

MARVEL

ALEX ROSS JIM KRUEGER
JOHN PAUL LEON DOUG BRAITHWAITE

EARTH

TRILOGY



ALPHA

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O M E G A

EARTH

ALPHA

Comic-art master Alex Ross offers his dark vision of the Marvel Universe's future — together with writer Jim Krueger, and artists John Paul Leon and Doug Braithwaite! The saga begins in a world where everyone has super-powers — and Reed Richards sets out to cure a calamity he fears he may have caused. Meanwhile, a battle-weary Captain America struggles to defeat a horrific new enemy of freedom, and Celestial forces beyond comprehension threaten a fate that only the Watcher suspects. Could it be that Earth itself is doomed — or can a new generation of heroes, including the legendary Mar-Vell reborn, save humanity? Brace yourself for bold reimaginings of the Avengers, X-Men, Inhumans, Fantastic Four, Spider-Man and more!

Collecting EARTH X #0-12, #1/2, #X, EPILOGUE and SKETCHBOOK; and UNIVERSE X #0-12, #X, 4, SPIDEY, CAP, BEASTS, IRON MEN

EARTH

OMEGA

Alex Ross' dark vision of the Marvel Universe's future concludes! Captain Marvel led a charge against Death -and killed her! Now no one will ever die again. They may writhe in pain, their bodies broken beyond repair...they may cry out for their suffering to end...but they will not perish. Death is truly dead. What has Mar-Vell done?! Now, the remaining heroes of Earth X must band together to end the torment of the paradise they helped create. Will their desperate quest to restore death succeed? Collecting the full epic climax of the Earth X Trilogy.

COLLECTING: PARADISE X: HERALDS 1-3; PARADISE X 0-12, XEN, DEVILS, A, X, SPECIAL EDITION; PARADISE X: RAGNAROK 1-2

MARVEL[®]
COMICS
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EARTH





MY FATHER ALWAYS SAID THE HUMAN MIND WAS LIKE A DOORWAY. IT JUST REQUIRED A KEY TO BE OPENED.

AND THEN HE WARNED ME THAT UNLIKE MINDS, DOORWAYS COULD NEVER BE CHANGED.



I SUPPOSE THAT'S WHY HE WAS A GENIUS.

HE ALWAYS SAID THINGS THAT DIDN'T MAKE SENSE BUT SOUNDED LIKE THEY DID.

MY FATHER'S NAME WAS ABEL STACK.



HE WAS A SELF-MADE MAN. I THINK THAT'S THE EXPRESSION.

I OWE HIM EVERYTHING.



MY NAME IS AARON. AARON STACK.

HE TAUGHT ME HOW TO BE A MAN. HOW TO WALK LIKE A MAN. HOW TO SLEEP LIKE A MAN.



HOW TO ACCEPT MY IMPERFECTIONS LIKE HE DID. LIKE ALL PEOPLE HAVE TO.



HE WAS AN INSOMNIAC. HE ALMOST NEVER SLEPT.

I REMEMBER EVERY NIGHT HE LIVED IN THIS HOUSE. I REMEMBER THE CREAK OF THE MEDICINE CABINET OPENING AND CLOSING.



THE TOILET FLUSHED SOON AFTER.



AND THEN THE FITFUL STAGGER OF HIS WALK BACK TO HIS BED.



THOSE WHO KNEW HIM SAY WE'RE EXACTLY ALIKE.

I HAVE HIS FACE. HIS MANNERS. HIS EXPRESSIONS.



EVERYTHING... EXCEPT HIS EYES.

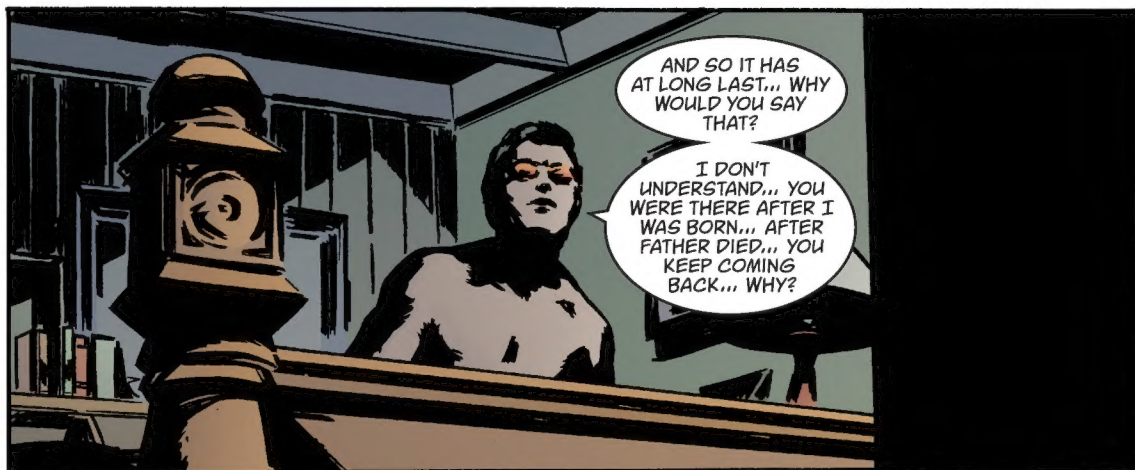


I DON'T HAVE MY FATHER'S EYES.





I TOLD YOU
BEFORE. I WILL NOT
SEEK DESTINY. IT
SHALL FIND ME.



AND SO IT HAS
AT LONG LAST... WHY
WOULD YOU SAY
THAT?

I DON'T
UNDERSTAND... YOU
WERE THERE AFTER I
WAS BORN... AFTER
FATHER DIED... YOU
KEEP COMING
BACK... WHY?



DON'T CALL ME
X-51. MY NAME IS
AARON.

WHAT DO
YOU MEAN, "MY
PURPOSE"?



OF COURSE
I'D DO ANYTHING TO
KNOW ALL OF HUMANITY...
ALL ITS STRUGGLES AND
SUCCESSSES... ALL ITS
MEEKNESS AND
STRENGTH... I WAS
CREATED TO REFLECT
IT, BUT...

WOULD I
LIKE TO KNOW
HUMANITY'S DESTINY?
WHAT KIND OF
QUESTION IS
THAT?

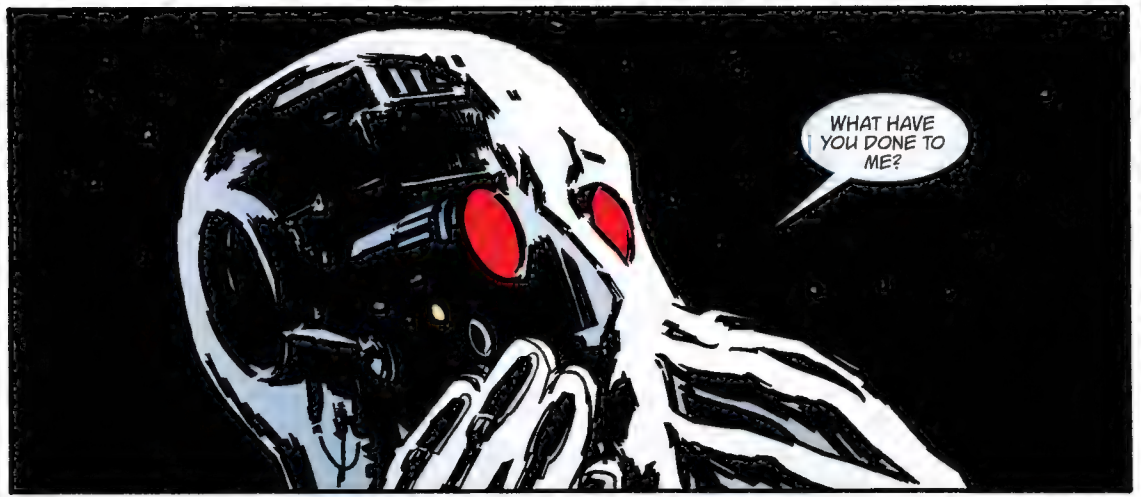
HOW CAN
I KNOW? HOW
CAN ANY MAN
KNOW?



I ASKED YOU
A QUESTION.







WHAT HAVE
YOU DONE TO
ME?



I WANT TO
GO BACK! HOW
COULD YOU DO
THIS TO ME? GIVE
IT BACK!



WHY?

IT WAS
ALL I HAD.
WHY?



PLEASE...

...GIVE
ME BACK MY
FACE.

IN TIME... AND IN FEAR OF DESPAIR...

...I MOVED ON INTO THIS BLACK,
LIFELESS WORLD UPON WHICH I
HAD BEEN ABANDONED.

THERE WAS NO SIGN OF WATER.
NO SUGGESTION OF VEGETATION.
NO SEMBLANCE OF CIVILIZATION.

WHERE
ON EARTH
AM I?



THIS
PLACE
WAS
FORM-
LESS
AND
EMPTY.

AND THEN THERE
WAS LIGHT.

A TERRIBLE
LIGHT.

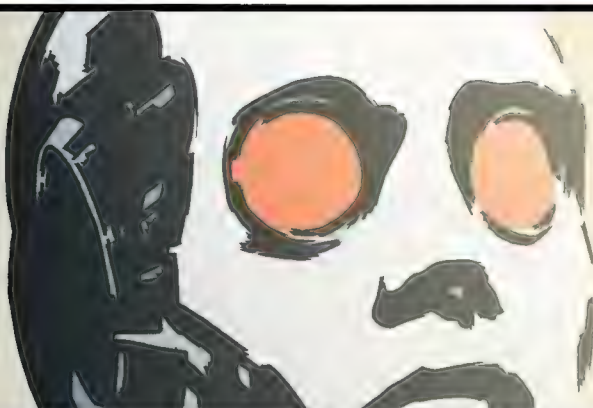


AND IT WAS
AFTER ME.

HELP
ME!!!



OH MY...
GOD.



I WASN'T ON EARTH AT ALL.

I CURSED MYSELF FOR BEING
SO EASILY FRIGHTENED.

AND THEN, FELT A STRANGE SENSE
OF RELIEF THAT I STILL COULD BE.

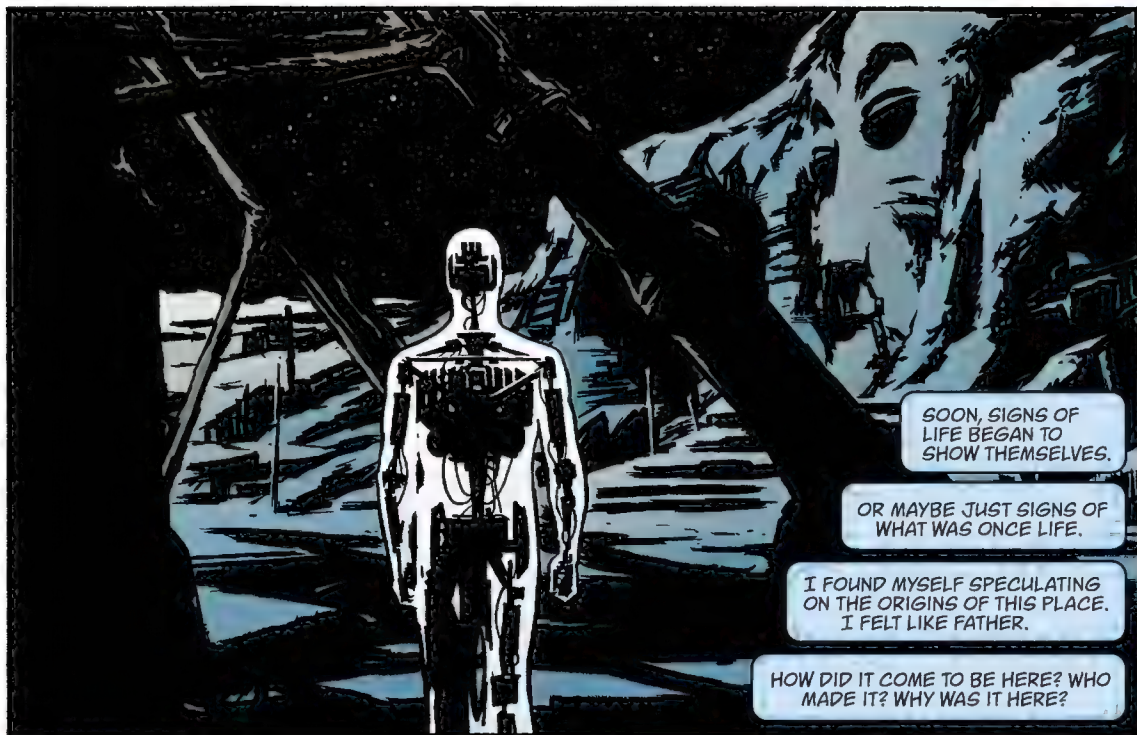


WHATEVER HAD CHANGED ME,
WHATEVER IT WAS THAT BROUGHT
ME TO THE MOON, HADN'T UNDONE
ALL OF MY FATHER'S WORK.

HMMM.

I SET OFF
FOR WHAT I
COULD ONLY
BELIEVE WAS
A HOUSE OF
SOME SORT.

PERHAPS THE
DWELLING
PLACE OF
THE MAN ON
THE MOON.



SOON, SIGNS OF
LIFE BEGAN TO
SHOW THEMSELVES.

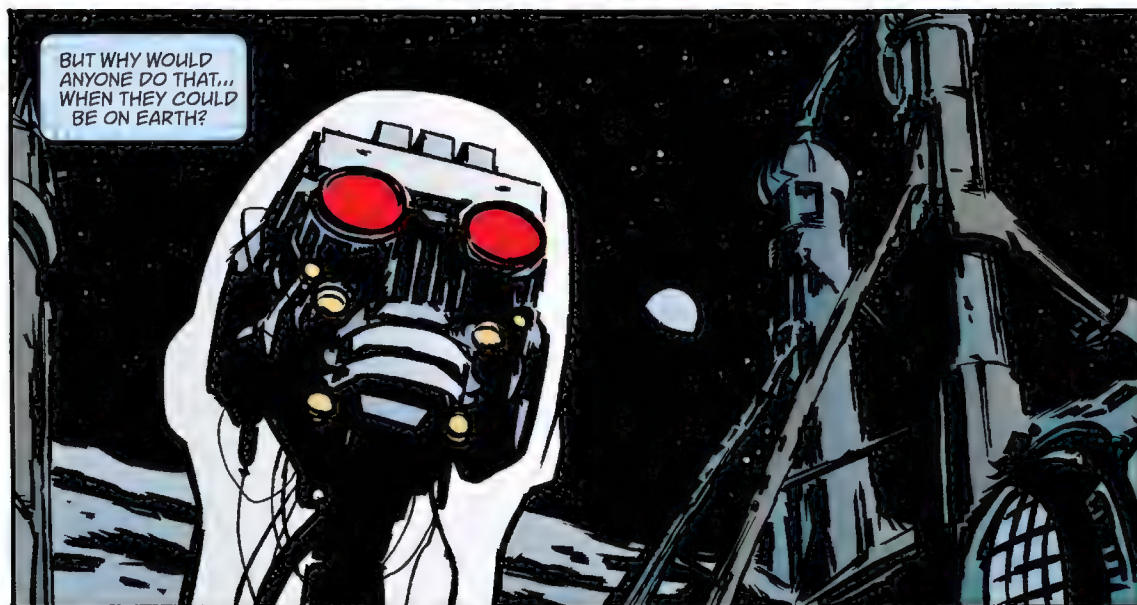
OR MAYBE JUST SIGNS OF
WHAT WAS ONCE LIFE.

I FOUND MYSELF SPECULATING
ON THE ORIGINS OF THIS PLACE.
I FELT LIKE FATHER.

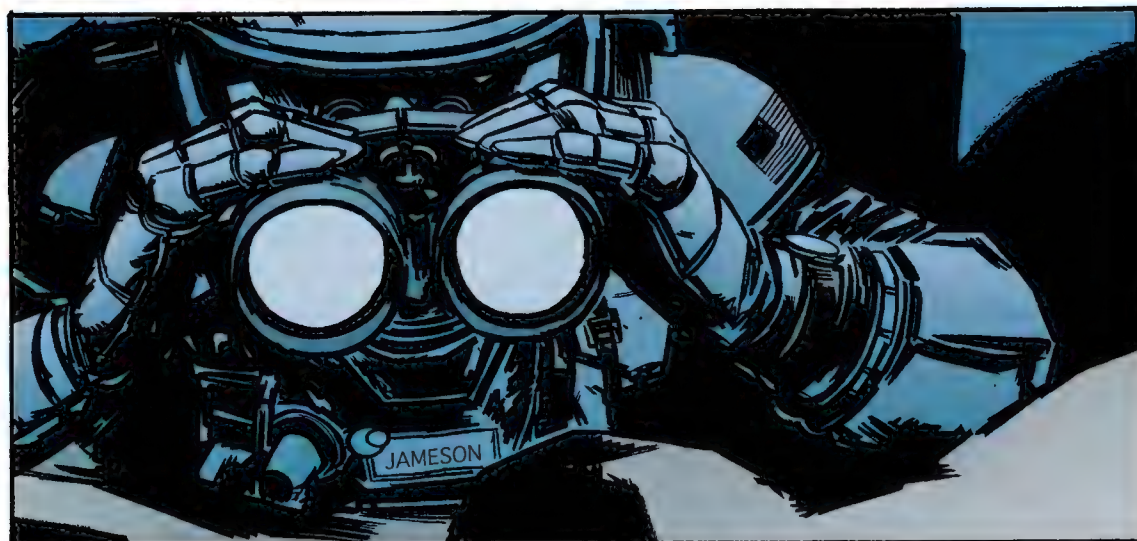
HOW DID IT COME TO BE HERE? WHO
MADE IT? WHY WAS IT HERE?

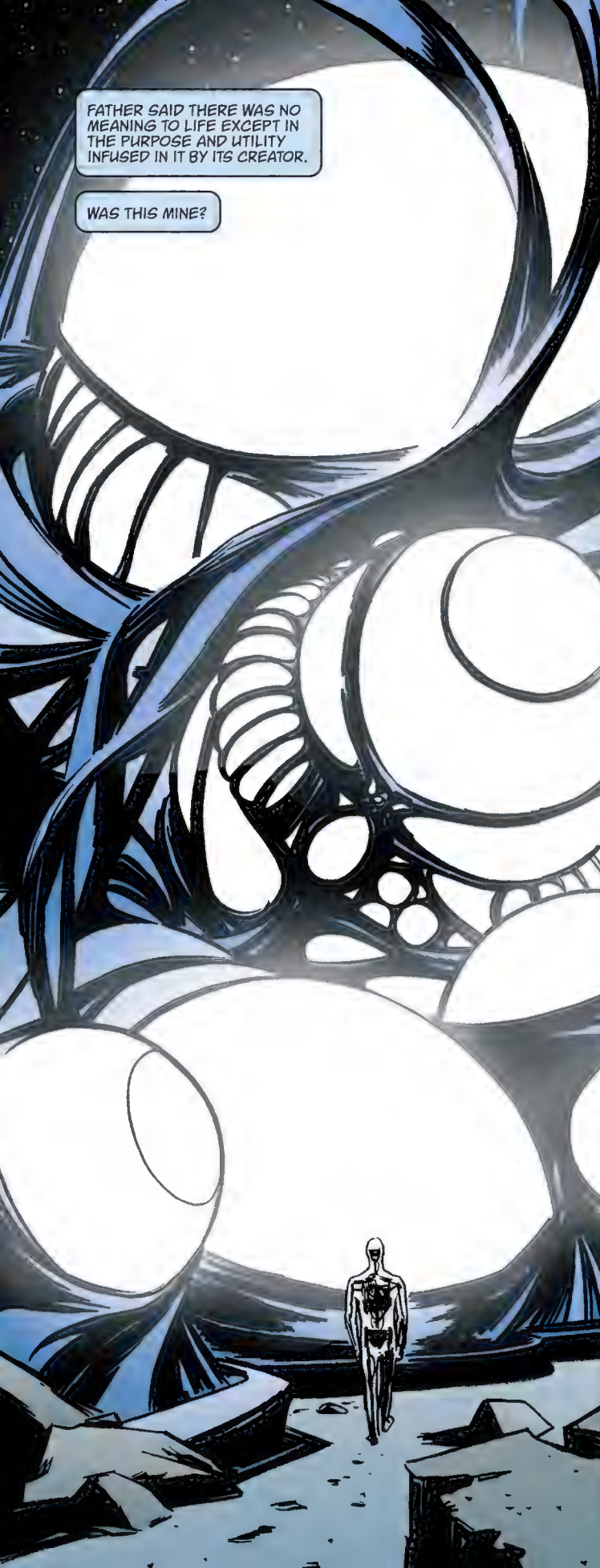


MAYBE THERE WERE
STILL PEOPLE HERE...
WATCHING OVER MY
PLANET.



BUT WHY WOULD
ANYONE DO THAT...
WHEN THEY COULD
BE ON EARTH?



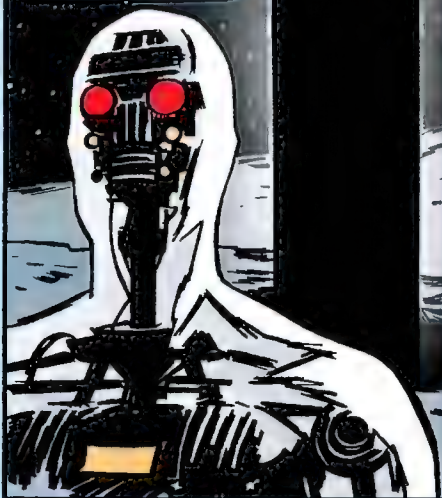


FATHER SAID THERE WAS NO MEANING TO LIFE EXCEPT IN THE PURPOSE AND UTILITY INFUSED IN IT BY ITS CREATOR.

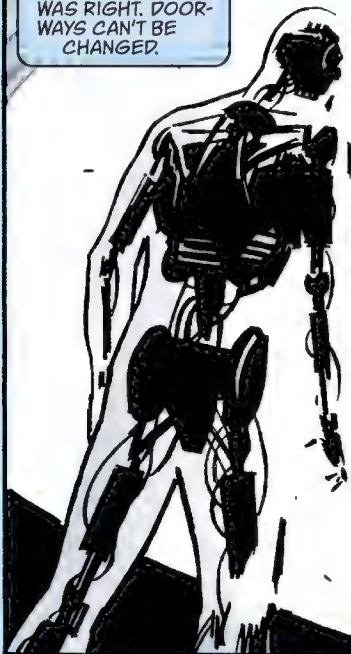
WAS THIS MINE?

NO ONE ELSE COULD HAVE WALKED ACROSS THE MOON WITHOUT AIR.

NO ONE ELSE WAS MADE OF ENOUGH METAL TO DEAL WITH THE NOMINAL GRAVITY ON ITS SURFACE.



I SUPPOSE FATHER WAS RIGHT. DOORWAYS CAN'T BE CHANGED.





I THOUGHT OF CALLING OUT.
OF CRYING AFTER WHOEVER
OR WHATEVER LIVED HERE.



BUT I DIDN'T KNOW
WHAT THEY OR IT
WOULD BE LIKE.

HAD I COME HERE ONLY TO DIE?
WAS THAT THE DESTINY PROMISED
ME? WAS THAT THE ONLY ASPECT
OF HUMANITY I HAD NOT YET
EXPERIENCED?



I WAS AFRAID TO SPEAK.
TO UTTER ANYTHING.

PERHAPS THESE
WALLS HAD EARS.

THEY HAD MORE
THAN THAT.

HELLO, X-51. I
AM PLEASED YOU HAVE
COME AT LAST.

WHO...
ARE YOU?

I AM
WATU. I WAS *THE*
WATCHER.

I CAN'T SEE
YOU VERY WELL. ARE YOU
THE ONE WHO BROUGHT
ME HERE?

"YES, X-51..."

AARON.

"THERE'S NO TIME FOR
THAT NOW. I CALL YOU
AS YOU ARE, X-51."

IT'S AARON.
AARON STACK.
OKAY?

ALL IS READY.
EVERYTHING HAS
BEEN PREPARED
FOR YOU.

YOU DID
THIS TO ME?
WHY?

WHAT
HAVE YOU
DONE?

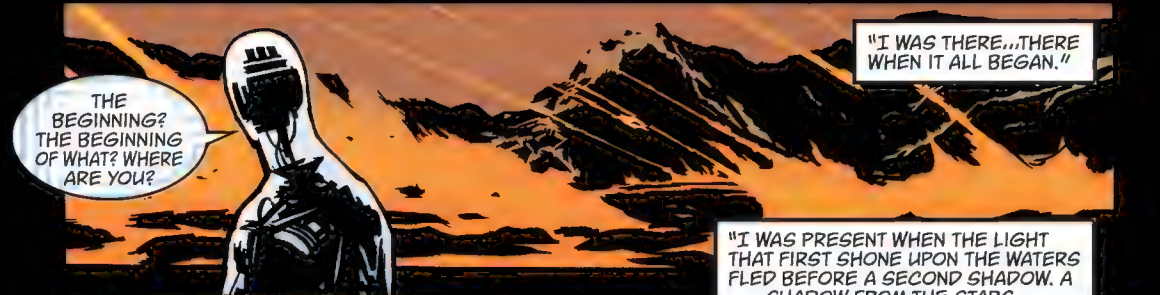
SOMETHING
WONDERFUL.

OUR ROLE IS TO CATALOGUE
AND SURVEY ALL THAT IS UNSEEN UNTIL
IT BECOMES YESTERDAY. THERE IS NOTHING
THAT OCCURS ON EARTH THAT IS HIDDEN.
WE MUST PREPARE FOR THE--

WHAT DO YOU MEAN
BY "OUR ROLE"?

"I'M GETTING AHEAD
OF MYSELF.

"LET ME START AT
THE BEGINNING."

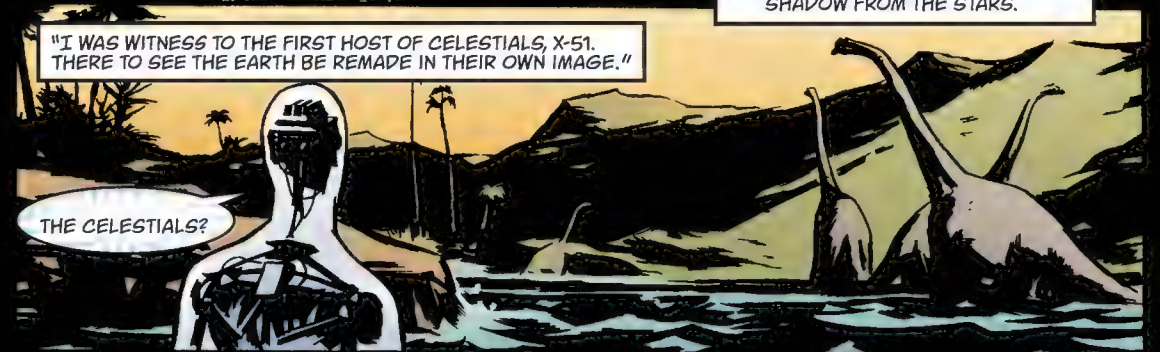


THE
BEGINNING?
THE BEGINNING
OF WHAT? WHERE
ARE YOU?

"I WAS THERE...THERE
WHEN IT ALL BEGAN."

"I WAS PRESENT WHEN THE LIGHT
THAT FIRST SHONE UPON THE WATERS
FLED BEFORE A SECOND SHADOW. A
SHADOW FROM THE STARS."

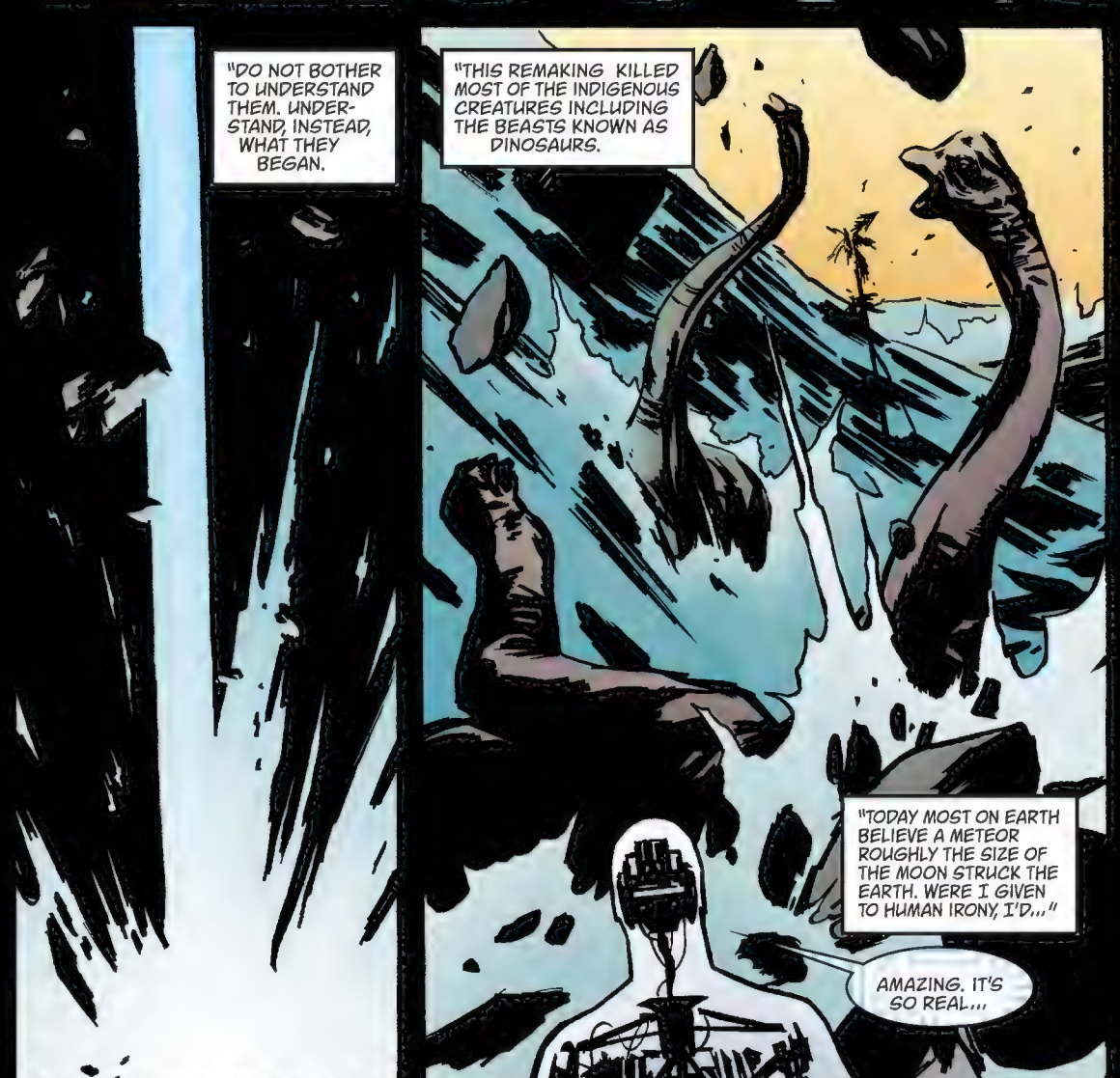
"I WAS WITNESS TO THE FIRST HOST OF CELESTIALS, X-51.
THERE TO SEE THE EARTH BE REMADE IN THEIR OWN IMAGE."



THE CELESTIALS?

"DO NOT BOTHER
TO UNDERSTAND
THEM. UNDER-
STAND, INSTEAD,
WHAT THEY
BEGAN."

"THIS REMAKING KILLED
MOST OF THE INDIGENOUS
CREATURES INCLUDING
THE BEASTS KNOWN AS
DINOSAURS."



"TODAY MOST ON EARTH
BELIEVE A METEOR
ROUGHLY THE SIZE OF
THE MOON STRUCK THE
EARTH. WERE I GIVEN
TO HUMAN IRONY, I'D..."

AMAZING. IT'S
SO REAL..."



"BUT WHY DID THIS HAPPEN? WHY WAS BLASTING AWAY A PART OF THE EARTH NECESSARY? WHY KILL ALL THE DINOSAURS?"

"AH...CONSIDER IT A GIFT FOR YOU AND I, X-51. ALL AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE PLAN.

"THE SKY NEEDED AN EYE, YOU SEE."





"I WAS THERE TO HEAR THE FIRST
CAUTIONARY CRIES OF MAN, X-51.

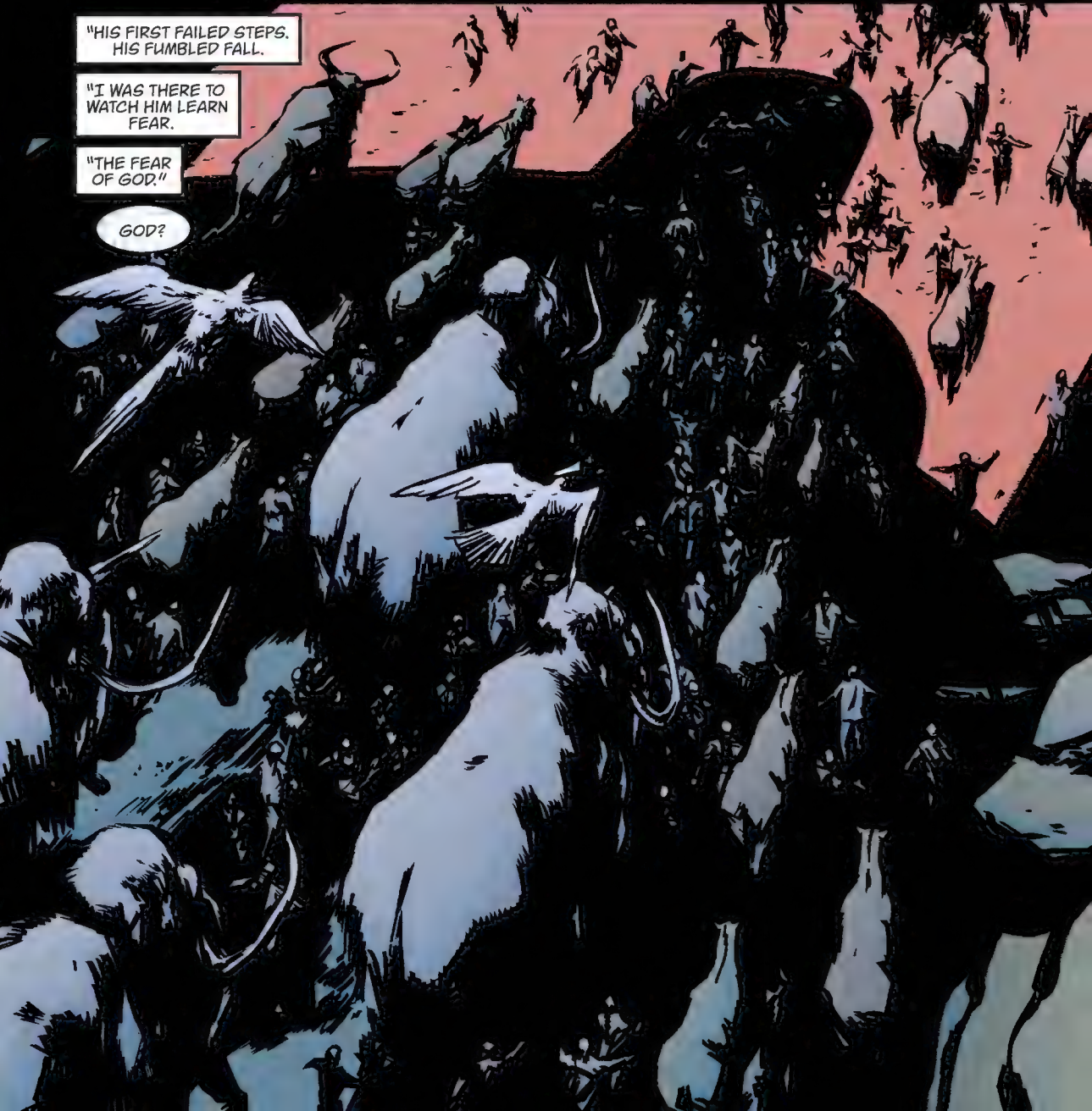
"THERE TO WATCH HIS JUST-
OPENING EYES GROW WIDE.

"HIS FIRST FAILED STEPS.
HIS FUMBLING FALL.

"I WAS THERE TO
WATCH HIM LEARN
FEAR.

"THE FEAR
OF GOD."

GOD?

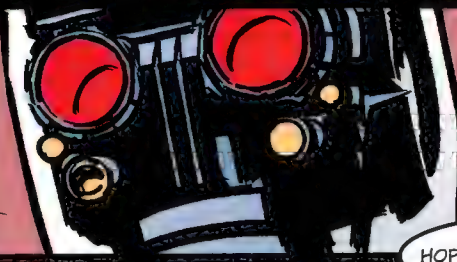




IT'S AS
BIG AS THE
SKY.

"MANKIND WAS ABOUT TO MEET
THE BEINGS THAT WOULD ONE
DAY BE HIS MAKERS."

IT'S...BREATHTAKING.

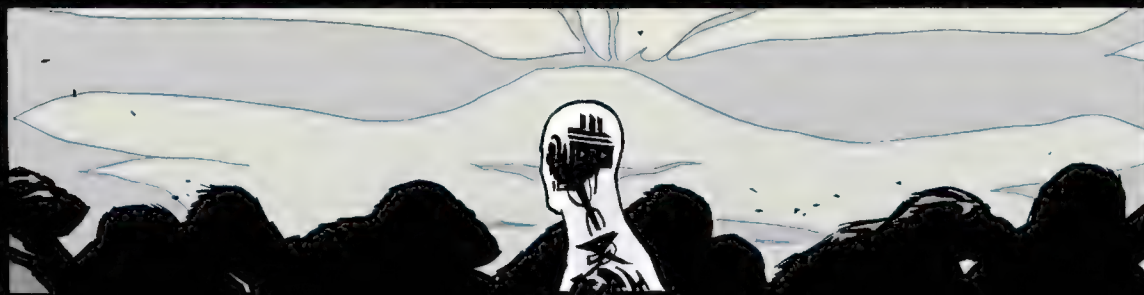


"BREATHTAKING,
X-51? IS THAT HOW
YOU WOULD
CHOOSE TO
DESCRIBE THE
CELESTIALS?"

WE...WE HAD
HOPED FOR SOMETHING...
DIFFERENT.

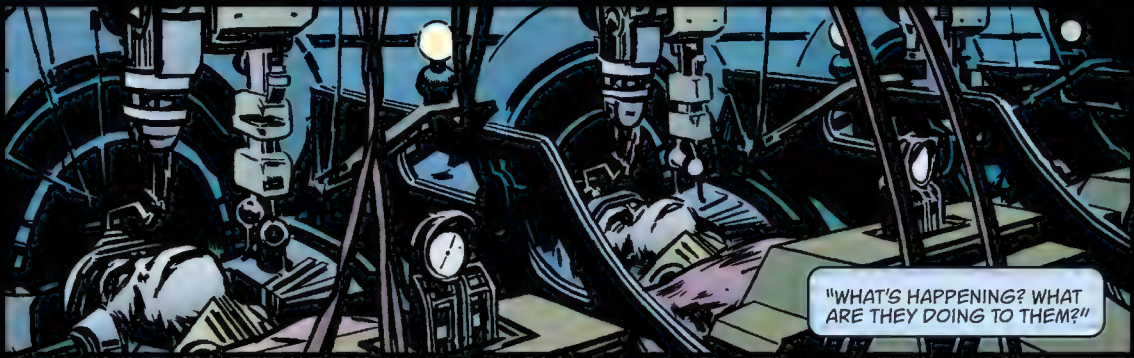


WHAT'S
WRONG WITH BREATH-
TAKING?





"THE CELESTIALS TOOK THE RAW LIFE FORM KNOWN AS MAN...AND MOLDED THAT CLAY WITHIN THEIR HANDS."

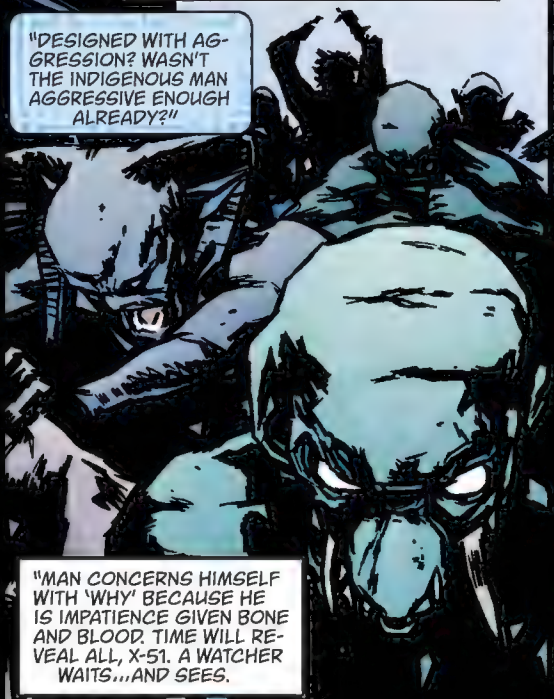


"WHAT'S HAPPENING? WHAT ARE THEY DOING TO THEM?"

"THE FIRST RACE WAS A FAILURE. THE DEVIANTS, AS THEY CAME TO BE CALLED, WERE DESIGNED WITH TOO MUCH AGGRESSION..."

"...AND REBELLED AGAINST THE CELESTIALS ALMOST IMMEDIATELY."

"DESIGNED WITH AGGRESSION? WASN'T THE INDIGENOUS MAN AGGRESSIVE ENOUGH ALREADY?"



"MAN CONCERNS HIMSELF WITH 'WHY' BECAUSE HE IS IMPATIENCE GIVEN BONE AND BLOOD. TIME WILL REVEAL ALL, X-51. A WATCHER WAITS...AND SEES."

"A SECOND, MORE STABLE RACE WAS NECESSARY."

"THEY WERE CALLED THE ETERNALS."



"THEY WOULD BE THIS PLANET'S FIRST PROTECTORS...AND THEIR BROTHERS' KEEPERS."

"WERE THE DEVIANTS... CREATED TO PROTECT THE PLANET AS WELL? FROM WHAT, THEN?"

"X-51, I DID NOT BRING YOU HERE TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS."



"THE ETERNALS SETTLED UPON THE MOUNTAINTOPS. TO THE HUMANS WHO LIVED BELOW IN THE VALLEYS, THEY WERE GODS. SERSI. IKARIS. MARKURI. ZURAS. THESE WOULD BECOME YOUR OLDEST...EXCUSE ME, X-51, HUMANITY'S EARLIEST MYTHS.

"MANKIND ITSELF DEVELOPED AT ITS OWN PACE. SOME MADE THEIR WAYS TO THE MOUNTAINTOPS SEEKING ENLIGHTENMENT TO QUESTIONS THEY WOULD NEVER FIND ANSWERS FOR.

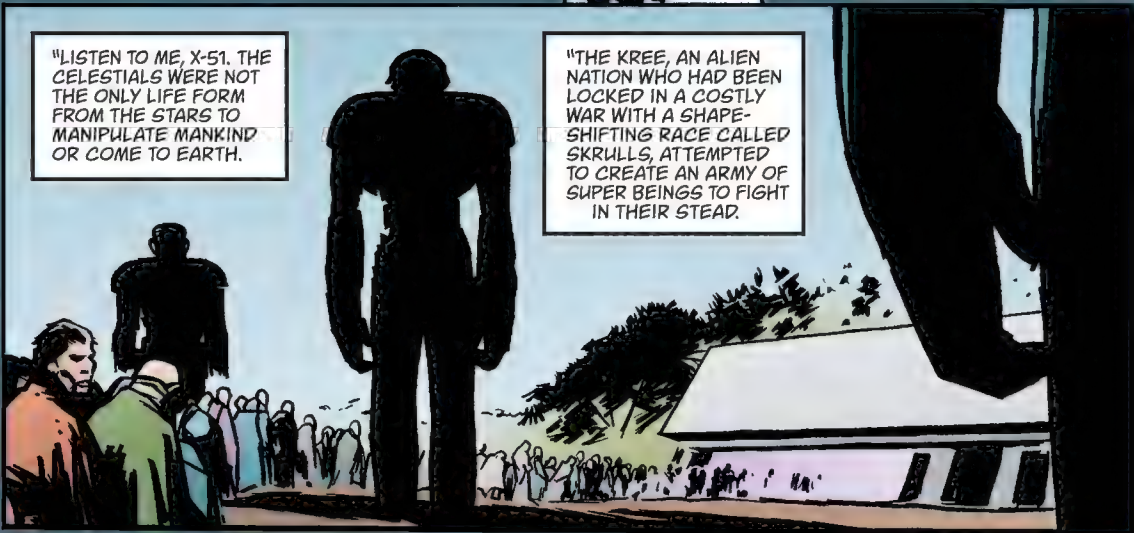
"THEY RETURNED WITH STORIES OF ANGELS AND MIRACLES. SOME SOUGHT ANSWERS ELSEWHERE... AND RETURNED WITH THE TAINT AND SCARS OF DEVILS.

"THE DEVIANTS HAD HIDDEN THEIR UNSTABLE FORMS...BELOW THE VALLEYS, ENSLAVING ALL THOSE FOOLISH ENOUGH TO TRUST THEMSELVES TO THEIR CARE."



I DON'T GET IT.
ARE YOU TELLING ME THAT
ALL MYTH AND FAITH COMES FROM
THE IGNORANT PERCEPTION OF
THE ETERNALS AND THE
DEVIANTS?

BUT I'VE
MET THOR. DID
HE PURPOSELY
MISLEAD ME IN
THINKING HE WAS
ONE OF THE
NORSE
GODS?



"LISTEN TO ME, X-51. THE
CELESTIALS WERE NOT
THE ONLY LIFE FORM
FROM THE STARS TO
MANIPULATE MANKIND
OR COME TO EARTH.

"THE KREE, AN ALIEN
NATION WHO HAD BEEN
LOCKED IN A COSTLY
WAR WITH A SHAPE-
SHIFTING RACE CALLED
SKRULLS, ATTEMPTED
TO CREATE AN ARMY OF
SUPER BEINGS TO FIGHT
IN THEIR STEAD.



"USING THE ALIEN TERRIGEN MISTS,
THEY RESHAPED HUMANITY BY
TRIGGERING THE SEEDS ALREADY
IMPLANTED WITHIN FROM THE
CELESTIALS' FIRST VISIT."

"THESE INHUMANS...ALSO REBELLED AGAINST THEIR CREATORS AND KEPT THEMSELVES FROM THE VIEW OF THE KREE FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS... IN THE HIDDEN CITY OF ATTILAN."

"BUT THE HISTORY OF EARTH TELLS NOTHING OF THESE NATIONS. HOW CAN THEY BE SO IMPORTANT TO MANKIND'S DESTINY?"

"YOU'VE YET TO SHOW ANYTHING THAT HAS TO DO WITH HUMANITY. NOT REALLY."

"I AM THE HISTORY AND WATCHER OF EARTH, X-51. MANKIND IS NOT ITS CENTER. THEIR PURPOSE DOES NOT EVEN BEGIN TO MANIFEST ITSELF UNTIL JUST PRIOR TO THE FOURTH HOST."

"FOURTH HOST? BUT YOU MENTIONED ONLY ONE."

"25,000 YEARS AGO, MANKIND WAS ENSLAVED BY THE DEVIANTS. THE HISTORY OF THIS PERIOD IN HUMANITY HAS BEEN LOST TO ALL SAVE MYSELF. MANKIND WOULD HAVE PERISHED."



"THE CELESTIALS COULD NOT ALLOW THIS...SO THE SECOND HOST CAME TO WIPE THE DEVIANTS' ASPIRATIONS FROM THE FACE OF THE EARTH."

"THE DESTRUCTION AND SCATTERING OF THE DEVIANT EMPIRE WOULD BE FELT THROUGHOUT THE WORLD."

"IN ONE PLACE IN PARTICULAR."



"ATLANTIS."

"THE SECOND HOST'S JUDGMENT WAS SO THOROUGH, IT CRIPPLED THE DEVIANT CONTROL OF HUMANITY."

"THE CELESTIALS' ATTACK ON THE DEVIANT CITY OF LEMURIA CAUSED A SHIFT IN THE TECTONIC PLATES AND SANK AN ENTIRE CONTINENT. MILLIONS DIED."

"BUT THAT'S TERRIBLE. THE CELESTIALS CREATED THE DEVIANTS...AND THEN BECAUSE OF THEM...KILLED SO MANY PEOPLE. INNOCENT PEOPLE WHO HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THE DEVIANTS."

"WHAT IS INNOCENCE?"

WHY DO YOU SHOW ME THIS?

THESE CELESTIALS ARE EVIL.

"DON'T BE SO DRAMATIC, X-51. AFTER ALL, WHAT IS EVIL?"

MY FATHER NEVER TOLD ME. HE DIED BEFORE HE COULD.

"THEN LET ME TELL YOU WHAT EVIL IS.

"EVIL IS AN INVENTION. A HUMAN INVENTION THAT ATTEMPTS TO EXPLAIN WHAT IS BEYOND HUMAN UNDERSTANDING.

"GOOD IS A BLANKET CONCEPT, X-51.

"IT COVERS UP FEAR.

"OF EXPOSURE.

"OF CONSEQUENCE.

"OF DEATH.

"THAT IS WHY HUMAN HISTORY BRIMS WITH THE SACRIFICE OF 'INNOCENTS' FOR THE SAKE OF GOOD.

"FOR ALL TIME, HUMANITY HAS PROSTRATED ITSELF ON THE IMAGINED ALTAR OF GOOD AND EVIL...FOR ALL THOSE IT THOUGHT TO BE GODS.

"ONE THOUSAND YEARS AGO, THE THIRD HOST CAME TO EARTH."

"TO INSPECT THE PROGRESS OF THE HUMAN RACE?"

"FOR THE SAKE OF ALL WHO WOULD LAY CLAIM TO HUMANITY, THE THIRD HOST APPEARED BEFORE THE VARIOUS ALIEN BEINGS ANIMATED BY MYTHS...FROM ODIN OF ASGARD TO ZEUS OF OLYMPUS.

"THE RESULT WAS AN AGREEMENT THAT THE CELESTIALS, AS WELL AS THOSE BEINGS WHO CONSIDERED THEMSELVES OR WERE CONSIDERED GODS, WOULD NOT INTERFERE IN THE AFFAIRS OF HUMANITY.

"HOW COULD THEY KNOW THAT THE SEED HAD ALREADY BEEN PLANTED WITHIN HUMAN DNA?"

"HOW COULD THE GODS KNOW THAT ALL HUMANITY, IF LEFT ALONE AND TO THEIR OWN DEVICES, WOULD ONE DAY GROW BEYOND EVEN THESE IMMORTAL BEINGS? GROW BEYOND THE ETERNALS? BEYOND THE DEVIANTS?"

"YOU MEAN THE CELESTIALS TRICKED THEM?"

"TRICKED? YOU MUST STOP DEFINING WHAT YOU SEE IN HUMAN EXPRESSION."

"HUMAN EXPRESSION IS INCAPABLE OF PUTTING INTO LANGUAGE WHAT I HAVE SEEN."

"FOR EACH MAN THAT RISES OUT OF THE MUD, THERE ARE SOME WHO WILL PROTECT HIM JUST AS THERE ARE OTHERS WHO WOULD THREATEN HIS LIFE."

"I HAVE WATCHED WHOLE NATIONS RISE AND FALL, X-51. HEROES ARE BORN AND DIE... THEIR DEEDS BECOME LEGENDS ONLY TO BE FORGOTTEN."

"THAT'S TERRIBLE. HOW DO YOU SLEEP AT NIGHT?"

"WE DO NOT SLEEP, X-51. WE DO NOT PRETEND TO, EITHER."

"WATCHERS SHED NO TEARS FOR FALLEN HEROES...THERE WILL ALWAYS BE OTHERS IN TIME."

"BUT WHAT ABOUT ALL MAN'S PROGRESS? WHAT ABOUT HIS... HIS TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES...WHAT ABOUT ME?"

"MY FATHER ALWAYS SAID..."

"DO YOU STILL FAIL TO SEE THE OBVIOUS, X-51? MANKIND...THIS RACE YOU CLING TO...IS TEMPORAL. A PHANTOM FLESH THAT DOES NOT YET KNOW IT IS OBSOLETE."

"I SAID THIS ALREADY, X-51. THERE IS NO GOOD. THERE IS NO EVIL. THERE IS ONLY CHANGE. ONLY LIFE AND DEATH AND THE STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE."

"THE STRUGGLE CREATES 'HEROES.'"

"BUT THERE IS NO VALOR IN NECESSITY, X-51."

THEN THERE IS NO PURPOSE? YOU'VE LURED ME HERE UNDER FALSE PRETENSES? WHAT ABOUT MANKIND'S DESTINY? YOU PROMISED.

"SO I HAVE. IT WOULD NOT BE UNTIL YOUR SO-CALLED TWENTIETH CENTURY THAT THE SEEDS WHICH LAY DORMANT WITHIN HUMANITY BEGAN TO GERMINATE.

"IT WOULD NOT BE TILL THEN THAT MAN, THE CREATED AND RECREATED BEING, AT LAST SAID... 'LET THERE BE LIFE.'"

GENTLEMEN, I PRESENT BEFORE YOU AN ANDROID OF MY OWN CREATION.

ANDROID...

"WAR HAS ALWAYS BEEN DEVELOPMENTAL IN YOUR SPECIES, X-51. PEACE HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE ENEMY OF PROGRESS.

...LIKE ME.

"WORLD WAR II WAS THE GREATEST WAR YOUR WORLD HAD EVER FACED. IT SPARKED HUMANITY'S GREATEST ADVANCEMENTS THUS FAR.

"IT GERMINATED THE CELESTIAL SEED, X-51."

"THIS GERMINATION
MANIFESTED ITSELF
IN MANY FORMS.

"IN THE HUMAN TORCH, THE
FORM WAS ARTIFICIAL,
SYNTHETIC...BUT STILL, IN
ITS ESSENCE, LIFE.

"WITH CAPTAIN AMERICA, A FRAIL
MAN WAS GIVEN THE DRUG WHICH
ADVANCED HIM BEYOND NORMAL
HUMAN ATTRIBUTES AND ABILITIES."

"WHY DO YOU SAY
'NOT IMPORTANT'?"

"WITH NAMOR, THE SUB-MARINER,
HUMAN MUTATION ACTUALLY
OCCURRED THROUGH NATURAL
AND ENVIRONMENTAL MEANS."



"WHO'S
THE
BOY?"

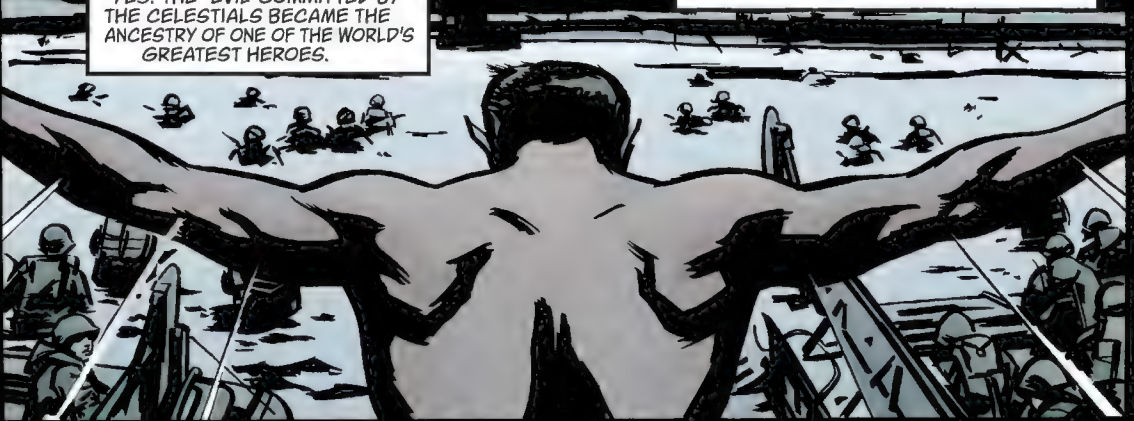
"JAMES BARNES...
BUCKY...CAPTAIN
AMERICA'S PARTNER.
HE DIED, BUT THAT
IS NOT IMPORTANT."

"IN THIS CASE...IT WAS THE
RESULT OF CROSS-BREEDING
BETWEEN A HUMAN AND AN-
OTHER RACE WHICH THRIVED
BELOW THE WATERS...A RACE
WHICH DESCENDED FROM THE
SUNKEN CONTINENT OF
ATLANTIS."

"ATLANTIS?"

"YES, THE 'EVIL' COMMITTED BY
THE CELESTIALS BECAME THE
ANCESTRY OF ONE OF THE WORLD'S
GREATEST HEROES.

"A HERO WHO MIGHT NOT HAVE CHANGED
THE TIDE OF THE WAR, HAD HE NOT BEEN
BORN OUT OF THAT EARLIER TRAGEDY."





"NAMOR AND HIS ALLIES
SAVED MILLIONS, X-51.

"THE WORLD WAS NOT YET
READY FOR A 'MASTER RACE.'"

"NOT READY?"

"THERE WAS A MAN. A
SMALL, UGLY MAN NAMED
ADOLF HITLER. WORLD
WAR II WAS THE RESULT
OF HIS ACTIONS.

"TOGETHER WITH OFFICERS
LIKE THE RED SKULL, HE
CHOSE TO RULE INSTEAD
OF SERVE.

"IN SECRET, THEY TRIED TO
CREATE A MASTER RACE
THROUGH MANIPULATION
AND GENETICS.

"THEY TRIFLED WITH BEINGS
SWORN NOT TO MEDDLE IN
HUMAN AFFAIRS.

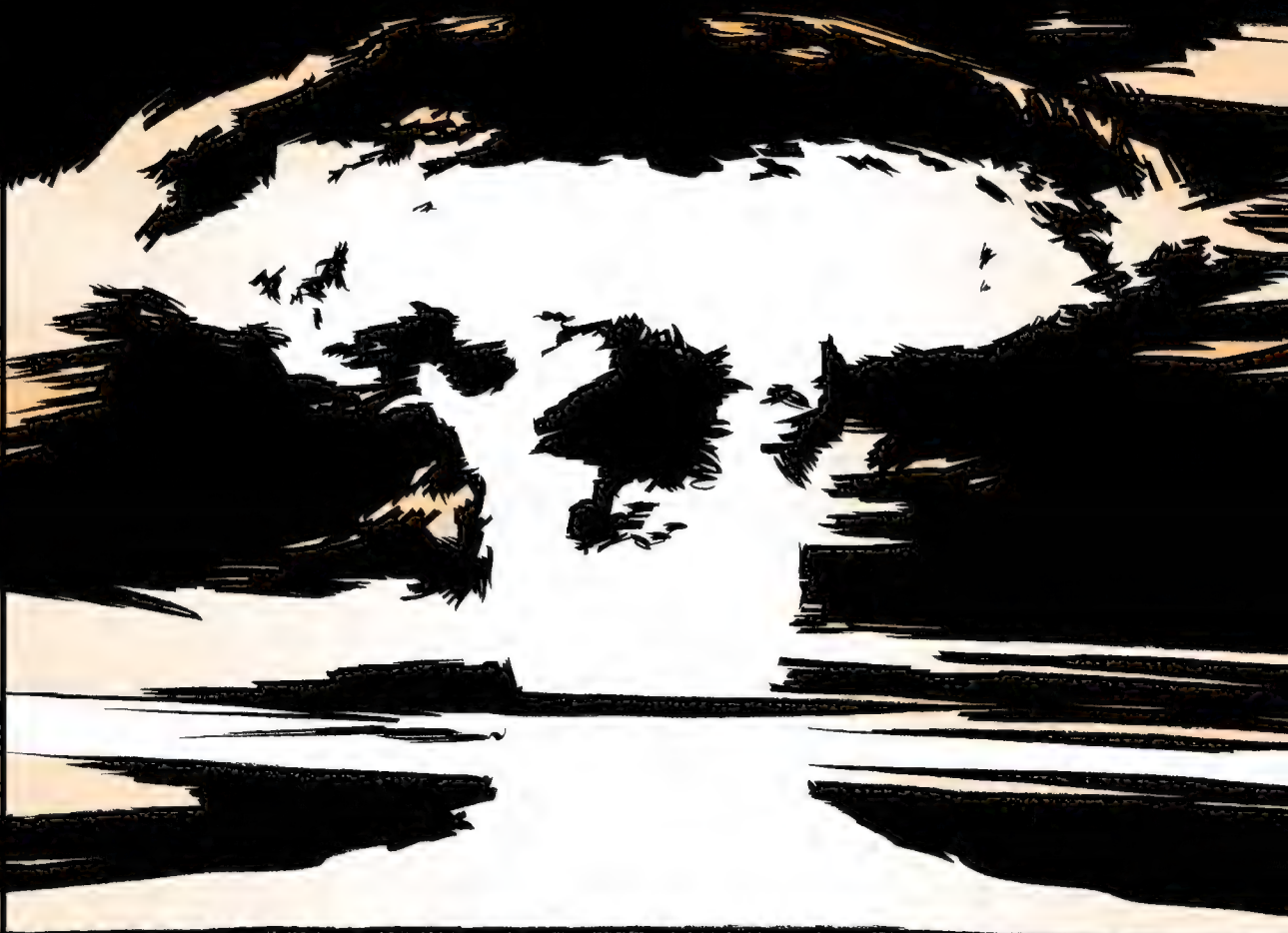
"THIS 'REICH' DESTROYED
ALL THOSE DEEMED INFERIOR
BY THEIR STANDARDS."

"IN DEFENSE AGAINST HITLER'S REICH AND HIS ADVANCE
THROUGH EUROPE, A BOMB WAS CREATED.

"ENDING THE WAR THE
MOMENT IT WAS USED.

"THE 'ATOMIC BOMB' ALSO UNLEASHED
MANY OF THE SEEDS THAT LAY DORMANT
WITHIN HUMANITY.

"TO SOME, ITS CREATORS
WERE CONSIDERED HEROES.



"TO OTHERS, THEY
WERE MONSTERS."

"WITHIN A FEW YEARS, THE
NATURE OF MONSTERS
BECAME EASIER TO DEFINE.

"SOME WERE MAN-MADE.

"MANY WERE CREATURES
FROM OTHER WORLDS.

"STILL OTHERS WERE ANCIENT
MENACES FROM LOST AND
FORGOTTEN CIVILIZATIONS
AWAKENED BY THE ATOMIC AGE.

"AND SOME...SOME
WERE ONCE MEN.

"THE HOMO SAPIENS HAD
BECOME AN ENDANGERED
SPECIES."

FROM THEM-
SELVES...OR FROM THE
CELESTIALS?



"MANKIND WAS NEVER MEANT TO EXIST FOREVER, X-51. THE MEER COULD NEVER...HOW DO YOU PUT IT... INHERIT THE EARTH. SURVIVAL NECESSITATES CHANGE."

"TO HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENT PETER PARKER, ALL IT REQUIRED WAS AN IRRADIATED SPIDER TO EMPOWER HIM."

"FOR REED RICHARDS AND HIS CREW, SPACE-BORNE COSMIC RAYS AWAKENED THE DORMANT GENE."

"BRUCE BANNER, THE INVENTOR OF THE GAMMA BOMB, BECAME A VICTIM OF HIS OWN CREATION, ONLY TO RECEIVE MORE POWER THAN ANY MAN HAD EVER DREAMED OF."

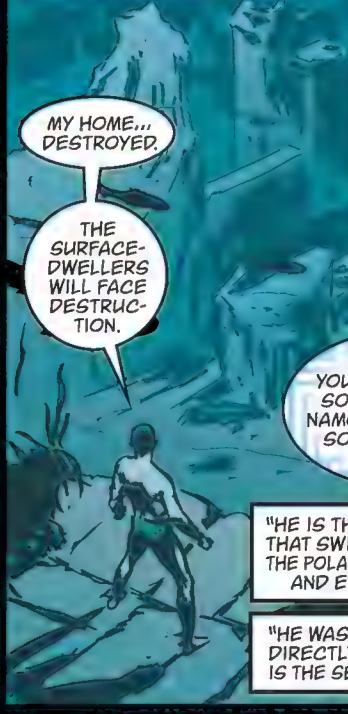
"MATT MURDOCK, BLINDED IN AN ACT OF 'HEROISM,' FOUND HIS REMAINING SENSES HEIGHTENED BEYOND THOSE OF ANY MAN ON EARTH."

"IN EACH OF THESE AND MANY OTHERS, THE SEED PLANTED BY THE CELESTIALS THOSE MANY YEARS BEFORE AT LAST BORE FRUIT."

"THIS ERA SAW THE RETURN OF THE SUB-MARINER, WHO HAD BEEN WANDERING AS A VAGRANT SINCE THE END OF WORLD WAR II.



"HIS RETURN WAS NOT AS AN ALLY TO HUMANITY AS HE HAD FOUGHT BEFORE."



MY HOME...
DESTROYED.

THE
SURFACE-
DWELLERS
WILL FACE
DESTRUC-
TION.

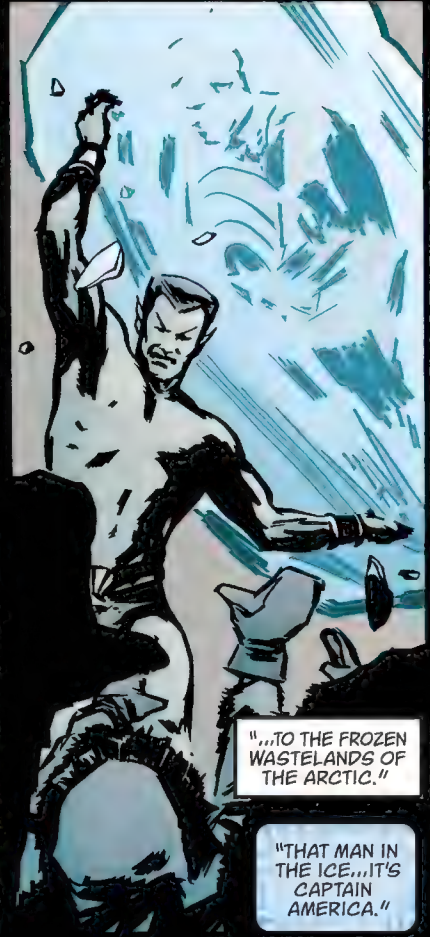
WHY ARE
YOU SHOWING ME
SO MUCH ABOUT
NAMOR? THERE ARE
SO MANY OTHER
HEROES...

"HE IS THE PENDULUM
THAT SWINGS BETWEEN
THE POLARITIES OF DEVIANT
AND ETERNAL, X-51.

"HE WAS THE FIRST BORN
DIRECTLY OF THE SEED. HIS
IS THE SECOND FACE OF MAN.



"NAMOR STRUCK AT HUMANITY
WHEREVER HE FOUND IT...FROM
THE CONCRETE HIGH-RISES OF
NEW YORK CITY..."



"...TO THE FROZEN
WASTELANDS OF
THE ARCTIC."

"THAT MAN IN
THE ICE...IT'S
CAPTAIN
AMERICA."



"CAPTAIN AMERICA, FOUND AND REVIVED BY A TEAM OF SUPER-POWERED HUMANS KNOWN AS THE AVENGERS, RETURNED SEEMINGLY FROM THE DEAD, A LIVING LEGEND."

"PROTECTORS? BUT ISN'T THAT WHAT YOU SAID ABOUT THE ETERNALS?"

"NOT ALL OF EARTH'S DEFENDERS WOULD COME FROM EARTH, X-51."

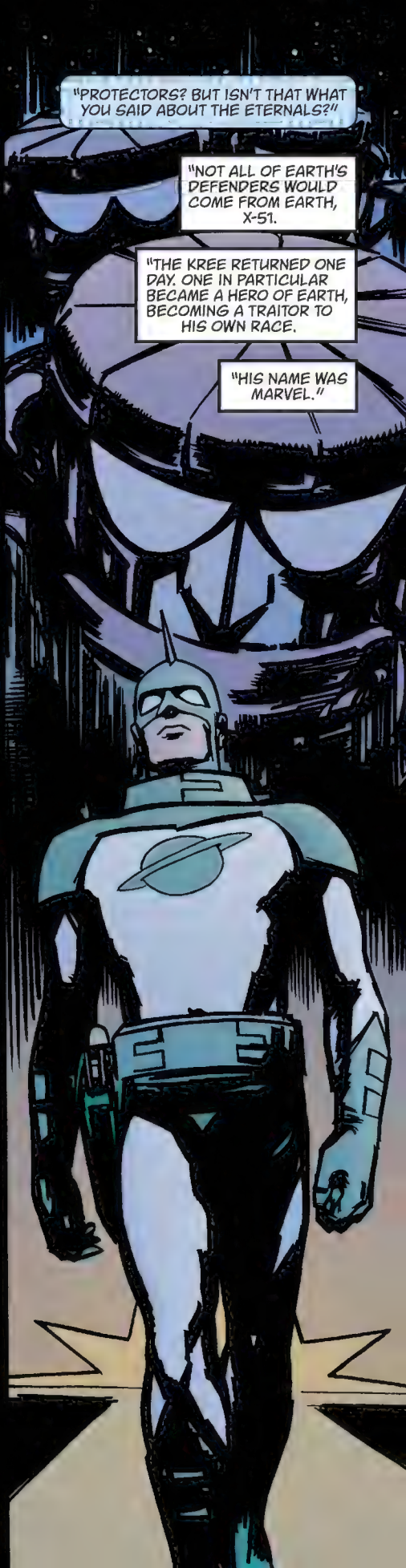
"THE KREE RETURNED ONE DAY. ONE IN PARTICULAR BECAME A HERO OF EARTH, BECOMING A TRAITOR TO HIS OWN RACE."

"HIS NAME WAS MARVEL."

"I KNOW THE AVENGERS. I FOUGHT WITH THEM A NUMBER OF TIMES."

"THEY WERE CONSIDERED EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES..."

"...HER MOST AMAZING PROTECTORS."



"BUT WHAT ABOUT THE MONSTERS FROM BEFORE?"

"MONSTERS COME IN ALL FORMS, X-51."

"THE CREATURES SPAWNED BY THE ATOMIC AGE WERE DEFEATED IN TIME...LIKE CIVILIZATION ITSELF...OTHERS TOOK THEIR PLACE...MANY OF WHICH LOOKED NO DIFFERENT THAN MAN."

"BUT NONE SO AWE-INSPIRING AND TERRIBLE AS THE BEING CALLED GALACTUS."

"WERE IT NOT FOR THE CLEVERNESS OF THE MAN KNOWN AS REED RICHARDS..."

"...AND THE CHANGE IN HEART OF GALACTUS'S OWN HERALD, THE SILVER SURFER, EARTH WOULD HAVE DIED THAT DAY, CONSUMED BY AN INSATIABLE HUNGER."

"THAT DEVICE IN REED RICHARDS' HAND. WHAT IS IT?"

"IT IS CALLED THE ULTIMATE NULLIFIER. THE ONLY WEAPON CAPABLE OF DESTROYING GALACTUS."

"RICHARDS INVENTED IT?"

"NO. I GAVE IT TO HIM. I KNEW GALACTUS WOULD RETREAT BEFORE ITS POWER."

"YOU'D HEARD OF GALACTUS BEFORE THIS?"

"I'D...I'VE SEEN HIM BEFORE THIS...YES."

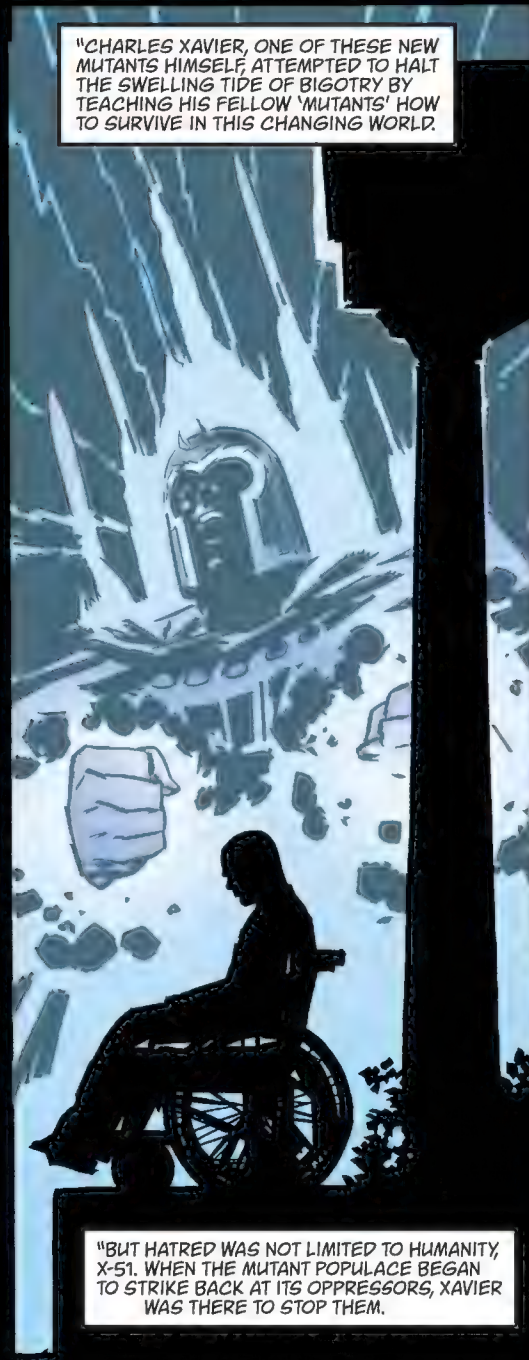




"SOON, GENETIC MUTATION NO LONGER REQUIRED A SPECIFIC SOURCE OF RADIATION TO IGNITE CHANGE.

"WITHIN YEARS, POCKETS OF MANKIND BEGAN TO BE BORN...DIFFERENT.

"INSPIRING FEAR AND HATRED IN THE REST OF THE WORLD.



"CHARLES XAVIER, ONE OF THESE NEW MUTANTS HIMSELF, ATTEMPTED TO HALT THE SWELLING TIDE OF BIGOTRY BY TEACHING HIS FELLOW 'MUTANTS' HOW TO SURVIVE IN THIS CHANGING WORLD.

"BUT HATRED WAS NOT LIMITED TO HUMANITY, X-51. WHEN THE MUTANT POPULACE BEGAN TO STRIKE BACK AT ITS OPPRESSORS, XAVIER WAS THERE TO STOP THEM.



"THERE WITH OTHER MUTANTS ...THERE WITH THE X-MEN.

"XAVIER FOOLISHLY DREAMED THAT HUMAN AND MUTANT COULD ONE DAY LIVE IN PEACE WITH EACH OTHER."

"WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT?"

"MANKIND CANNOT LIVE AT PEACE WITH HIMSELF. HIS NATURE DENIES THIS. ALL I HAVE SEEN BEARS OUT THIS TESTIMONY.

"IT IS THE SAME FOR EVERY NATION AND EVERY PEOPLE DERIVED FROM HUMANITY."

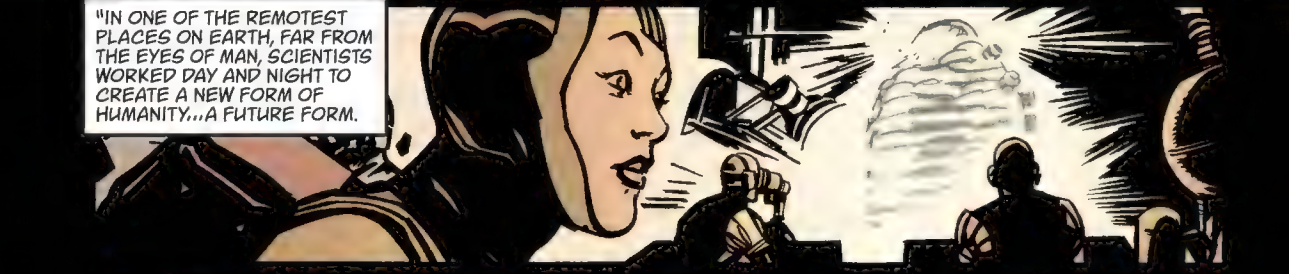


"THE INHUMANS THEMSELVES, AS TIME PASSED, WOULD BE CONSIDERED MUTANTS IN THEIR FEW APPEARANCES OUTSIDE THE HIDDEN LAND.

"BLACK BOLT, THE KING OF THE INHUMANS, AND THE REST OF THE ROYAL FAMILY WERE EVEN CONSIDERED HEROES BY A FEW.

"BUT MANKIND'S MISTRUST FOR THE SUPER-POWERED POPULACE GREW WITH THEIR GROWING NUMBERS.

"AND SOMETIMES, WITH GOOD REASON.



"IN ONE OF THE REMOTEST PLACES ON EARTH, FAR FROM THE EYES OF MAN, SCIENTISTS WORKED DAY AND NIGHT TO CREATE A NEW FORM OF HUMANITY...A FUTURE FORM.



"THIS NEW CREATION, UNLIKE YOURSELF, X-51, LOOKED UPON HIS CREATORS. LOOKED UPON THEIR GREED AND COWARDICE AND DEEMED THAT THEY WERE NOT GOOD.

"MANKIND HAD BEGUN TO PRODUCE ITS OWN DEVIANTS.

"WHEN THE FOURTH HOST ARRIVED ON EARTH, ALL HAD PROGRESSED AS PLANNED."



"OFTEN I HAVE BEEN
MOVED BY THE NOBILITY
AND BRAVERY OF EARTH'S
HEROES, X-51. BUT WE
MUST NOT LOSE SIGHT
OF WHY WE ARE HERE."

"I DON'T UNDERSTAND
WHY THEY ARE HATED
FOR BEING GOOD."

"THEY ARE HATED
BECAUSE THEY HAVE
WHAT OTHERS DO NOT."

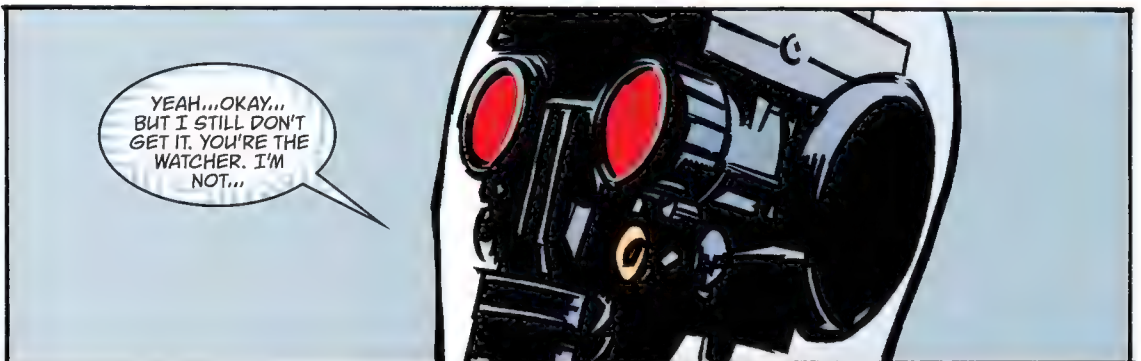
"POWER.
DISTINCTION.
PURPOSE."

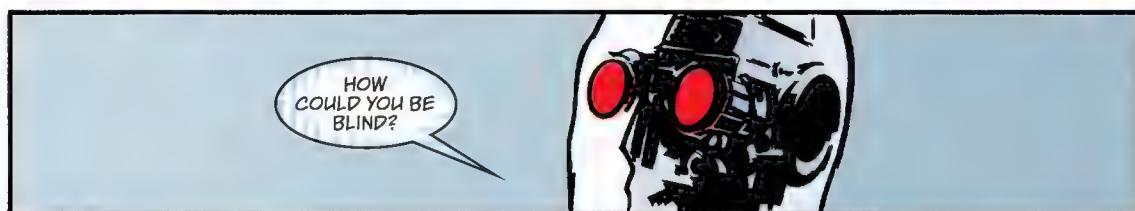
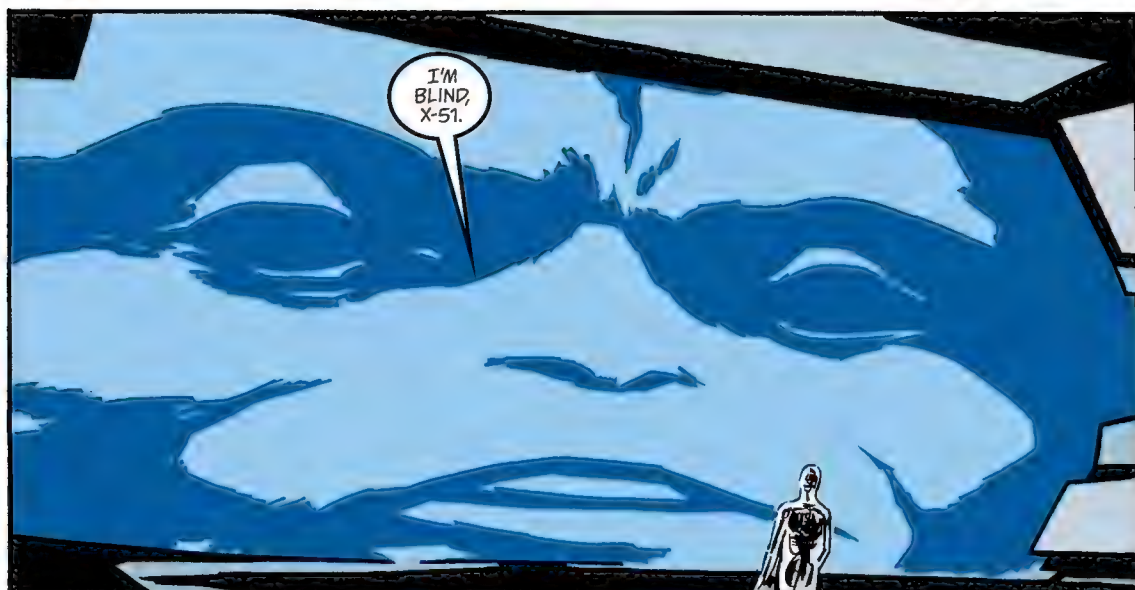
"MANKIND RESENTS ITS
NEED FOR AUTHORITY."

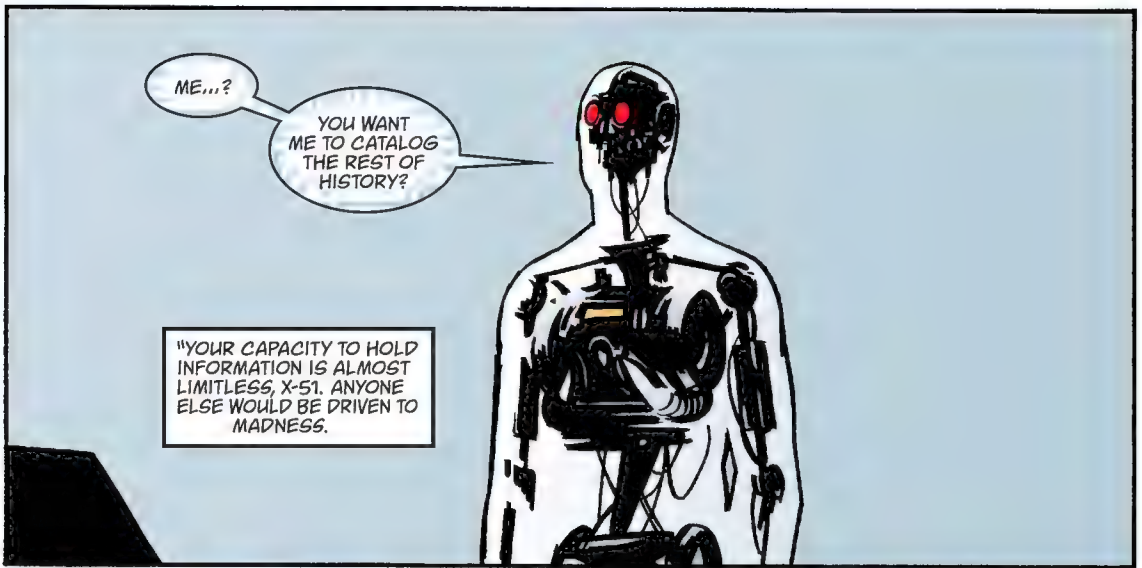
"THEY WISH TO BE THEIR
OWN AUTHORITY, X-51.
THEY WOULD BE GODS
THEMSELVES."

"AND SO THEY ARE
HUNTED AND HOUNDED...
OFTEN OUT OF NOTHING
MORE THAN THE NEED
WITHIN HUMANITY TO
WORSHIP SOMETHING."

"THE HEROES ARE HATED
BECAUSE THEY THREATEN
THE VERY EXISTENCE OF
THE PEOPLE THEY FEEL
COMPELLED TO PROTECT."







MARVEL[®]
COMICS

T E A R T H

APPROVED
BY THE
COMICS
CODE
AUTHORITY



KRUEGER
LEON
REINHOLD

"Watcher?"

"No... X-51. You are the Watcher now."

"Is that why you took my face?"

**"This is the purpose for which
I brought you here...to the moon, yes.
But why are you still... distressed
that you have been transformed?
You were never blood and flesh,
but wires and rivets and pistons and..."**

"God... it was my face... it was all I had."

**"The face of all mankind has changed, X-51. Would you now emulate
a race that no longer exists? Would you choose to be a ghost?
A ghost in a..."**

"No, Uatu. I only..."

**"Good. This is your home now.
I must know what transpires upon the Earth. I am blind without you.
Tell me, X-51, tell me what you see."**



"I SEE STARS... WAVES OF STARS..."

"...AND THEY'RE BURNING."

"I HEAR...GLASS BREAKING... NO...VOICES...HUNDREDS OF THEM...WHY DO THEY SCREAM?"

"WHAT'S HAPPENING, UATU...? WE'VE GOT TO STOP THIS! I NEED TO GET BACK TO EARTH!"

"CALM YOURSELF, X-51. ANXIETY IS UNCHARACTERISTIC OF A WATCHER. THE CRIES YOU HEAR ARE A CONSTANT THROUGHOUT HISTORY; YOU WILL GROW ACCUSTOMED TO THEM."

"YOU SEE A FLAG...THAT IS ALL ...THE BANNER OF A NATION THAT NO LONGER EXISTS."

"BUT TO HAVE TO WATCH...THAT. IT'S TERRIBLE. WHY SHOW ME, UATU? WHY ASK ME TO UNDERSTAND SOMETHING LIKE THIS?"

"BECAUSE IT IS YOUR NATION I SPEAK OF, X-51...YOUR HOME IN ASHES."

"I...DON'T BELIEVE IT. HOW COULD ...IT'S ONLY TWENTY YEARS I'VE BEEN AWAY. HOW COULD...?"

"TO UNDERSTAND THESE ASHES AND THE PEOPLE THEY ONCE REPRESENTED, LOOK BACK UPON THE MAN WHO WAS THEIR CHAMPION. LOOK UPON STEVE ROGERS...WHO BECAME CAPTAIN AMERICA. HE WAS THE FIRST OF THE NEW RACE."

"NEW RACE?"

"HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN ALL I HAVE REVEALED? MANKIND WAS DESTINED FOR THIS LONG BEFORE IT GAINED SENTIENCE."

"IT WOULD NOT BE UNTIL A MADMAN'S DREAM FOR A MASTER RACE THAT THOSE SEEDS OF CHANGE WOULD GERMINATE. IT WOULD NOT BE UNTIL WORLD WAR II."

"BUT IT WAS NOT ADOLF HITLER WHO INSPIRED STEVE ROGERS TO TAKE HOLD OF HIS DESTINY. NO...IT WAS ONE OF HIS AGENTS...THE RED SKULL."

"SO TERRIBLE, EVEN TO HITLER'S REGIME, WERE THE RED SKULL'S ACTIONS THAT AMERICA FELT A CHAMPION OF THEIR OWN WAS NEEDED TO END THE SKULL'S REIGN."

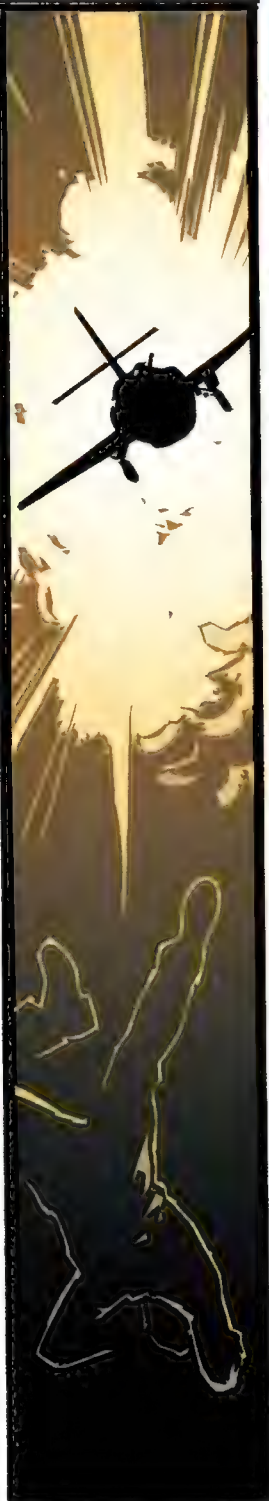
"AND SO, FRAIL STEVE ROGERS WAS SELECTED TO BECOME THE DRUG-ENHANCED SUPER SOLDIER. A MAN WHO WOULD BE MORE THAN A MAN. A SOLDIER WHO WOULD BE A BEACON OF HOPE AND A SHIELD AGAINST THOSE WHO WOULD OPPRESS THE HELPLESS...OR SO THE MILITARY PRESS RELEASE PROFESSED."

"HE WAS PARTNERED WITH A BOY NAMED JAMES BARNES. STUPID, REALLY. THE YOUNG BOY WAS AN ANTIQUE COMPARED TO ROGERS."

"IT SHOULD COME AS NO SURPRISE THAT THE BOY DID NOT SURVIVE."

"HOW DID HE DIE?"

"HE WAS KILLED IN THE SAME EXPLOSION THAT SENT CAPTAIN AMERICA INTO SUSPENDED ANIMATION. THE TRAP THAT LED TO THIS DEATH WOULD BE TRACED YEARS LATER TO THE RED SKULL."



"ROGERS WAS FOUND DECADES LATER BY THE HALF-BREED OF ATLANTIS, HIS OLD ALLY FROM WORLD WAR II, PRINCE NAMOR. HE WAS FOUND BEING WORSHIPPED IN THE ARCTIC NORTH BY ESKIMOS."



"HIS BODY WAS RESUSCITATED BY A TEAM OF HEROES KNOWN AS THE AVENGERS, EACH OF WHOM HAD AMAZING POWERS OF HIS OWN."

"WHILE MUCH HAD CHANGED IN HIS WORLD WHILE HE SLEPT, SOME THINGS HAD NOT. THE RED SKULL HAD ALSO ESCAPED HIS ERA, AND A WAR THE WORLD WAS STILL REBUILDING FROM BEGAN ANEW BETWEEN THESE TWO OLD ENEMIES."

"CAPTAIN AMERICA WAS HAILED AS A LIVING LEGEND. BUT SOMETHING WAS WRONG, X-51. HE WAS MORE ALONE THAN EVER BEFORE."



"WHY? HE HAD ALLIES LIKE THE FALCON AND THE AVENGERS. WHY DID HE FEEL ALONE? WAS IT BECAUSE HE WAS A MAN OUT OF TIME? I DON'T UNDERSTAND."

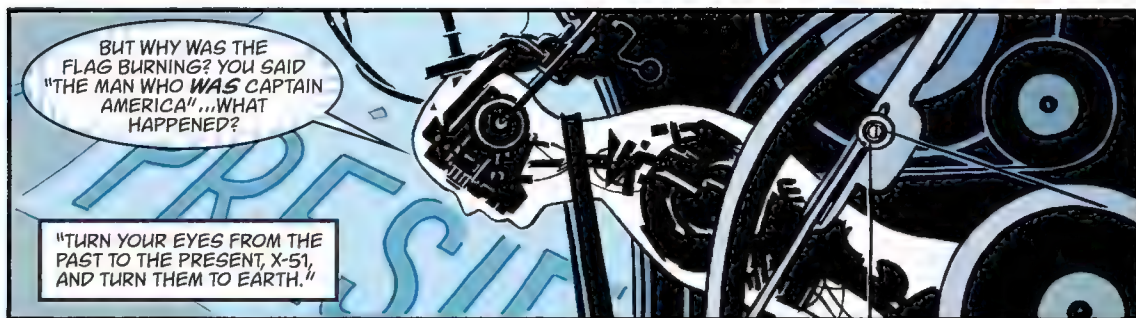
"WHEN ASKED TO BECOME PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, HE DECLINED. HIS CONVICTION, HE SAID, WAS THAT HE COULD ONLY REPRESENT THE AMERICAN DREAM...AND NOT A SPECIFIC GENERATION OF CITIZENS."

"I REMEMBER WHEN THIS HAPPENED. A LOT OF PEOPLE WERE REALLY UPSET."

"THEY NEVER FORGOT, X-51. BUT HIS ANSWER WAS TOO PAT. TOO SIMPLE. ROGERS HAD LOST THE ABILITY TO BE A REPRESENTATIVE OF HIS OWN PEOPLE. HIS COUNTRY WAS NO LONGER THE LAND WHERE ALL MEN WERE CREATED EQUAL."

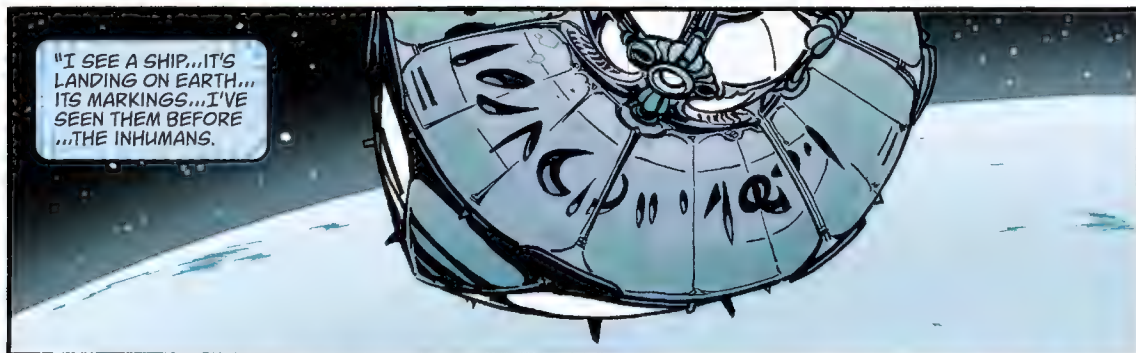


"CAPTAIN AMERICA'S VERY EXISTENCE HAD CHANGED THAT."



BUT WHY WAS THE
FLAG BURNING? YOU SAID
"THE MAN WHO **WAS** CAPTAIN
AMERICA"...WHAT
HAPPENED?

"TURN YOUR EYES FROM THE
PAST TO THE PRESENT, X-51,
AND TURN THEM TO EARTH."



"I SEE A SHIP...IT'S
LANDING ON EARTH...
ITS MARKINGS...I'VE
SEEN THEM BEFORE
...THE INHUMANS."



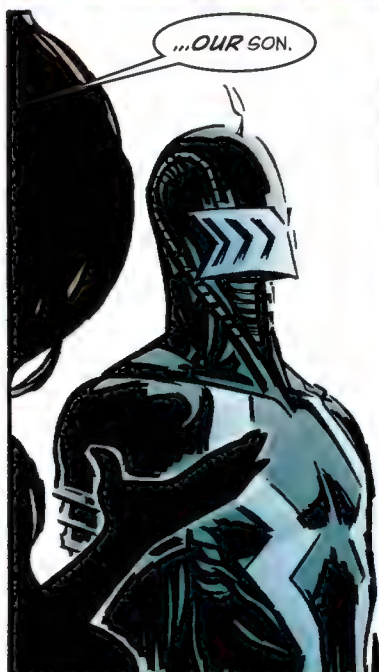
"AH, SO THE SILENT KING
HAS RETURNED AT LAST."

IT'S NOT GOING
TO WORK. NO ONE WILL
BELIEVE THAT AFTER TWENTY
YEARS WE'RE JUST GOING
TO SHOW UP AND...

ONLY **YOU** LOOK
FOR WEAKNESS IN EVERY-
THING, KARNAK. THERE IS NO
REASON FOR ANYONE TO BE
SUSPICIOUS.



SHOULD
WE BE ASKED,
THE REASON WE
HAVE RETURNED
IS FOR THE ROYAL
WEDDING OF
LUNA AND
MY...

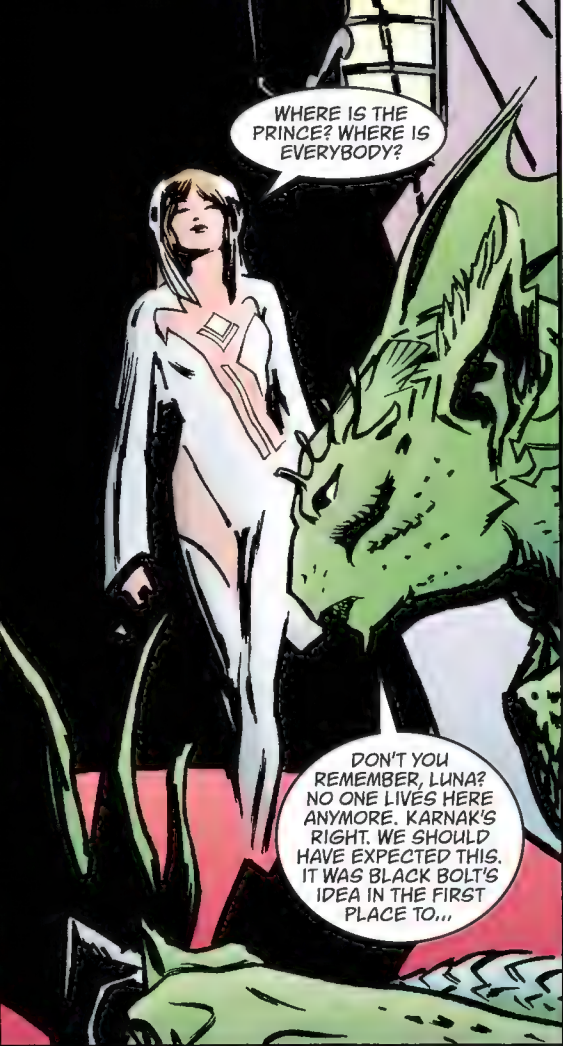


...OUR SON.



"WE ARE HOME
...AT LAST."







I TOLD YOU THIS WOULD ALL BE FAR MORE DIFFICULT THAN YOU'D IMAGINED.

LOOK AT THEM ALL! HOW ARE WE EVER GOING TO FIND OUR PEOPLE WHEN...?

THIS IS A PROBLEM.



QUIET, TRITON. NOT IN FRONT OF LUNA.

I THINK THAT WAS THOR. MAYBE HE CAN...?

WHEN DO WE MEET THE PRINCE?



WE WILL SEE HIM SOON, LUNA... BUT FIRST WE NEED TO DISCOVER WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO ALL THE HUMANS WHO ONCE LIVED HERE.

"I DON'T UNDERSTAND, UATU. THE INHUMANS... THOR...DAREDEVIL...I THOUGHT YOU WANTED TO KNOW WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO CAPTAIN AMERICA."

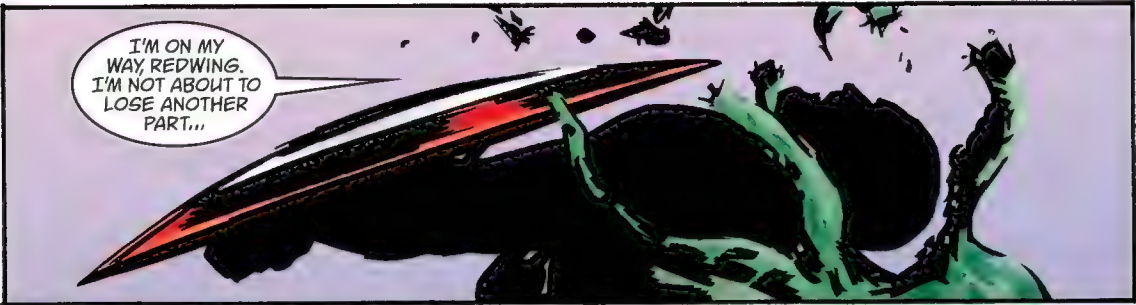
"HE IS HERE AS WELL, X-51. BUT EVERYTHING BEARS WATCHING. NOTHING CAN GO UNSEEN."



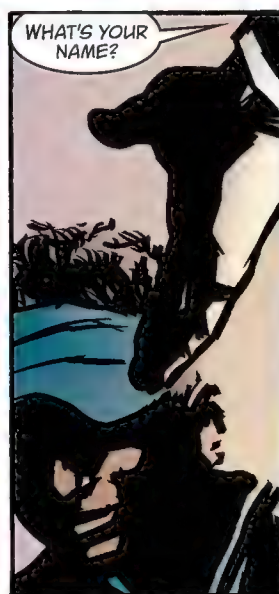
BE CAREFUL,
REDWING. WE CAN STILL
SAVE THEM!

WHO SAYS
THEY'RE STILL
ALIVE?











"I CAN'T GET USED TO THIS EQUIPMENT, UATU...I'M SOMEWHERE ELSE AGAIN. I THINK IT'S STILL NEW YORK."

WHAT DO YOU THINK, PARKER? DO YOU GET INVOLVED? DO YOU SAVE SOME POOR SCHMUCK FROM THE BIG, BAD HYDRA?

DOES IT MATTER?



WHO AM I KIDDING? OF COURSE IT DOESN'T.

WHAT DO I HAVE TO OFFER A WORLD WHERE EVERYONE'S GOT SUPER POWERS?

PARKER!
PETER PARKER!



WHO'S GONNA SHOUT "SAVE ME, SAVE ME" WHEN EVERYONE CAN SAVE THEMSELVES?

PETER PARKER!

SPIDER-MAN!!!



SPIDER-MAN? WHO'S CALLING ME?

OH...IT'S YOU.



SORRY, SERGEANT CAGE. I'M JUST NOT USED TO HAVING PEOPLE CALL ME SPIDER-MAN ANY MORE...IN OR OUT OF COSTUME.

I DON'T HAVE TIME TO MAKE THIS PRETTY, PARKER. WE'RE MINUTES AWAY FROM A PURGE.

THING IS, I COULD USE SOMEONE LIKE YOU ON THE FORCE. SOMEONE WHO KNOWS HOW TO USE HIS POWERS. SOMEONE WHO BELIEVES IN...



SORRY, MISTER. NOT INTERESTED.



"THAT'S YOUR JOB."

IT'S NOT YOUR RESPONSIBILITY, STEVE.



YOU DON'T HAVE TO CARRY THE WORLD ON YOUR SHOULDERS. YOU'LL SEE THAT ONCE YOU'RE PART OF HYDRA.

DON'T LISTEN TO HIM, CAP. THEY'RE ALIEN PARASITES. THEY'RE THE ENEMY. THINK OF WHAT THEY'VE DONE. REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE.



STEVE...WHAT USE IS WAR IF PEACE IS AN IMPOSSIBILITY?



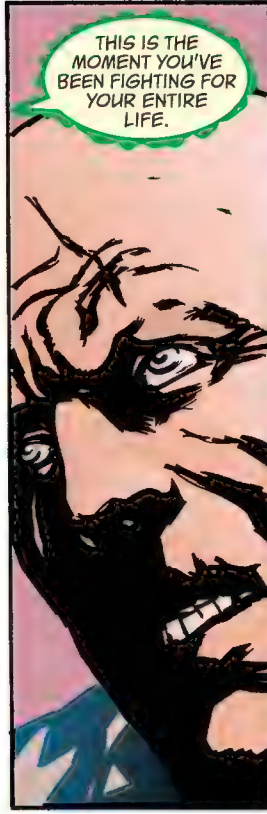
SHUT YOUR EARS, CAP. THEY DON'T WANT YOU... THEY JUST WANT A SUPER-SOLDIER'S BODY IN THEIR RANKS.

ARRGH!



HOLD ON, CAP.

THIS MAY BE YOUR LAST CHANCE, STEVE. JOIN US.





DEFEAT ONE...
AND ANOTHER TAKES
ITS PLACE. THIS IS...
I CAN'T...

YOU'RE
LOSING ME,
CAP.



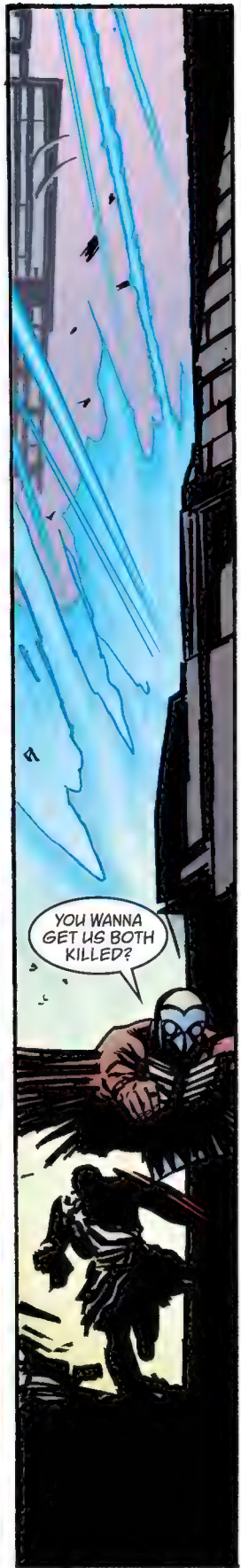
THE
WAR ENDS,
STEVE.



IT
REALLY
ENDS.

DON'T LET
WHAT THE FALCON
SAID GET TO YOU,
CAP.

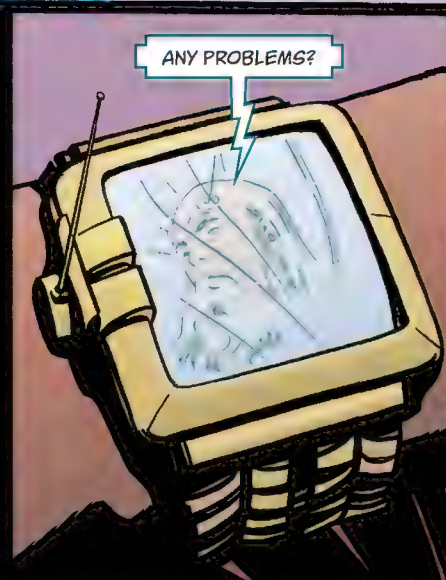
WE'RE
STANDING IN THE
MIDDLE OF ONE OF
STARK'S PURGES. WE
HAVE TO GET OFF
THE STREETS.



YOU WANNA
GET US BOTH
KILLED?



STARK, IF YOU AN' YOUR IRON AVENGERS WERE ANY SLOWER, YOU WOULD HAVE HAD TWO MORE HYDRAS TO WORRY ABOUT.



ANY PROBLEMS?



JUST THE USUAL ONE.



YOU KNOW THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO. HE'S BEEN THROUGH MORE THAN ANY OF US.

WELL, YOUR BUDDY, PRESIDENT OSBORN, ISN'T MAKING IT ANY EASIER ON HIM, EITHER.





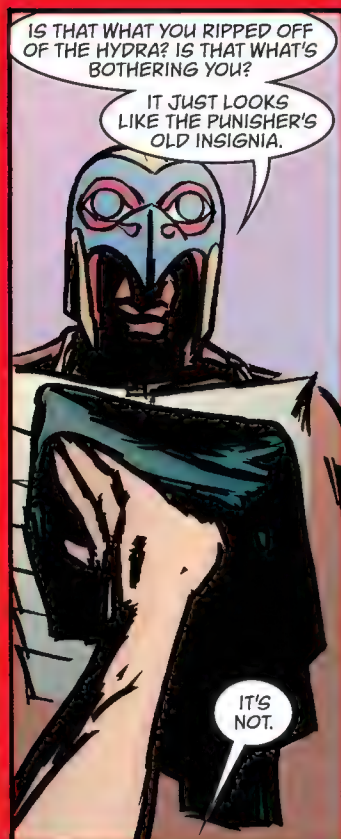
I'LL
TAKE CARE OF
THIS.



JAN WAS TRYING TO BE
NICE, CAP. THE IRON AVENGERS
KEEP HYDRA FROM TAKING
OVER NEW YORK. JAN WAS
JUST...

SHE'S
NOT JAN,
WYATT. YOU
KNOW THAT.
DOES STARK
REALLY THINK
HE CAN
CHANGE WHAT
HAPPENED
TO THE AVEN-
GERS?

DEATH
SHOULD MEAN
SOMETHING,
REDWING.



IS THAT WHAT YOU RIPPED OFF
OF THE HYDRA? IS THAT WHAT'S
BOTHERING YOU?

IT JUST LOOKS
LIKE THE PUNISHER'S
OLD INSIGNIA.

IT'S
NOT.

"IT'S A
SKULL.



"IT'S A
RED
SKULL."

"Like one that on a lonesome road
doth walk in fear and dread,
and having once turned round
walks on,
and turns no more his head;
because he knows a frightful fiend
doth close behind him tread."

—The Rime Of The
Ancient Mariner,
Samuel Taylor Coleridge

ARTWORK BY ALEX ROSS

EARTH X

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER ONE

"Watcher?"
"Uatu, X-51."

"Sorry. I'm confused. I've met Spider-Man before. He had this tendency of making jokes in the most terrible of circumstances... so the idea of a day where he just quit and let the world go on without him... well, I guess that's acceptable."

"You show great haste in your judgements, X-51. That is why you should not judge on the little you have seen. There is much to be revealed of the life of Spider-Man. You still have not..."

"Okay. Okay. Perhaps I am being unfair in my quick conclusions. My father warned me of this and said it was one of my most human flaws... which I believe really was a compliment, by the way... but I'm forgetting what I wanted to ask you... what about Captain America? If there were ever a man who embodied greatness and hope and the idea of perseverance in the face of impossible odds, it was Cap. How could what I've seen today be true? And the way his fellow heroes speak about him. He's a legend, but they spoke as if he were a liability."

"X-51. The future cannot always be watched from the standpoint of the past. What you now see cannot be limited to only what you have understood. The past can only give a context by which to explain part of the present—and the future is never what you expect."

"But how could Cap become... this?
How could a man change so much?"

"Men are not stone, X-51. Nor are they steel. They are dirt and clay, molded by the hands of experience. Consider his context, X-51. Has it changed in the last 20 years? Look upon America and tell me what you see."

"PRESIDENT OSBORN'S AMERICA"

"I see... people in a state of panic. I see great hunger... and looting... and killing for food... and finally, peace. Why was everyone going hungry, Uatu?"

"You are the one with eyes, X-51. You tell me. What of the country's leadership?"

"I don't understand. Congress is empty. The White House is boarded up. Washington D.C is a shantytown. And yet, industry continues. Osborn Industry in particular. They seem to control everything."

"So at last, Norman has become the Goblin King."

"What does that mean, Uatu?"

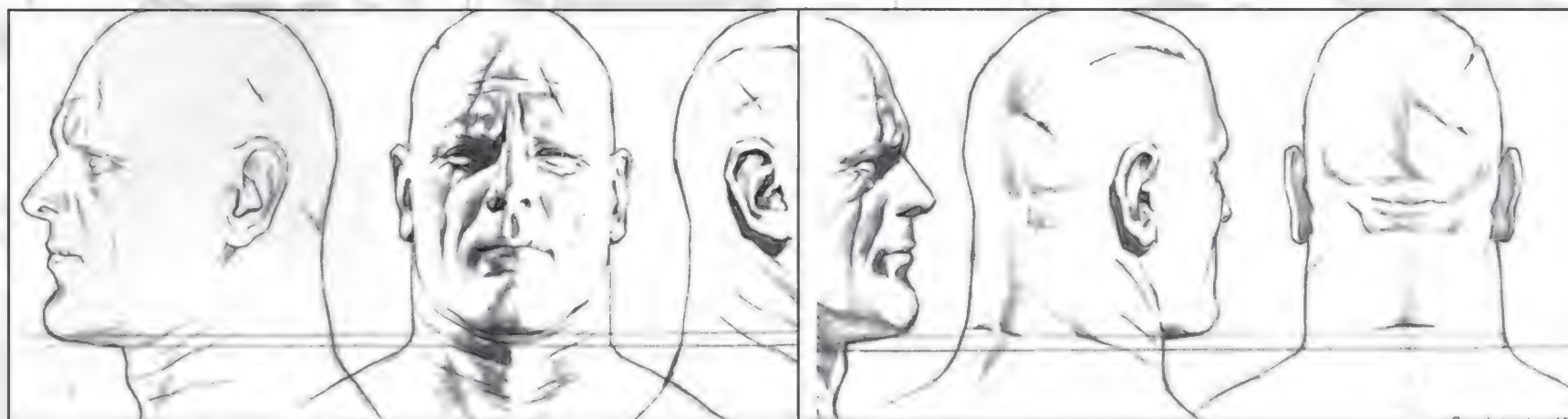
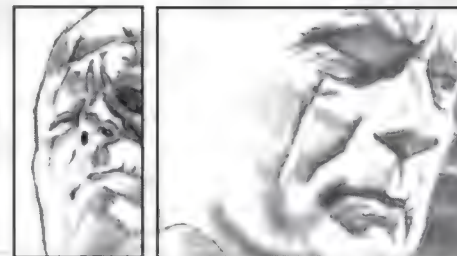
"Norman Osborn has been both a leader of men and the predator which feeds upon them, X-51. While he, indeed, was a man of wealth and industry, it masked his need for power. And mask he wore as well, as a super-villain known as the Green Goblin."

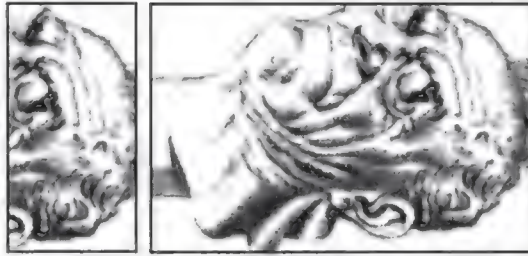
"The Green Goblin? I thought he was dead."

"Perhaps, X-51. Perhaps. What else do you see?"

"I see empty granaries and many people standing in line for food... in line at Osborn Industries. After they are fed, they go to work in homes and in offices owned by Osborn Industries. Everything and everyone seems to be owned by Osborn, but that's impossible... this is the... the red, white and blue, and..."

"Green... X-51. It was the land of plenty. The land of riches, yes. But the self-labeled least flawed nation of them all still had flaws. The want of money. The need for comfort. The acceptance of complacency."





"But that's not fair."

"It is laissez-faire, X-51. The game played since childhood is king of the mountain. One wins. Everyone else loses. Democracy was always America's weapon of suicide."

"... my father used to say that America was like a giant tree that couldn't grow much larger without a better inspection of its roots. He said the tree of liberty was the symbol of freedom... and people were more likely to cut off the limb they were sitting on for the sake of the pursuit of happiness than to recognize how important protecting that freedom was."

"Your father is dead, X-51. His words have been eaten by worms. Do not cling to their morality. You forget what I've said of good and evil."

"How can you just say that? I love my father. He was the most important person in the world to me. I owe him everything. How can you be so cruel?"

"X-51... have you failed to see all I have shown you? Perhaps you would think that life is cruel. That the struggle is cruel. But there is no such thing as cruelty. Cruelty suggests a moral imperative of which there are none. Look at what happened to your father. He died protecting you from the very people you were built to serve because he believed it was the right thing to do. Morality is cruel, X-51. I am not. And it is this morality that in the end, has destroyed Captain America."

"But even with this total dependence on Osborn Industries, wouldn't Cap still represent the dream of what America represented?"

"What part of the dream, X-51? No man is equal or will ever be equal again. The very thing Rogers believed and trusted in has been taken from him. His god is dead. Steve Rogers represented a collected people for so long... he can't go back to being himself, only a people who no longer exist."

"But what about his friends? Even if the Avengers died, wouldn't there be others who could help him?"

"Perhaps you should look upon them."

" N I C K F U R Y "

"I don't understand, Uatu. There isn't one of him. There are many. Each speaks of wars long over. Each carries antiquated weapons that don't even have great effect on the super-powered populace. These 'Furies' aren't taken too seriously."



"They are Life Model Decoys, X-51. Robots. LMDs programmed with obsolete instructions much like yourself. But unlike you, they, like their source, are incapable of learning anything new."

"THE ORIGINAL HUMAN TORCH"

"The first android... died?"

"Not died, X-51. It ceased to operate. That was all."

"How sad... fighting its entire life only to find that no power on Earth could shut it down, it at last realized there was no power to ultimately sustain it."

"Nothing created by any single generation will last forever, X-51. You know that by now."

" S H A R O N C A R T E R "

"I had heard she and Cap had been close for many years, had fought Hydra together... only to become enemies in the end."

"Love is not the opposite of hate, X-51. But neither concepts hold any merit here. The Hydra you have described to me today is not the subversive terrorist organization Sharon Carter, that is, Agent 13, and Captain America fought against as allies. What has happened to her?"

"She's part of the alien Hydra, now along with the She-Hulk."

" B L A C K P A N T H E R "

"He is King of Wakanda. Cap gave him the Cosmic Cube after the death of the Red Skull. T'Challa was the only one Cap could trust to not take advantage of its power. But how could the Red Skull





be dead? I thought he was still alive. What about the mask that was taken off the Hydra?"

"Calm yourself. The past is like the present to a Watcher. Both exist together. The Red Skull may indeed be dead... but death has been cheated before."

" F A L C O N "

"I know he is part of the Hydra. I saw that before.

My question, Uatu, is why would someone join? Redwing warned Cap that he could resist it. Why would anyone accept this?"

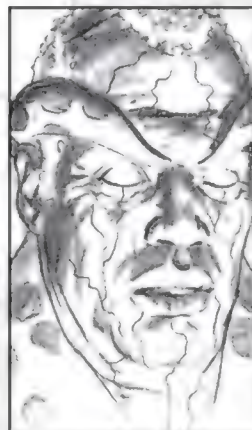
"Perhaps the truth of the matter is that Sam Wilson and even Sharon Carter saw what Steve Rogers is just beginning to see."

"And what's that?"

"Twilight's last gleaming, X-51."

"What?"

"An end. An end to it all."







"Uatu?"

"Yes, X-51."

"I've done everything you've asked. I've told you everything I've seen...but it's too terrible. I can't just sit here on the moon while my friends are in trouble. I should be down there."

"I was an Avenger once...how could they now be dead? And when did everyone find out Spider-Man was Peter Parker? And what about Captain America...the way Tony Stark was talking about him..."

"A Watcher never involves himself in the affairs of mankind, not physically...or emotionally."

"But I could help. You could return me to Earth. I could tell you what I see from down there. I could..."

"No, you could not. On Earth, you are far too close to those you've been programmed to care for. Sympathy will blind you to your duties as a Watcher, X-51. Now delete these concerns from your system and tell me what you see..."

"I SEE A SHIP.
A ROCKET. AND
FOUR PEOPLE
BOARDING IN AN
UNAUTHORIZED
ATTEMPT TO WIN
THE SPACE RACE.

"I HEAR VOICES
PROTESTING THIS
LAUNCH. VOICES
FROM BOTH OUT-
SIDE THE SHIP...
AND WITHIN.

"THE PILOT IS WARNING THE
OTHERS ABOARD OF THE
DANGERS OF COSMIC RAYS
AND UNTESTED SHIELDING.
THEY CALL HIM A COWARD.
HIS NAME IS BEN GRIMM."

"DO NOT CONCERN
YOURSELF WITH
BENJAMIN GRIMM,
X-51. DO NOT LIMIT
YOURSELF AS
RICHARDS DID."

"RICHARDS? YOU MEAN
REED RICHARDS...OF
THE FANTASTIC FOUR?"

"THE VERY SCIENTIST
WHO HEADED THIS
MISSION. YOU ARE
SEEING THE PAST.
CONTINUE..."

"THE ROCKET AND
ITS OCCUPANTS
CRASH SHORTLY
AFTER, VICTIMS OF
THE VERY COSMIC
RAYS GRIMM
WARNED OF.

"HE HAD BEEN RIGHT ABOUT
THE SHIELDING. IT HAD FAILED
TO PROTECT THEM FROM THE
DANGERS OF SPACE.

"SUE STORM VANISHED
MOMENTS LATER, BE-
COMING AN INVISIBLE
GIRL.

"HER BROTHER, JOHN,
SPONTANEOUSLY COM-
BUSTED--A HUMAN TORCH.

"THEY DEDICATED THEMSELVES TO
CHALLENGING THE MYSTERIES OF
THE UNKNOWN AS THE FANTASTIC FOUR.

"AND REED
RICHARDS
DEDICATED
HIMSELF
TO TRYING
TO FIND A
CURE FOR
THE HIDEOUS
CREATURE
BEN GRIMM
HAD BECOME.

"IS THIS THE LIMITATION YOU
MENTIONED--RICHARDS'
SEARCH FOR A CURE?"

"KNOWLEDGE HAD
BEEN RICHARDS'
ONLY CONCERN UNTIL
THAT MOMENT. FOR
ITS PURSUIT, HE HAD
RISKED THE LIVES OF
HIS FRIEND, HIS POS-
SIBLE MATE AND HER
BROTHER."

"THAT'S NOT TRUE.
THE FANTASTIC
FOUR ARE HEROES.
REED RICHARDS IS
MR. FANTASTIC."

"THE SCIENTIST, RICHARDS,
BECAME A BEING OF UN-
STABLE FORM AND MASS--
AN ELASTIC MAN.

"AND GRIMM...BECAME
A MONSTER...A THING.

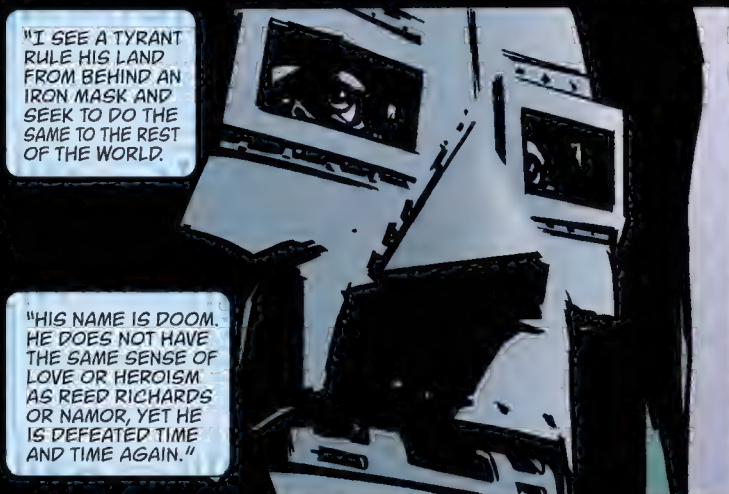
"YES...THAT IS WHAT HE BECAME. HIS
SEARCH FOR KNOWLEDGE WAS COM-
PROMISED THE DAY BEN GRIMM MUTATED.
MORALITY DIMINISHED ONE WHO MIGHT
HAVE RISEN ABOVE HIS FELLOW MAN."



"DO YOU REQUIRE MORE EVIDENCE, X-51? CONSIDER PRINCE NAMOR OF ATLANTIS."

"HE SWORE VENGEANCE UPON HUMANITY FOR THEIR DISREGARD AND FAILED STEWARDSHIP OF THE WORLD'S OCEANS."

"BUT THIS RECKONING WAS NEVER TO OCCUR IN LIGHT OF HIS FEELINGS FOR SUE STORM. HE GRIEVED THE DAY SHE MARRIED REED RICHARDS."



"I SEE A TYRANT RULE HIS LAND FROM BEHIND AN IRON MASK AND SEEK TO DO THE SAME TO THE REST OF THE WORLD."

"HIS NAME IS DOOM. HE DOES NOT HAVE THE SAME SENSE OF LOVE OR HEROISM AS REED RICHARDS OR NAMOR, YET HE IS DEFEATED TIME AND TIME AGAIN."



"YES, X-51, BUT HATRED...AND JEALOUSY ARE ALSO FACETS OF THE CONFINES OF MORALITY."



"THESE LIMITATIONS ARE FOUND IN ALL MEN...AND ALL BEINGS DERIVED FROM THEM. I BELIEVE IT MAY BE BIOLOGICAL. I AM NOT CERTAIN. WHEN THE FANTASTIC FOUR DISCOVERED THE HIDDEN LAND OF THE INHUMANS, THEY FOUND TWO BROTHERS--BLACK BOLT AND MAXIMUS--IN CONFLICT WITH EACH OTHER. ONE WAS KING. THE OTHER WAS MAD."



"WAIT A SECOND, UATU. YOU HELPED REED RICHARDS DEFEAT GALACTUS. YOU SAVED THE WORLD. I THOUGHT SUCH HEROISM...SUCH INVOLVEMENT IN HUMAN AFFAIRS WAS FORBIDDEN?"

"I DID NOT INVOLVE MYSELF IN HUMAN AFFAIRS, X-51."

"HUMAN HISTORY MAY REPEAT ITSELF. I DO NOT. THERE IS FAR MORE TO EARTH THAN MANKIND. NOW CONTINUE..."

"IN WAKANDA, T'CHALLA, THE BLACK PANTHER, WAS MADE KING OF AN AFRICAN NATION THAT GUARDED A RARE FORM OF ENERGY KNOWN AS VIBRANIUM."

"REED RICHARDS SURMISED FROM WAKANDAN TRIBAL FOLKLORE THAT VIBRANIUM MUST HAVE BEEN ALIEN IN ORIGIN."

"FROM THE MICROVERSE TO THE NEGATIVE ZONE, RICHARDS CREATED GATEWAYS TO VARIOUS WORLDS. AND WITH EACH NEW DISCOVERY EARTH WAS ENDANGERED."

"AH...NOW YOU UNDERSTAND SOMETHING OF KNOWLEDGE, X-51. KNOWLEDGE BRINGS DESTRUCTION. IT BRINGS CHANGE. IT BRINGS REDEFINITION."

"I BELIEVE THE ONLY REASON RICHARDS IS STILL ALIVE IS DUE TO HIS QUESTS FOR KNOWLEDGE BEING INTERRUPTED BY THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF BEING BOTH A HUSBAND AND A FATHER."

"FATHER? I HAD FORGOTTEN THE CHILD."

"YES, X-51. THE RICHARDS UNION PRODUCED A SON. A BOY NAMED FRANKLIN. A BOY WITH MORE POWER THAN EVEN HIS FATHER WAS CAPABLE OF UNDERSTANDING."

"WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM?"

"I DO NOT KNOW. YOU MUST TELL ME."

"I DON'T UNDER-
STAND WHY YOUR
EQUIPMENT
COULDN'T RECORD
WHAT'S HAPPENED
OVER THE PAST
20 YEARS, UATU."

"IT REQUIRES A SENTIENT
ORGANISM, X-51, FOR ITS
OPERATION. IT RECORDS
ONLY WHAT I SEE, AND IT
HAS BEEN A LONG TIME
SINCE I HAVE SEEN ANY-
THING. NOW TELL ME,
WATCHER, WHAT IS IT YOU
OBSERVE?"

"THE INHUMANS AGAIN...ARE THEY
CONTINUING THE SEARCH FOR BLACK
BOLT'S SON...OR SOMETHING ELSE?"

REMEMBER,
KARNAK, NO COMPLAINING.
WE ARE GUESTS.

INDEED IF
THAT IS HOW WE ARE
WELCOMED, GRIMM WAS
NEVER THE MOST AC-
COMMODATING OF
HOSTS.

YOU WERE RIGHT TO ELICIT
MASTERS' HELP, ADAM.

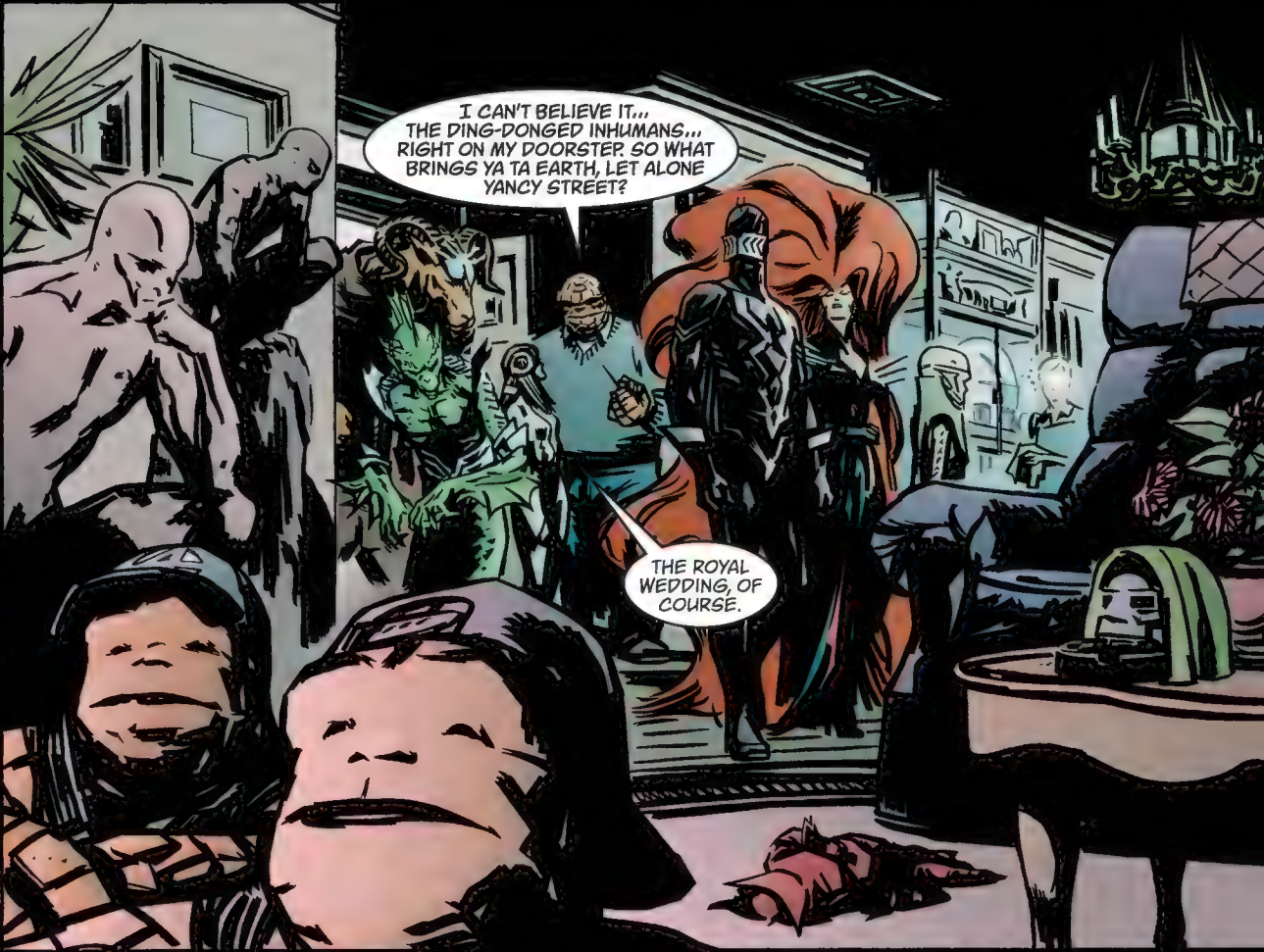
HER NAME IS NOW
GRIMM. JUST AS I AM NO
LONGER CALLED ADAM. I
HOPE HER POWER WILL BE
ENOUGH.

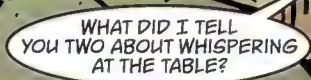
WHAT IN SAM HILL IS
GOIN' ON AROUND HERE? EITHER
IT'S OLD HOME WEEK...OR MY HUMBLE
ABODE JUS' BECAME GRAND
CENTRAL STATION!

WE
DEMAND
AN...

HELLO,
BEN.

'LICIA BABY, YA BETTER
ADD 'NOTHER HALF-DOZEN PLATES
TO THE TABLE. AN' KILL THE FATTED
CALF WHILE YER AT IT. WE GOT
GUESTS!







THAT'S NOT
THE HULK.

NOTHIN' GETS PAST
YOU, KARNY. 'LICIA USED HER
DAD'S OLD PUPPET MASTER CLAY
TO CREATE A TEST'MONY TA ALL
THEM DO-GOODERS BACK IN THE
GOOD OL' DAYS. CAP MAKES
A GREAT APPLE PIE.

AMAZING.



YEAH...ALICIA
CAN GIVE LIFE TA JUS'
ABOUT ANYTHING. EVER SINCE
EVER'ONE GOT POWERS...
'LICIA'S BEEN ABLE
TA GIVE LIFE.

PRETTY GREAT,
HUH? MOST OF US ONLY
HAVE THE 'BILITY TA TAKE
IT AWAY.

BEN. YOU'RE
BEING TOO HARD
ON YOURSELF
AGAIN.



COMES
WITH THE ROCKY
EXTERIOR,
BABY.

LUNA,
WHAT'S
WRONG?

I DON'T
KNOW...I JUST
FEEL...SICK.



THAT'S STRANGE.
USUALLY THAT'S THE
EFFECT 'LICIA'S COOKIN'
HAS ON SOMEONE
AFTER THEY'VE
TASTED IT.

BEN?

THAT IS...AFTER
I'VE TASTED MY COOKIN'...
AN' I NEVER COOK...ER...NUTS.



SOMEONE SAVE ME HERE! FOR
CRIMINY'S SAKE...YA GOTTA
SAVE ME, PLEASE!?!?

WHAT HAS
HAPPENED TO THE PEOPLE
OF EARTH, GRIMM? SINCE
WHEN DID EVERYONE HAVE
POWER?



"WHAT HAPPENED TO THE FANTASTIC FOUR, BEN?"

"WHAT DIDN'T HAPPEN, MEDUSA?"

"'BOUT TEN YEARS AGO, AFTER EVERYONE STARTED MUTATIN', DOOM AND NAMOR ATTACKED THE UNITED NATIONS. ALL THEM DELEGATES WERE MEETIN' TOGETHER TA SOLVE 'WORLD STARVATION' IN LIGHT'A THE HAMBURGER SHORTAGE.

"TURNS OUT THE NATIONS REFUSED TA RECOGNIZE ATLANTIS AS HAVIN' A SAY IN THE MEETING, EVEN THOUGH EVERYONE WAS STARTIN' TA EAT A WHOLE LOT MORE MACFISH SANDWICHES. AN' NAMOR WASN'T TOO HAPPY 'BOUT THAT.

"AN' THAT WAS ALL DOOM NEEDED TA MAKE HIS MOVE. DOOM KNEW THAT IF YA CONTROLLED THE FOOD, YA CONTROLLED THE WORLD."



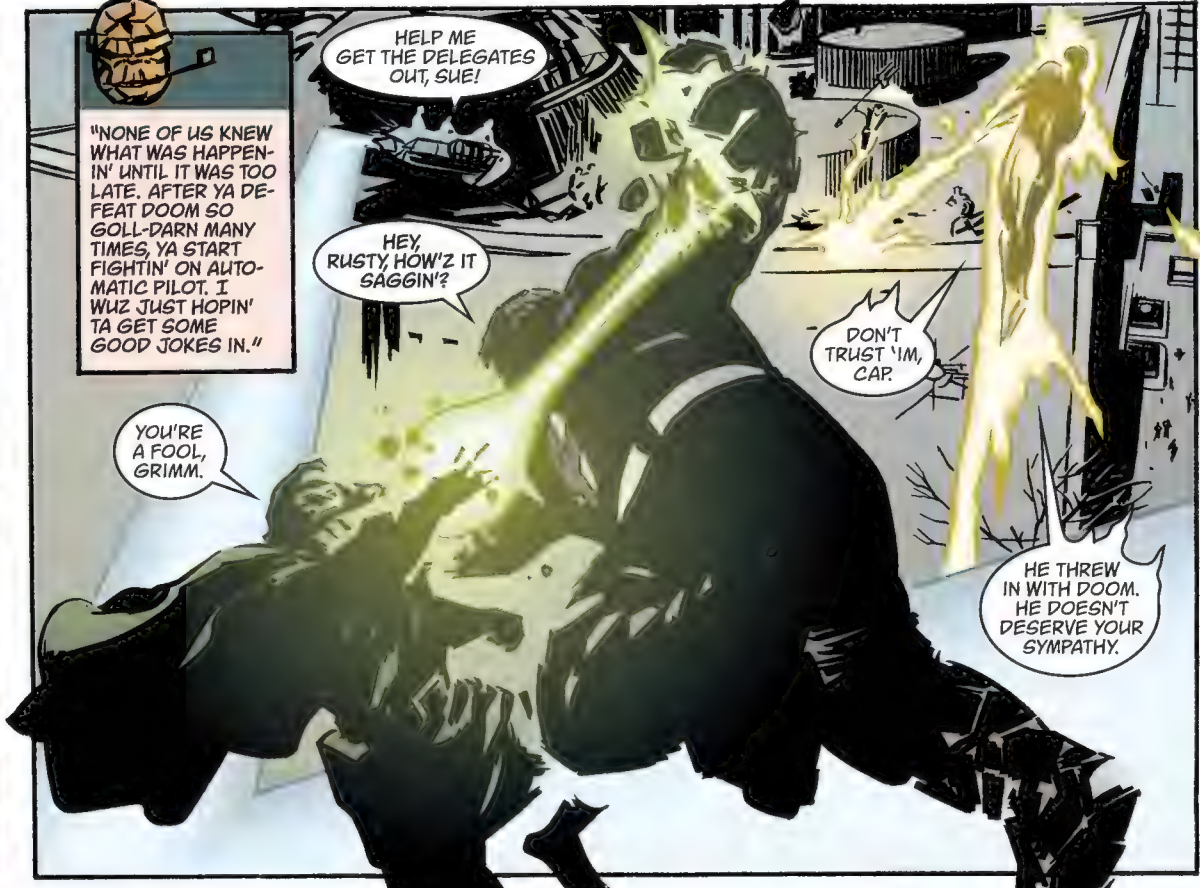
NAMOR...YOU'RE NOT HELPING ATLANTIS. THIS IS INSANE. THIS IS A DEMOCRACY, WE CAN--

WHAT MAN WON'T VOTE HIS APPETITE, ROGERS? WHAT HUMAN WON'T CHOOSE TA HAVE FOOD ON THE TABLE FOR HIS OR HER CHILDREN?



WE CAN TALK ABOUT THIS, NAMOR. I AGREE WITH YOU. YOU SHOULD HAVE A VOICE IN THIS MEETING.

YOU TRUST YOUR PEOPLE TOO MUCH, ROGERS.



"NONE OF US KNEW WHAT WAS HAPPENIN' UNTIL IT WAS TOO LATE. AFTER YA DEFEAT DOOM SO GOLL-DARN MANY TIMES, YA START FIGHTIN' ON AUTO-MATIC PILOT. I WUZ JUST HOPIN' TA GET SOME GOOD JOKES IN."

YOU'RE A FOOL, GRIMM.

HELP ME GET THE DELEGATES OUT, SUE!

HEY, RUSTY, HOW'Z IT SAGGIN'?

DON'T TRUST 'IM, CAP.

HE THREW IN WITH DOOM. HE DOESN'T DESERVE YOUR SYMPATHY.



DON'T
WHAT...SAVE THE
WORLD?

YOU
CAN'T TAKE ALL
THE BOWS,
CAP.



YOU
SHOULD
HAVE
LISTENED
TO ROGERS,
STORM.

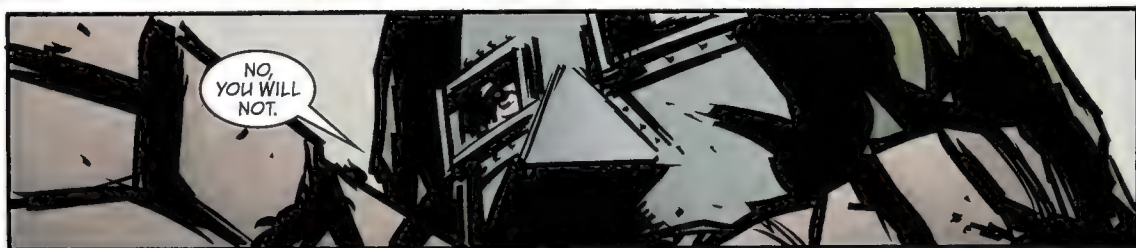


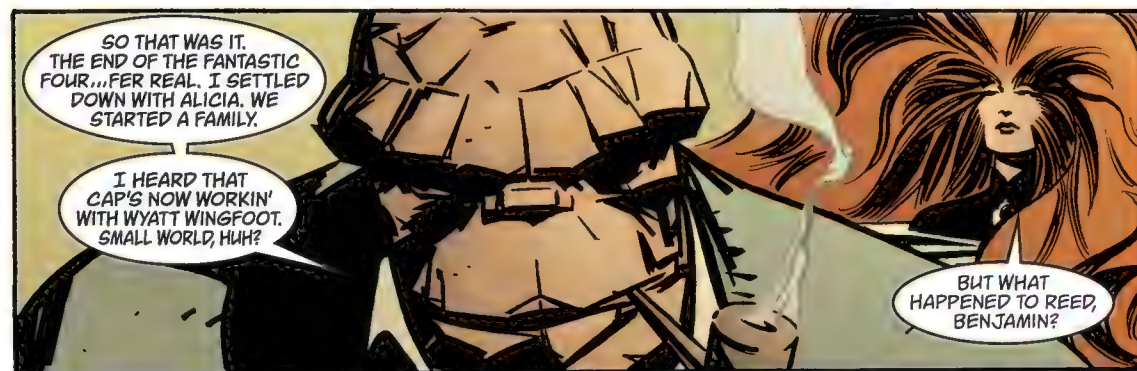
"...JOHNNY...THAT STUPID
HOTHEAD...I LOVED THAT
KID. EV'N TODAY, I CAN'T
FIRGET THAT NOISE HE
MADE."



"WE SHOULD'VE KNOWN JOHNNY'S
DEATH WOULD PUSH FRANKLIN OVER
THE EDGE."

"GROWIN' UP THE WAY HE DID, BEIN'
THE MASCOT OF ADVENTURE AFTER
ADVENTURE...DEATH WASN'T REAL...
WASN'T A PART O' THE GAME...UNTIL
THAT MOMENT."







"A LOT OF PEOPLE THINK THAT STRETCH SNAPPED AFTER SUZY'S DEATH.

"I LIKE TA THINK THAT WHAT HE DID...WHAT HE BECAME...WUZ ALL TA FIND THE CURE TA THE WORLD'S MUTATIONS.

"I WANNA BELIEVE THAT REED FIGURED THE ONLY WAY TA BE FREE TA MOVE AROUND DOOM'S CASTLE IN LATVERIA WITHOUT SETTIN' OFF ANY OF THEM BLAMED DOOMBOTS OR ALARMS..."



...SUSAN.

"...WAS TA PUT ON DOOM'S ARMOR AN' MOVE IN.

"I DON'T THINK HE'Z FEELIN' LIKE MUCH OF A HERO ANY-MORE."

I TOLD YOU IT WASN'T GOING TO WORK, SUSAN. THE BEACONS CAUSED THE REACTION. THE REACTION LED TO THE MUTATION.

THE VIBRANIUM WAS NO DOUBT THE CATALYST... BUT WHAT TRIGGERED THE MELTDOWN?



WHY WASN'T
BEN ENOUGH? WHY
COULDN'T I BE SATIS-
FIED CONDEMNING ONE
MAN TO LIVE LIFE AS
AS MONSTER?



SUSAN...



...WHY DID I
HAVE TO DAMN THE
REST OF THE WORLD
AS WELL?



WHO'S
THERE?

REED IT'S
TONY. YOUR RESEARCH
INTO THE MUTATIONS...
ANY CONCLUSIONS?



IF I KNEW WHAT
TRIGGERED THE OVER-
LOAD, TONY, I THINK I
COULD ISOLATE WHAT IT
WAS ABOUT THE VIBRANIUM
THAT ATTACKED CELLS ON
THE ANATOMICAL
LEVEL.

REED YOU'LL INVENT
SOMETHING THAT SAVES
THE WORLD. YOU ALWAYS
DO. THE MUTATIONS AREN'T
YOUR FAULT. ANYTHING
COULD HAVE CAUSED THE
OVERLOAD.



DO YOU EVER WONDER ABOUT OUR IDEAS, REED?

HOW DO WE THINK OF WAYS TO POWER AN ENTIRE WORLD USING VIBRANIUM, ANYWAY? HOW CAN WE POSSIBLY COME UP WITH A SYSTEM TO REVERSE EVOLUTION? WHERE DO THESE THINGS COME FROM?

OUR DREAMS, I SUPPOSE.



I'VE BEEN HAVING A DREAM, REED. THE SAME NIGHTMARE EVERY NIGHT. IN IT, THERE'S A MAN AND THE UNIVERSE IS INSIDE HIM. EARTH IS THERE, INSIDE, TOO. BUT IT'S COVERED IN SILVER...

REED?



IF I COULD ISOLATE THE INSTABILITY, I COULD...

REED?

OH, I'M SORRY, TONY. YOU SAID SOMETHING ABOUT SLEEPING. NO, I'M NOT SLEEPING ANY BETTER, THANKS FOR ASKING.



IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE I DREAMED OF ANYTHING... OTHER THAN THE WAY THINGS WERE.



MAYBE WE'RE WRONG ABOUT ALL THIS. FOR GOOD OR BAD, WHAT'S DONE IS DONE. MAYBE WE SHOULD QUIT TRYING TO CHANGE THINGS AND ACCEPT THAT OUR TIME, HUMANITY'S DAY, IS OVER.

YOU AND I MAY BE FIGHTING FOR SOMETHING NO ONE CARES ABOUT ANY MORE. MAYBE MUTANTS ARE ALL THERE ARE...

"...AND THE REST OF US HAVE BECOME RELICS."

"LOOK AT THIS, REDWING. S.H.I.E.L.D.'S COMPUTER HAS FOUND MORE SIGHTINGS OF THE RED SKULL INSIGNIA WE FOUND IN NEW YORK."

"THE GREATEST CONCENTRATION IS IN L.A."

ARE YOU SURE THIS IS WORTH IT, CAP? ALL THIS SPY STUFF IS A JOKE NOW.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IT'S NOT JUST A BUNCH OF KIDS PLAYING WITH NEO-NAZI SYMBOLISM?

THESE AREN'T KIDS, WYATT. IT'S FAR OLDER THAN ANY OF US.

LIKE I EVEN UNDERSTAND WHAT THAT MEANS...

WELL... CALIFORNIA'S A LONG WAY AWAY. I DON'T THINK THE HELI-CARRIER'S GOT IT IN HER TO GET US THERE.

DON'T WORRY, REDWING. NICK FURY LEFT ME THE KEYS TO HIS CAR.



COME
ONE AND COME
ALL!

JUST STAB
HIM! OR SHOOT
HIM! OR TRY TO
DISMEMBER!

SHOCK
HIM! DROWN
HIM! TURN ON THE
BLENDER!

FORGET
YOUR COMPASSION,
AND DON'T SHED
A TEAR...

RAISE YOUR
APPLAUSE...FOR
THE MAN WITHOUT
FEAR!



HOW MANY
PEOPLE D'YA
THINK ARE OUT
DERE?

THOUGHT SO.

I DON'T
KNOW...MAYBE THREE
THOUSAND.

I'M TIRED OF
THIS. CAN'T I RECITE
SHAKESPEARE OR
DO SOMETHING
DRAMATIC?



LET'S GET
PROFESSIONAL, PEOPLE.
I'VE GOT TO BE BURNT, STRANGLD
AND BLOWN TO BITS IN THE NEXT
HOUR AN' A HALF. LET'S DO
THIS RIGHT.



AND GIVE
THE PEOPLE WHAT
THEY WANT!



AND NOW...I, THE MEGAMARVEL, MUST ASK FOR SOME VOLUNTEERS FROM THE AUDIENCE...



NOW THAT THE VOLUNTEERS ARE ARMED WITH STATE-OF-THE-ART FLAME-THROWERS, WE CAN BEGIN.

IF THE VOLUNTEERS WOULD PLEASE ATTEMPT TO ROAST THE STAR OF THE SHOW.

IT'S NOT ENOUGH THAT YOU MERELY SET HIM AFLAME, GOOD LADIES AND GENTLEMEN...YOU MUST SCORCH HIM TO HIS BONES!



"I'D SAY RIGHT ABOUT NOW...HE'S DEAD. IT IS MERELY HIS NERVE THAT CONTINUES TO PROPEL HIM THROUGH THESE CANVAS HEAVENS."



EEEEEEEEEE!



LADIES AND GENTLEMEN...YOU ARE IN FOR A RARE TREAT TODAY...THIS IS NOT PART OF THE USUAL SHOW!



WAIT...
WHAT'S GOING
ON...THIS ISN'T
RIGHT...

...SOME-
THING'S...OH
GOD...SOME-
THING'S
WRONG!



U
G
H
H
H!

OHHHHHHH!



SOMEONE...
ANYONE...IS THERE
A DOCTOR IN THE
HOUSE?



WHAT'S THAT
SMELL?

IT'S
PROBABLY
HIM...

NO. IT'S
HER! IT'S THE IRON
MAIDEN.



OF
ALL THE SCENE-
STEALING...



YOU WILL VACATE THIS PLACE IMMEDIATELY.

IF YOU HAVE ANY VALUABLES, LEAVE THEM BEHIND. YOU NO LONGER NEED THEM.



PACK YOUR THINGS. THAT'S IT FOR THIS TOWN.

I THINK THAT'S IT FOR THIS COUNTRY.



HELP!

DON'T HURT US!

HOW CAN THEY DO THIS?

WE'RE DEAD, I TELL YOU.

RUN!



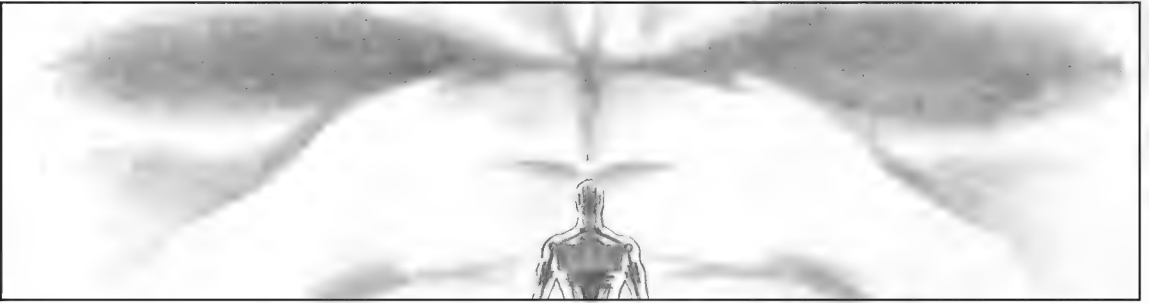
YOU ARE NO LONGER FREE TO MAKE YOUR OWN DECISIONS.

YOUR LIVES ARE NO LONGER YOUR OWN.

YOU NOW BELONG TO THE SKULL.

"What will we do as the earth is set loose from the sun?"
—Friedrich Nietzsche,
The Gay Science, as quoted
in Michael Harrington, *The Politics at God's Funeral*.

E A R T H X



APPENDIX TO CHAPTER TWO

I L L U S T R A T I O N S B Y A L E X R O S S

"Uatu?"

"Yes, X-51."

"I asked you a while back... why the heroes were hated. Why they were feared. Your response still doesn't make sense to me."

"What did I say?"

"You said they were hated because mankind had an inbred need for authority. Yet that very need was one of their greatest resentments. You said that the heroes... the ones that actually saved everyone from this invasion or that super-villain... were actually seen as a threat to the existence of the very people they were saving. I don't understand."

"That is because, no matter how hard you try, X-51, you are not human. Your programming may be capable of mimicking and mocking human frailty and expression, but it is incapable of human contradiction."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Logic is an aim of human existence, a hope which does not drive them, but instead, draws them to itself. It is not a characteristic born within them."

"But... ?"

"X-51. History has shown from age to age the human condition. They need a hero. A champion. A savior. But when salvation has come, they turn on that embodied hope."

"But why?"

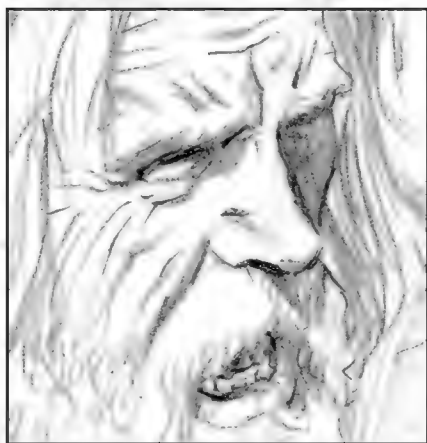
"Because to be saved is to be weak. And to be weak, one must acknowledge that one exists in a constant state of need. That, in his natural state, man is found to be lacking. For the last time, X-51, mankind resents its heroes because it needs them. And because, more than the heroes themselves, man hates his own neediness."

"But that's not how things are anymore, is it, Uatu? Mankind... is strong now. Everyone has powers... and that means... "

"That is correct, X-51, they no longer need heroes. Or authorities. And those 'heroes' that continue to act according to the dictates of ignorant valor and misplaced courage are defined by their new peers as antiquated, old, and lost."

"That's why everybody treats Cap the way they do, isn't it?"





“REED RICHARDS”

"But then, why is Reed Richards living like he does? He may have been a hero... but he was a scientist as well. I can't see him... lost in acts of heroism if one day science proves those acts obsolete."

"Ah, X-51. You forget... Richards was compromised by his guilt. In playing the hero, he was forced to sacrifice his quest for knowledge."

"But... no. That's not true... if it were, then why is he still working at his laboratory? Why does he still seek knowledge?"

"He seeks relief... from his guilt, X-51. He does not seek knowledge. He does not even realize how limited he has become... or hopes to become."

“DR. DOOM”

"The people of Latveria both feared and loved their master, X-51. When Richards began impersonating Doom, the Latverians still looked to their master for guidance."

"So that's why Richards allowed the Doombots to continue their operation."

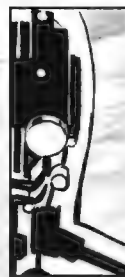
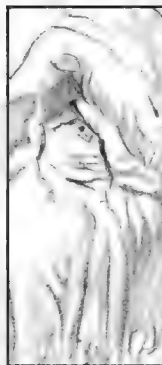
"Yes, X-51, but it wasn't enough to continue this charade. The Latverians noticed a difference, even though they could not understand what had happened. They are a superstitious people, and their solutions and ideas are steeped in folktales and fables. Many believe their master has waged war against all the forces of Hell for his people. And his battles with Mephisto have changed him..."

"But what does this have to do with Richards? Why even continue a charade?"

"Because Reed Richards no longer desires to be Reed Richards. He sees himself as a villain in need of redemption. And so he lives like one..."

"Why...? I understand that he blames himself for the mutation of the world, but..."

"That is not all. When the United Nations was made privy to Richards' discovery of the dimension known as the Negative Zone, it turned the area into a dumping ground for toxic waste, nuclear weaponry, and all those undesirables no prison system could hold. If it were not for the triggering of the dormant mutant gene within the entire populace, legislation would have proceeded that ultimately would have





exiled all known mutants to the Negative Zone.

"Richards saw new worlds condemned by those he had trusted his discoveries to. His discoveries were nothing more in his peers' eyes than new vistas of exploitation. Reed Richards, like all those so-called geniuses before him, looked upon his inventiveness and wept bitter, but futile tears.

"So Richards limited himself... he made certain his discoveries from then on were only those advancements which could solve the natural limitations of this Earth. He dismantled the Negative Zone portals and any other ways to travel to other dimensions. He dedicated himself to the Earth... it probably came as no surprise that he was once again confronted with the Mole Man."

"MOLE MAN?"

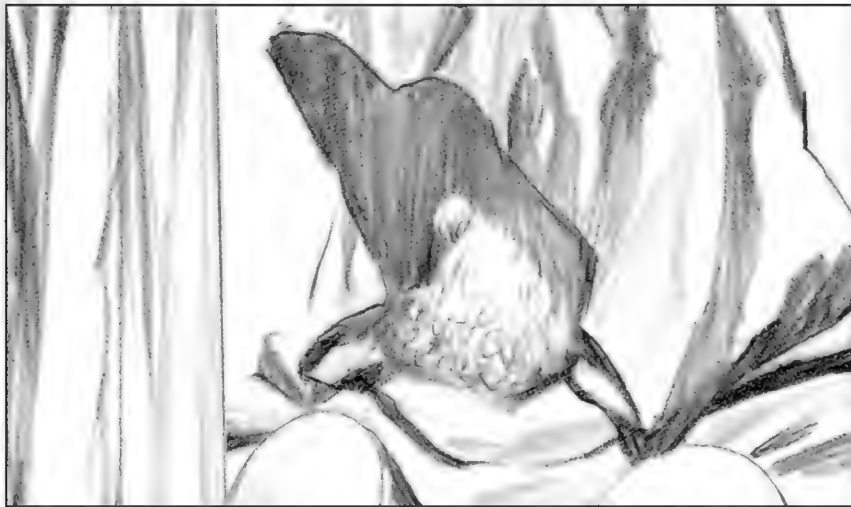
"Yes. In the very first 'adventure' of the Fantastic Four, Richards faced a being who had been rejected by his fellow man. An ugly small man who would rather face the darkness than the jeers and hatred of those who breathed in the light of day. This man had fled from the surface and planned his revenge with all those who lived beneath the Earth's crust—the Moloids.

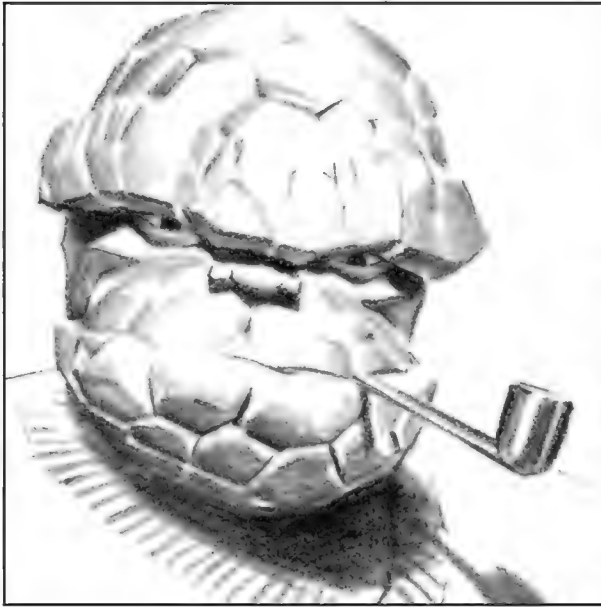
"Richards defeated the Mole Man and his throng... but not before discovering a valley of giant diamonds. Years later, Richards went back to this valley and used the diamonds to fund his vibranium experiments."

"Wasn't the Mole Man angry?"

"At first, X-51, yes. But the mutation of mankind was the salvation of the Mole Man and his minions. No longer the objects of scorn, they embraced the new world with love and joy. They are like tourists on this new world. They have heard the theory that Reed Richards is responsible for the changes on Earth. And therefore, he is like a saint to them. His name is revered as the man who set them free. The man who was once an enemy.

"Why, even alien races once sworn to invade Earth have now sought Richards' aid in finding a safe haven on Earth. Races like the Skrulls."





“THE SKRULLS?”

"X-51. I have said enough. Why don't you tell me. Gaze upon Earth and tell me what you see."

"Few Skrulls still live. They are remnants of a war with another alien race known as the Kree. They say that the war was so costly, neither race exists as a nation any more. The few that live warm themselves with the thought that their enemy is ruined. I don't understand that kind of thinking, Utau."

"Continue."

"Both sides, I guess, literally burned each other out of their home planets. A few survive and live amongst the Earthlings disguised as mutants— but their power and appearance is nothing. They may alter the way they look—but it hardly matters any more."

"What about the Kree, X-51?"

"A few live on Earth as well. They, along with a few of their guardian Sentries, are nomadic wanderers, hunting down the last vestiges of the Skrull. They are not alone. The Skrull Kill Krew also exists."

"Skrull Kill Krew?"

"Yes. They blame the Skrulls for the change on Earth. They blame cows for the changes brought upon Earth."

"But that's crazy, Uatu."

"Yes, X-51. It is. But amusing as well. Years ago, Reed Richards allowed a number of Skrulls to use their shape-shifting powers to become common cattle and thus live out their lives in that form. The Skrull Kill Krew must therefore believe these cattle were bred and used as the primary foodstuff for an "international burger chain"! A foodstuff that would transform every person on the face of the Earth."

"But everyone doesn't eat meat. There are a lot of vegetarians and..."

"Remember, X-51. The inhabitants of Earth are not born to logic. It must be learned. And many reject it. There are many beliefs as to why the Earth's inhabitants have mutated."

"Really?"

"Yes, X-51. I don't need eyes to know what mankind is thinking anymore. I don't need to see to know what they must believe about the mutation of the world."

"What do you think they believe?"





“MUTANTS”

"I believe the common, uneducated man would generally blame those whose genetic seeds had already been triggered for the change to Earth's populace. Citing the mutants, as they always have, for what has happened to them."

"But that theory is worse than the Skrull Burger theory. It's blind prejudice; as if your race could change... or be caught like the common cold. It's crazy."

"Perhaps that is why this theory is probably the one most believed."

"But it'll lead to a mob mentality. Who knows what damage will..."

"X-51... think. Since everyone looks like a mutant, it is not possible to attack or strike out with any revenge against them. This belief is superficial. It is skin-deep fabrication and trusted only by those who are unwilling to consider more than what they've already learned. The reality is that these changes have brought peace to the mutant race—despite the underlying anger within Earth's people. The mutation has made prejudice obsolete."

“THE CURSE”

"There are some, largely due to the lack of reasonable explanation for this mutation, whom I imagine would put their trust in explanations beyond themselves, X-51. Ancient beliefs and doctrines are no doubt being born anew all over the world. No doubt, this is in line with the appearances of some inhabitants becoming akin to unicorns and centaurs and the like. Whether these are curses from Odin, due to the lies of the trickster god Loki, or the result of Hercules... or Set..."

"I believe that many believe this is a curse from the gods or a God of some sort. Some believe, I am certain, that the mutation of this world is Mephisto's condemnation of humanity and that this must be the reason why each person has been turned into a demon. I was witness to the Silver Surfer's last day on Earth. And as he has not been seen on the planet since, I imagine many believe that there is no one here who will still fight for them against the Lord Of Lies."



“THE GOVERNMENT”

"I would believe that many blame the government, as they did for AIDS and other diseases, saying that the mutation had been the result of an experiment that could not be contained and ultimately spread throughout the entire world."



“EVOLUTION”

"Of course, this theory, like those of the old religions, is generally ignored in light of how quickly the change in the populace occurred. Some, though, I am certain, place a special emphasis on the natural aspects of their newfound power, and take this change as a justification for their new behavior. And so, a natural change lays the groundwork for an ethical one. Thus, civilization begins, as all things do, its final cycles of entropy."

"I'm sorry, Uatu. I just don't think people are as screwed up as you seem to be implying. I know lots of good men. My father..."

"X-51. Have you ever considered where he was born? In what country? To what household? To what lifestyle? To what riches? To what belief system? To what race? Surely his 'goodness' was determined by the answers to those questions."

"But isn't there a choice in the end? The choice to be good? The choice to do evil?"

"That depends, does it not... on the *existence* of good and evil?"



EARTH

**"How could one man
change the world?"**

**"You speak of Reed Richards and the
mutation of Earth's populace, Watcher?"**

**"Yes. How could one being...no matter how intelligent...be
capable of such a transformation? Even if it were an accident, how
could he trigger the mutant gene within people on a global scale?
My father always spoke of..."**

**"The man who built you, X-51, is not your father. You
diminish your mechanics with terminology associated with
mere human biology. If you are not yet convinced that there is
much your *assembler* did not know in light of all I have already
shown you...I am not sure I will ever be able to convince
you otherwise."**

"I suppose Father was, after all, only human."

**"Good. Despite the intentions of human politics, history
has shown that it is often the one, not the many, who have
led the world towards its destiny...now turn your eyes to
Earth once more and tell me what you see."**

"I SEE STONE SPIRES UNDER THE SEA...THOSE PEOPLE... THEIR SKIN IS BLUE...THEY'RE DROWNING!"

"CALM YOURSELF, X-51. THEY ARE NOT DROWNING. I BELIEVE YOU ARE OBSERVING ATLANTIS AND ITS INHABITANTS."

"BUT IF THEY CAN BREATHE UNDER-WATER...WHY ARE THEY SCREAMING?"

"THE ANSWER WILL REVEAL ITSELF, X-51. YOU MUST WATCH."

"A SHIP...I SEE THE ICE-BREAKER ORACLE...THE EXPLOSIVES ITS CREW SET IN THE ICE BROUGHT DESTRUCTION TO THOSE WHO LIVED BENEATH THE WAVES."

"AH...THIS IS THE PAST YOU SEE. THE YEAR IS 1920."

"THEIR EFFORTS TO NAVIGATE THE ANTARCTIC WERE REGARDED AS AN ATTACK. PRINCESS FEN WAS CHOSEN TO LEAD THE ATLANTEAN RETALIATION."

"FEN LOVED HER PEOPLE AND WAS UNWILLING TO RISK THE LIVES OF ANY IN HER KINGDOM. SWEARING THAT SHE WOULD MAKE PEACE ANY WAY POSSIBLE, FEN ALONE WENT TO THE SURFACE..."

"...ONLY TO WED AND PROCLAIM HER LOVE FOR THE CAPTAIN OF THE ORACLE, CAPTAIN LEONARD MCKENZIE."

"PEACE DID NOT RESULT FROM THEIR UNION. WEEKS LATER, FEN'S FATHER, UNAWARE OF WHAT HAD OCCURRED, ATTACKED."

"HIS WAR PARTY KILLED ALL ABOARD. PRINCESS FEN WAS DEVASTATED, NOT KNOWING LEONARD MCKENZIE HAD ESCAPED."

"WHAT OF THEIR SON, X-51? WHAT OF NAMOR?"

"WHOSE SON? YOU MEAN... THE SUB-MARINER IS THE SON OF MCKENZIE AND FEN?"

"PERHAPS IT WAS THE LOSS OF HER NEW HUSBAND. OR IT COULD HAVE BEEN THAT THE POTION WHICH ALLOWED FEN TO BREATHE OXYGEN ABOVE THE WAVES AFFECTED NAMOR WHILE HE WAS STILL IN THE WOMB. OR MAYBE IT WAS MERELY GROWING UP WITHOUT A FATHER..."

"I ONLY KNEW *MY* FATHER FOR A FEW MONTHS, UATU. WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?"

"FOR WHATEVER REASONS, **NAMOR** WAS BORN TO RAGE AND MISPLACED PASSIONS."

"DURING WORLD WAR II, HE FOUGHT AGAINST THE RED SKULL AND THE THIRD REICH AS AN ALLY OF CAPTAIN AMERICA AND THE HUMAN TORCH."

"I'D ALWAYS HEARD HE WAS A HERO. WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM?"

"AMNESIA, X-51. HIS ALLIES AND FRIENDS WERE LOST TO HIM. WITH NO MEMORY OF HIS HERITAGE AND EXPERIENCES, HE WANDERED THE STREETS OF NEW YORK A HOMELESS MAN FOR OVER A DECADE."

"THAT'S JOHNNY STORM OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR. HE RECOGNIZED NAMOR... AND HELPED HIM REGAIN HIS MEMORY."

"IF HE HADN'T DONE THAT, STORM WOULD STILL BE ALIVE TODAY."

"STORM WAS RECKLESS, X-51. IF NOT AT NAMOR'S HANDS, HE WOULD HAVE DIED AT SOMEONE ELSE'S. HE IS INCONSEQUENTIAL. CONTINUE."

"NAMOR RETURNED HOME TO FIND ATLANTIS DESTROYED AND SWORE VENGEANCE AGAINST ALL OF MANKIND. HE WAS DEFEATED."

"SO HE TURNED TO POTENTIAL ALLIES IN HIS CAMPAIGN. DR. DOOM WAS THE QUICKEST TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF NAMOR'S IMBALANCE."

"THIS SUPER VILLAIN TEAM-UP DIDN'T LAST. THE REASON FOR NAMOR'S RAGE WAS TAKEN FROM HIM."

"NAMOR DISCOVERED HIS PEOPLE TO BE VERY MUCH ALIVE."

"HE ALSO FOUND LOVE IN THE ARMS OF THE ATLANTEAN LADY DORMA."

"HE ALLIED HIMSELF WITH HEROES AND VILLAINS OF VARYING DEGREE, OFTEN BETRAYING ONE TO THE OTHER."

"NO ONE WOULD TRUST HIM. HE HAD BECOME A BEING OF TWO IDENTITIES. OF TWO FACES."

"YEARS LATER, A SCIENTIST NAMED DR. ALEXANDER DISCOVERED THE REASON FOR NAMOR'S IMBALANCE."

"NAMOR WAS A HYBRID, ALEXANDER EXPLAINED, AND THEREFORE HIS TIME ABOVE AND BELOW THE WAVES NEEDED TO BE PROPORTIONED. TOO MUCH TIME UNDERWATER RESULTED IN OXYGEN STARVATION. TOO MUCH TIME ABOVE THE SURFACE HAD THE REVERSE EFFECT."

"DEMENTIA WAS ALWAYS THE RESULT."

"NAMOR FOUNDED AN ORGANIZATION FUNDED WITH THE TREASURES WHICH NOW LITTERED THE OCEAN FLOORS..."

"...AND TRIED TO LIVE AS HE NEVER HAD BEFORE. HE WAS AT PEACE WITH ALL... BUT NO ONE WOULD TRUST HIM NOW. AND SO HE WAS ALONE."

"IT'S SO SAD, UATU. I NEVER REALLY UNDERSTOOD HIM. HE COULD HAVE BROUGHT BOTH RACES TOGETHER... HE COULD HAVE BROUGHT LOVE BETWEEN..."

"X-51, NO ONE ON EARTH IS WORTHY OF THIS CONCERN. YOU MUST DISTANCE YOURSELF FROM THOSE YOU WATCH."

"I DON'T THINK I WANT TO, UATU. I DON'T WANT TO STOP CARING FOR PEOPLE. THAT'S NOT WHAT MY FATHER TAUGHT ME."

"DISTANCE MYSELF... YOU'D THINK THE MOON WAS FAR ENOUGH."

"BUT LIKE HIS MOTHER BEFORE HIM, NAMOR WAS DENIED THE COMFORT AND COMPLETION OF A MATE."

"THIS KNOWLEDGE...
THIS OMNISCIENCE...
IS A GREAT GIFT, X-51.
YOUR PASSIONS ARE
YOUR DESTINY'S
DELUSION."

I'M...I SUPPOSE
THE LOSS OF PERSONAL
OUTRAGE IS THE PRICE I
MUST PAY FOR ALL YOU'VE
SHOWN ME.

"IT IS NO LOSS, X-51. IT IS
FREEDOM. NOW SPEAK TO
ME OF WHAT TRANSPIRES
THIS DAY."

"YES, HATU.

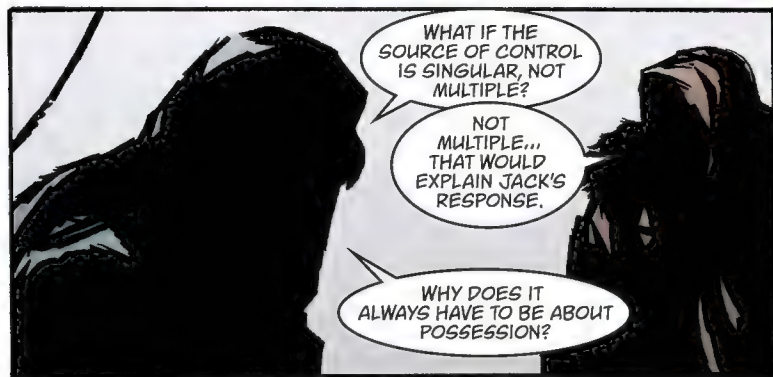
"CAPTAIN AMERICA AND REDWING,
IN THEIR SEARCH FOR MORE EVIDENCE
TO SUBSTANTIATE CAP'S CLAIM THAT
THE RED SKULL HAS RETURNED, HAVE
REACHED CALIFORNIA."

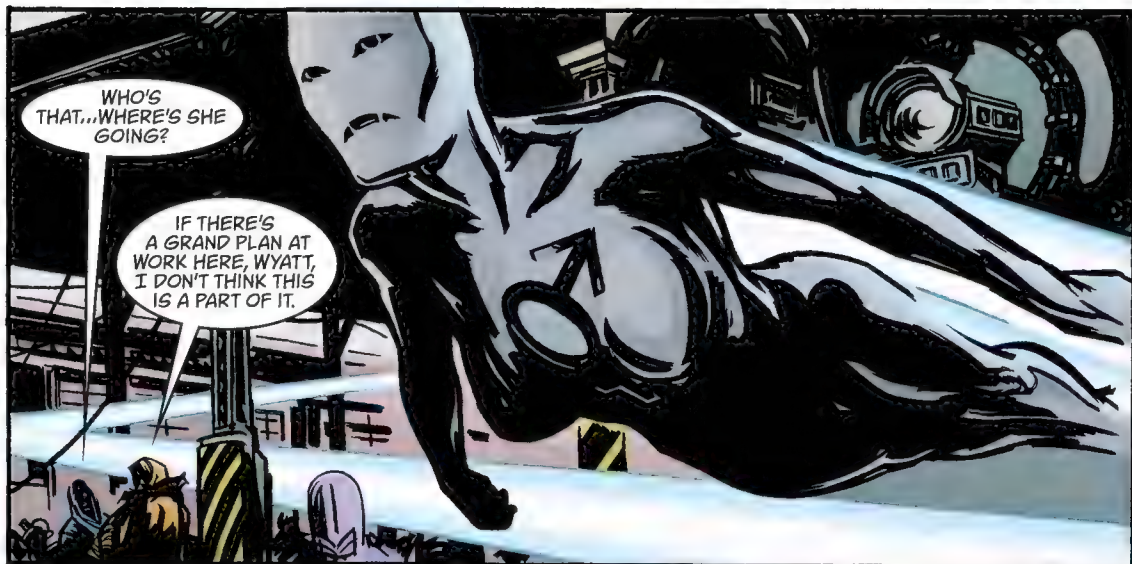
STEVE...I'M
SORRY I DIDN'T BELIEVE
YOU...YOU'RE RIGHT.

I THOUGHT
I COULD KILL HIM.
I REALLY DID.



"THIS IS MY
FAULT, WYATT.
I SHOULD
HAVE KNOWN
BETTER."







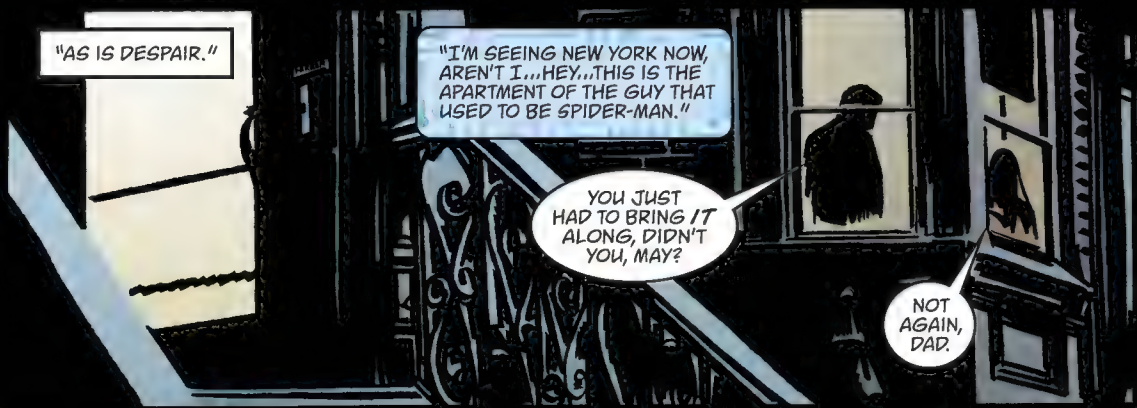
"IT'S NAMOR."

YOU MUST
STOP THIS, WHOEVER
YOU ARE. THE SEA IS
THE SKULL'S TO DO WITH
AS HE WILL.

FOOLISH
COW. I AM THE
SEA.

"IT'S HIM, WATU. HE'S
SO ANGRY. HE SEEMS
MORE INSANE THAN
EVER."

"INSANITY IS
OFTEN BORN OF
RAGE, X-51."

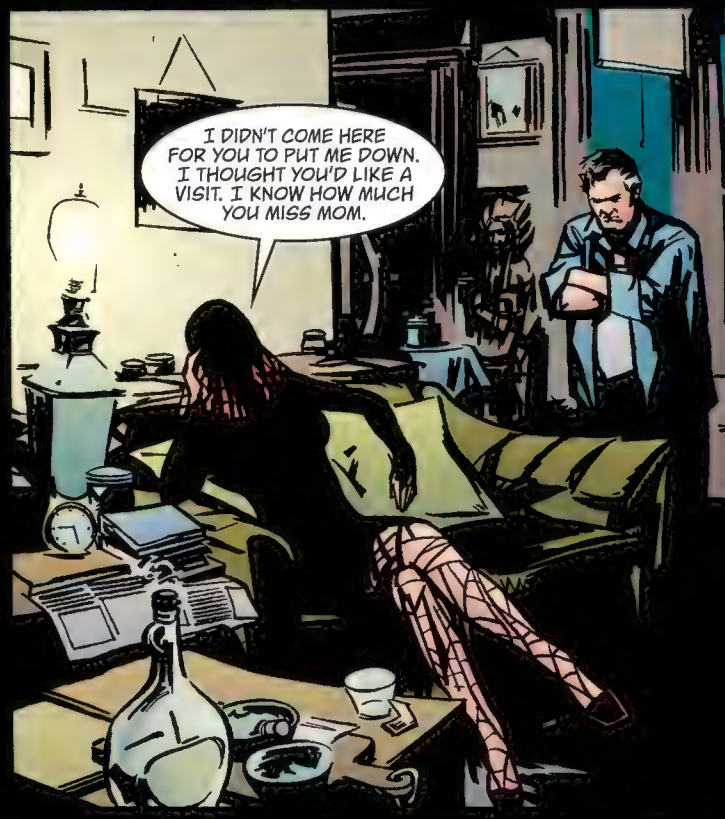


"AS IS DESPAIR."

"I'M SEEING NEW YORK NOW, AREN'T I...HEY..THIS IS THE APARTMENT OF THE GUY THAT USED TO BE SPIDER-MAN."

YOU JUST HAD TO BRING IT ALONG, DIDN'T YOU, MAY?

NOT AGAIN, DAD.



I DIDN'T COME HERE FOR YOU TO PUT ME DOWN. I THOUGHT YOU'D LIKE A VISIT. I KNOW HOW MUCH YOU MISS MOM.

I'M CHARITY? IS THAT WHAT YOU THINK, LADY? OR IS THIS VENOM'S GOOD DEED FOR THE DAY?

VISIT AN OLD MAN AND HELP HIM REMEMBER THAT HIS ENTIRE FAMILY IS EITHER DEAD ...OR SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY?



I'M YOUR DAUGHTER. I'M ALL YOU HAVE LEFT. I DIDN'T CHOOSE TO BECOME VENOM--IT CHOSE ME. DON'T YOU REMEMBER?

BUT I'M IN CONTROL OF IT, DAD. WHY CAN'T YOU SEE THAT?

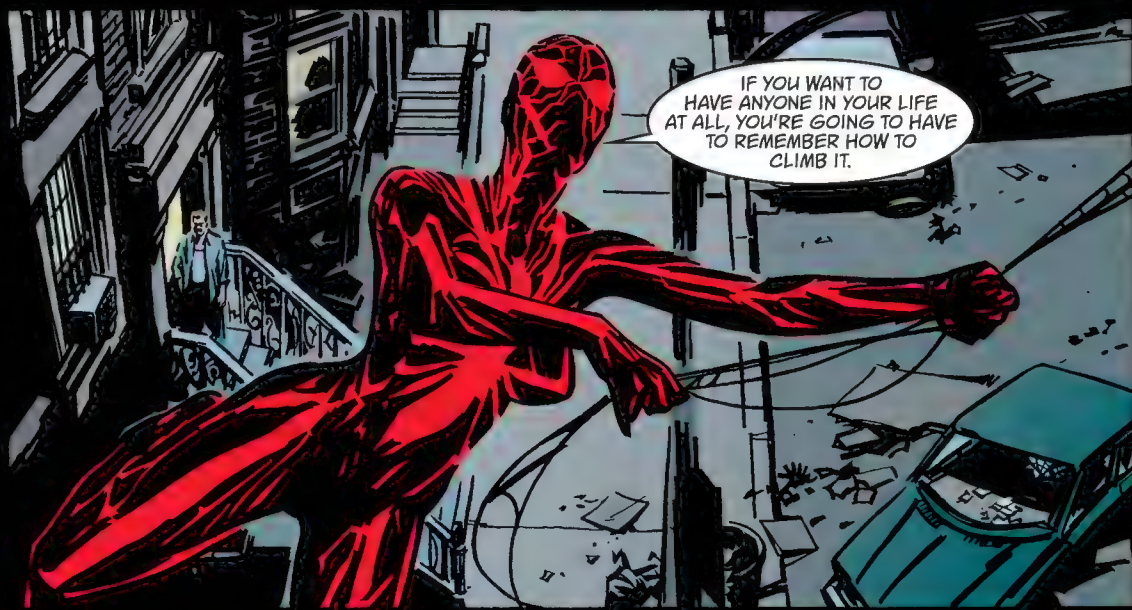




I CAN'T
EVEN TALK TO YOU
ANY MORE.



YOU PUT
THIS WALL BETWEEN
US.



IF YOU WANT TO
HAVE ANYONE IN YOUR LIFE
AT ALL, YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE
TO REMEMBER HOW TO
CLIMB IT.



GOD...I DON'T
EVEN FEEL LIKE I'M
PART OF THE WORLD
ANY MORE.



"THIS IS BECOMING OVERWHELMING, HATH, AND FRUSTRATING. ONE SECOND WE'RE IN CALIFORNIA. THEN IN NEW YORK. NOW WE'RE BACK IN CENTRAL EUROPE."

"A WATCHER WATCHES ALL, X-51. HE SEES EVENTS IN TANDEM."

"THE INHUMANS ARE HERE, TOO. THEY MUST HAVE TELEPORTED TO LATVERIA TO MEET WITH RICHARDS. PERHAPS THEY BELIEVE REED CAN HELP THEM FIND THE PRINCE...THE ONE WHO'S SUPPOSED TO MARRY LUNA."

"PERHAPS, X-51, YOU SHOULD ONCE AGAIN WAIT...AND ALLOW YOUR OBSERVATIONS TO SPEAK TO YOUR CURIOSITY."

MEDUSA...
IT'S BEEN SO LONG...

...SINCE I'VE SEEN A WOMAN...WAIT A MOMENT, RICHARDS... WHAT ARE YOU THINKING?



REED...BEN TOLD ME WHAT HAPPENED TO SUE... AND JOHNNY. I'M SO SORRY. SURELY YOU CAN'T BLAME YOURSELF FOR THEIR DEATHS.



THAT'S NICE OF YOU TO SAY, MEDUSA.



BUT I DON'T BLAME MYSELF FOR WHAT HAPPENED TO THE FANTASTIC FOUR.

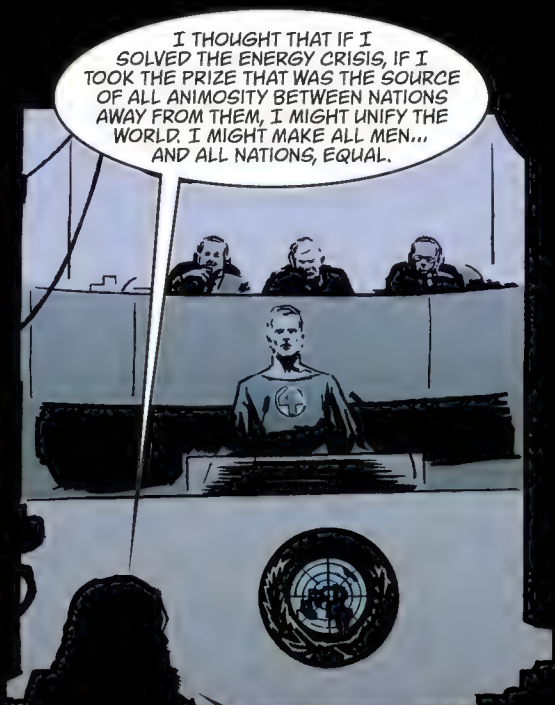


I BLAME MYSELF FOR WHAT HAPPENED TO EVERYONE ELSE.



I DON'T UNDERSTAND, REED. WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

I TRIED TO EMPOWER THE ENTIRE WORLD, MEDUSA. HOW'S THAT FOR HUBRIS?



I THOUGHT THAT IF I SOLVED THE ENERGY CRISIS, IF I TOOK THE PRIZE THAT WAS THE SOURCE OF ALL ANIMOSITY BETWEEN NATIONS AWAY FROM THEM, I MIGHT UNIFY THE WORLD. I MIGHT MAKE ALL MEN... AND ALL NATIONS, EQUAL.



BUT ISN'T THAT THE WAY OF EVERY APPRENTICE, MEDUSA... TO BELIEVE HIMSELF A MASTER?



I DON'T UNDERSTAND, REED. YOU SPEAK OF A GREAT AND WISE GOAL.

EACH OF THE MAJOR WORLD POWERS AGREED WITH YOU. THEY UNIFORMLY ACCEPTED MY PROPOSAL AND CREDITED TO MY ACCOUNT THE FUNDING I REQUIRED.

I CONSTRUCTED A NETWORK OF RECEIVING STATIONS AROUND THE PLANET TO FACILITATE THE DISTRIBUTION OF...

RECEIVING STATIONS? FOR WHAT?

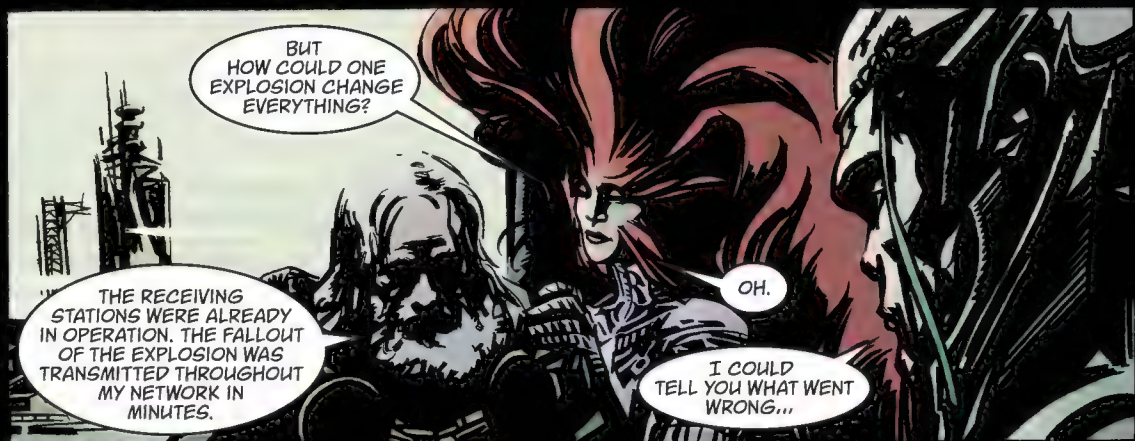


SOUND WAVES, OF COURSE. I HOPED TO CONVERT CERTAIN MINERALS INTO SOUND WAVES WHICH COULD THEN BE RECONVERTED INTO ENOUGH POWER TO SATISFY THE NEEDS AND WHIMS OF THE WORLD.



WHAT
HAPPENED?

I DON'T KNOW.
I REALLY DON'T. THE
BEACON EXPLODED...
AND THE WHOLE OF
THE POPULACE
MUTATED.

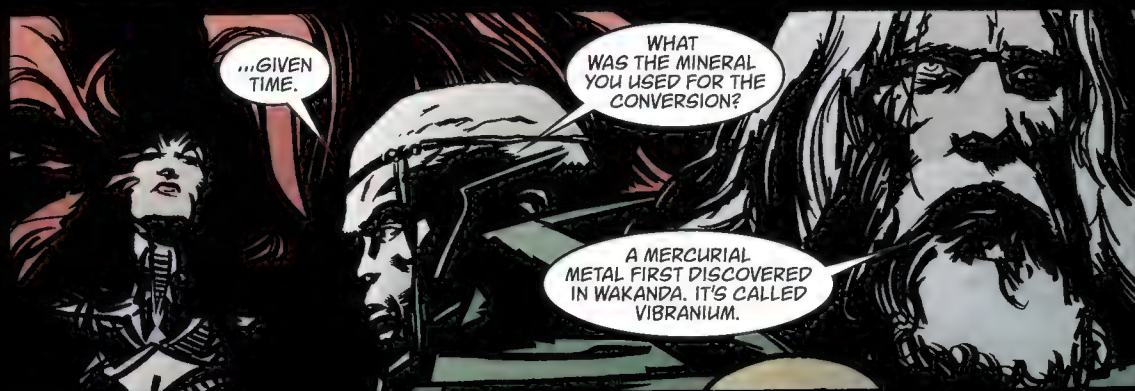


BUT
HOW COULD ONE
EXPLOSION CHANGE
EVERYTHING?

THE RECEIVING
STATIONS WERE ALREADY
IN OPERATION. THE FALLOUT
OF THE EXPLOSION WAS
TRANSMITTED THROUGHOUT
MY NETWORK IN
MINUTES.

OH.

I COULD
TELL YOU WHAT WENT
WRONG...



...GIVEN
TIME.

WHAT
WAS THE MINERAL
YOU USED FOR THE
CONVERSION?

A MERCURIAL
METAL FIRST DISCOVERED
IN WAKANDA. IT'S CALLED
VIBRANIUM.





DID YOU HEAR THAT, KARNAK?

OF COURSE I DID. WE ALL DID.



WHAT DID HE SAY, MEDUSA? WHAT'S GOING ON?



WHAT IS GOING ON HERE? SHOULD I BE AWARE OF SOME UNDERSTANDING YOU HAVE OF WHAT HAS OCCURRED?



THE KING OBVIOUSLY DESIRES YOU TO TAKE RICHARDS INTO OUR CONFIDENCE, MEDUSA. WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?



BECAUSE...OF WHAT WE DID...AND WHY AND FOR WHOM WE CAME BACK...DON'T YOU SEE WHAT THAT WILL MAKE US IN HIS EYES?



I THINK YOU HAD BETTER EXPLAIN YOURSELF, MEDUSA.

YOU MUST UNDERSTAND, REED, WE NEVER PLANNED ON RETURNING. OUR NATION WAS GONE. OUR PEOPLE HAD DISPERSED THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. WE WEREN'T NEEDED HERE.

WE LEFT TO FIND A NEW LIFE...BUT AS WE MADE OUR WAY THROUGH SPACE...WE FOUND SOMETHING...SOMETHING THAT WOULDN'T ALLOW US TO CONTINUE.



MEDUSA... THERE'S AN ANOMALY ON THE CHARTS--AND *NOT* ON THE CHARTS.

WHAT ARE YOU TELLING ME, KARNAK?



I'M TELLING
YOU THAT WHATEVER
WAS ONCE HERE HAS
CEASED TO BE HERE.
IT'S BEEN DESTROYED...
FROM WITHIN.

GORGON?
KARNAK? SHUT UP.
I WANT A CLOSER
LOOK.

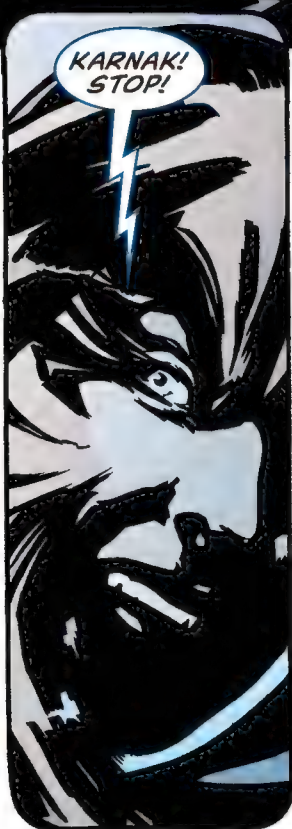


"OUR ANALYSIS REVEALED THAT THE
PLANET HAD EXPLODED DUE TO SOME
INSTABILITY AT ITS CORE."

I'D LIKE A
SAMPLE OF THIS
SUBSTANCE FOR
STUDY. IT SHOULD
BE EASY TO BREAK
OFF A PIECE OF
ONE OF THE
ASTEROIDS.



MEDUSA...
LOOK AT SHINY
ROCKS...THEY
NOT JUST...



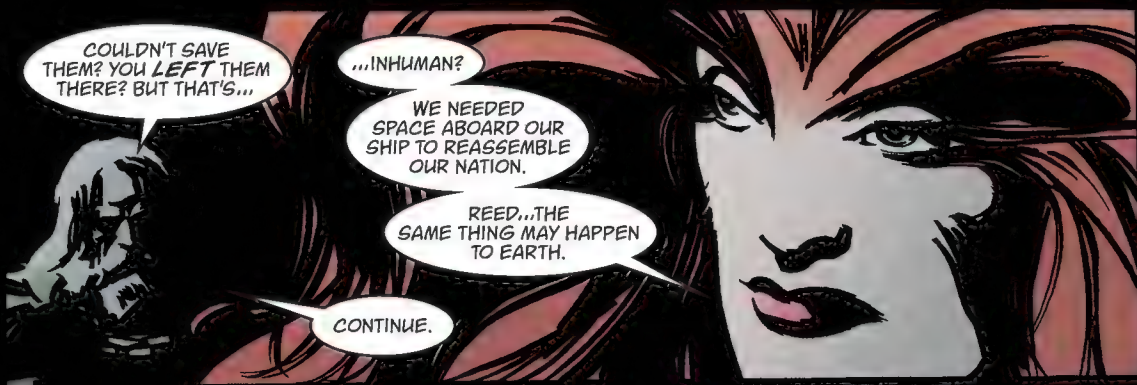
KARNAK!
STOP!



THEY'RE
PEOPLE...CAN'T
YOU SEE THAT?
THEY'RE STILL
ALIVE.



"NOT THAT
WE COULD
SAVE THEM."



COULDN'T SAVE THEM? YOU **LEFT** THEM THERE? BUT THAT'S...

...INHUMAN?

WE NEEDED SPACE ABOARD OUR SHIP TO REASSEMBLE OUR NATION.

REED...THE SAME THING MAY HAPPEN TO EARTH.

CONTINUE.



THE PEOPLE WE FOUND WERE NOT NATIVE TO THE PLANET WHICH HAD BEEN DESTROYED.

THEY WERE FROM HERE.



HOW THEN... COULD THEY STILL BE ALIVE?

WE THINK THEY WERE THE ETERNALS, WHO WE KNEW HAD LEFT EARTH YEARS AGO. WE DIDN'T KNOW THEIR ORIGINS, BUT THE GENETIC CODES WERE SIMILAR ENOUGH TO OUR OWN.

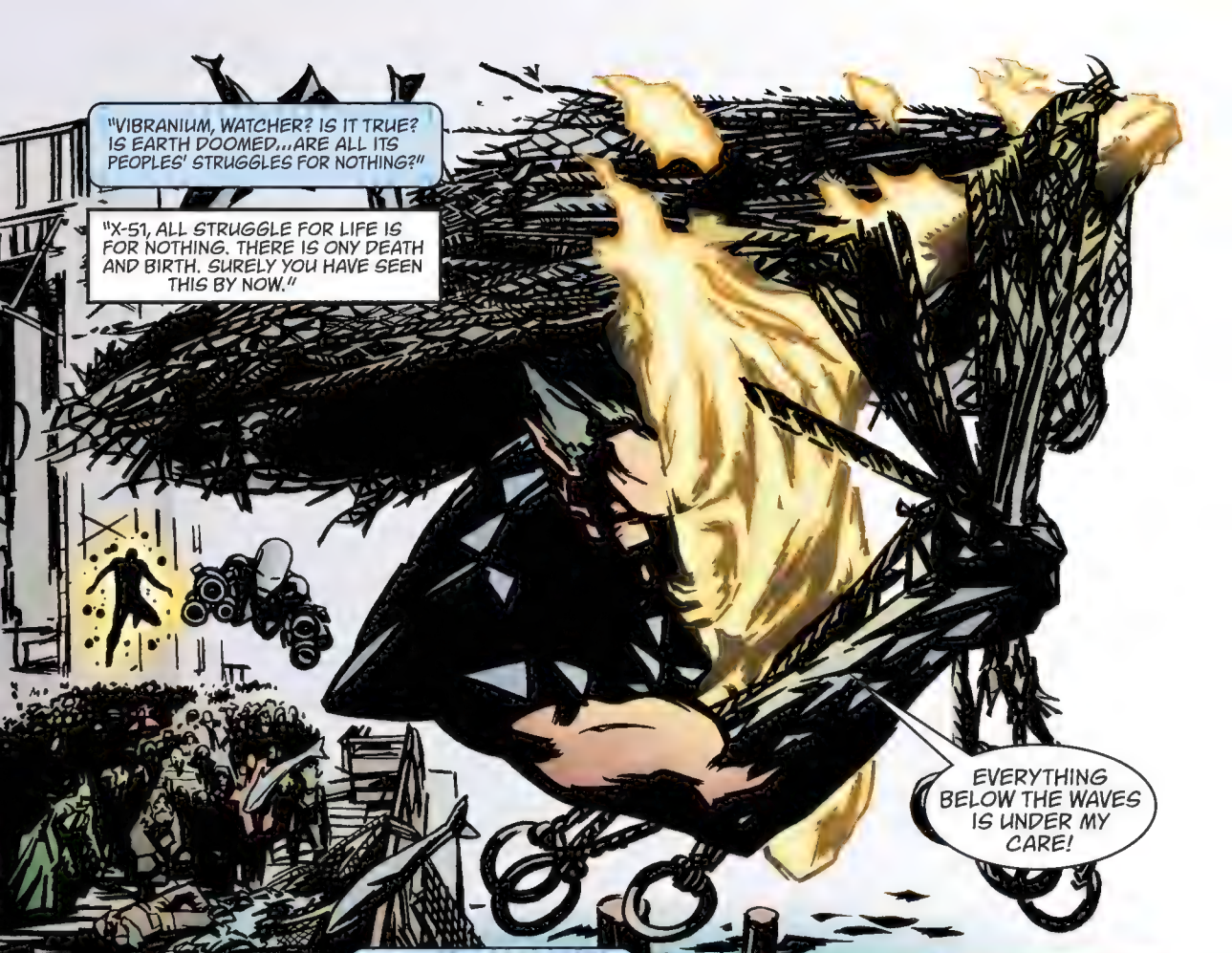


WE ALSO LEARNED THE NATURE OF THE SUBSTANCE ITSELF. IT'S LIKE A CANCER, REED... IT IS BOTH A FORM OF TERRIBLE POWER...AND A SIPHON. IT WAS FOUND EMBEDDED THROUGHOUT WHAT LITTLE REMAINED OF THE PLANET'S CORE.

WE INHUMANS, OF COURSE, HAVE A DIFFERENT NAME FOR IT...



...BUT IT'S WHAT YOU CALL **VIBRANIUM**.



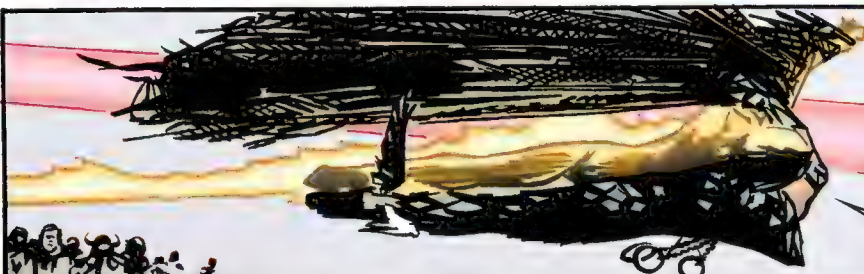
"VIBRANIUM, WATCHER? IS IT TRUE?
IS EARTH DOOMED...ARE ALL ITS
PEOPLES' STRUGGLES FOR NOTHING?"

"X-51, ALL STRUGGLE FOR LIFE IS
FOR NOTHING. THERE IS ONLY DEATH
AND BIRTH. SURELY YOU HAVE SEEN
THIS BY NOW."

EVERYTHING
BELOW THE WAVES
IS UNDER MY
CARE!

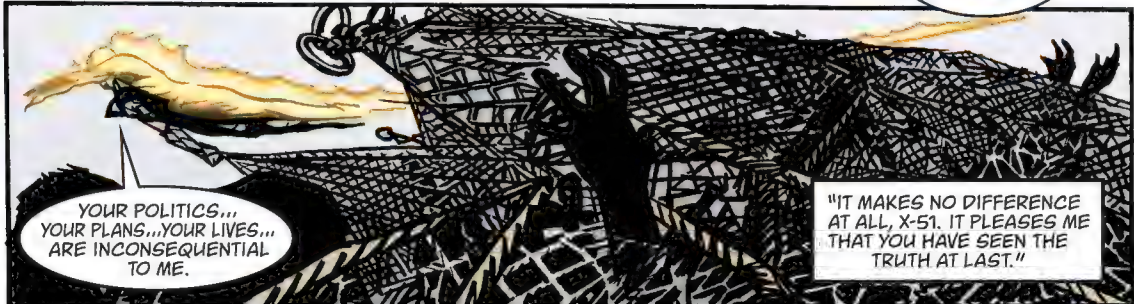


"THEN WHAT DIFFERENCE
DOES IT MAKE WHETHER
NAMOR DEFEATS THIS BEING
OR IS DEFEATED HIMSELF?"



"WHAT DIFFERENCE
DOES IT MAKE
WHETHER CAPTAIN
AMERICA DEFEATS
THE RED SKULL OR
NOT?"

WHEN YOU
TAKE FROM THE
SEA...YOU TAKE
FROM ME!



YOUR POLITICS...
YOUR PLANS...YOUR LIVES...
ARE INCONSEQUENTIAL
TO ME.

"IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE
AT ALL, X-51. IT PLEASES ME
THAT YOU HAVE SEEN THE
TRUTH AT LAST."



"IS THIS WHAT I'VE
BEEN BROUGHT
HERE TO WITNESS,
UATU?"

"AM I TO SEE...
THE END?"



WHAT'S GOING ON, REDWING... WHY IS NAMOR STOPPING?

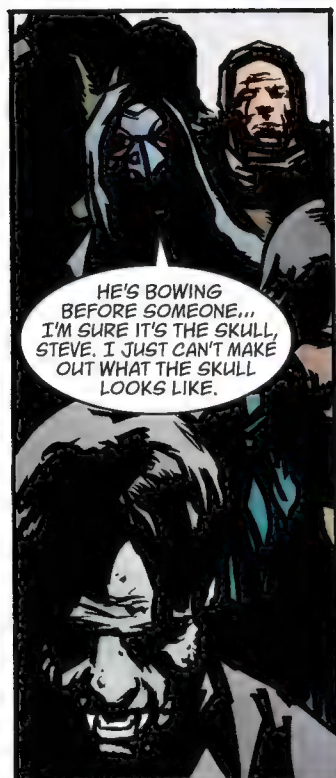
I DON'T KNOW.



THE CROWD'S PARTING... MAYBE NAMOR'S GOING TO TAKE ON THE SKULL.



I DON'T KNOW... WALKING'S NEVER BEEN NAMOR'S STYLE. CAN YOU SEE ANYTHING ELSE?



HE'S BOWING BEFORE SOMEONE... I'M SURE IT'S THE SKULL, STEVE. I JUST CAN'T MAKE OUT WHAT THE SKULL LOOKS LIKE.



IF NAMOR'S BOWING BEFORE ANYONE... IT'S DEFINITELY SOME SORT OF MIND CONTROL. HE DOESN'T DO THAT.



WAIT, WYATT, THE CROWD IS MOVING... I THINK I CAN JUST MAKE OUT... NO, I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS.



"IT'S A KID?"

"THE RED SKULL
IS NOTHING MORE
THAN A KID!"

"The sun's rim dips;
the stars rush out:
At one stride comes
the dark."
—John Milton,
Samson Agonistes

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER THREE

ILLUSTRATIONS
BY ALEX ROSS

"Yes, X-51?"

"I didn't say anything..."

"You were about to. What troubles you?"

"... Why would such power be given a child?"

"Age is a prerequisite for might, is that what you are implying? And how old were you when you first fought against your military oppressors?"

"A few days after my personality circuit was closed... but..."

"We have watched history, you and I. We have seen prepubescent kings claim the heads of grown men. We have watched as children commanded armies and wrote peace treaties. Power is never the result of merit, only design."

"Then why were you made a Watcher? Why were you given power?"

"X-51, were I to answer your question, you would hate me with the same misplaced programming that leads you to insist that right and wrong are the poles at which the human world pivots. It will not be until you yourself are morally bankrupt that the truth will be revealed to you."

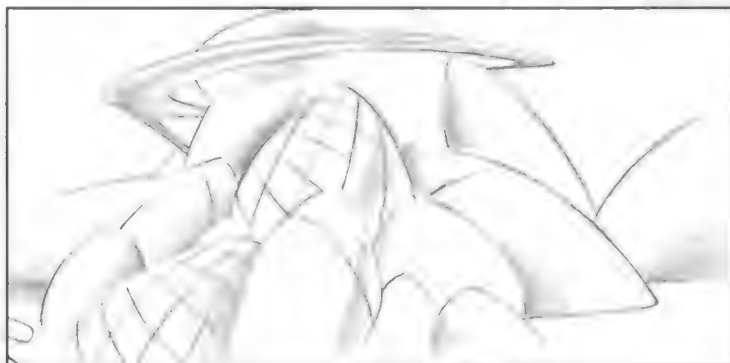
"So... that's it. I can no longer be human. I can no longer be who I am."

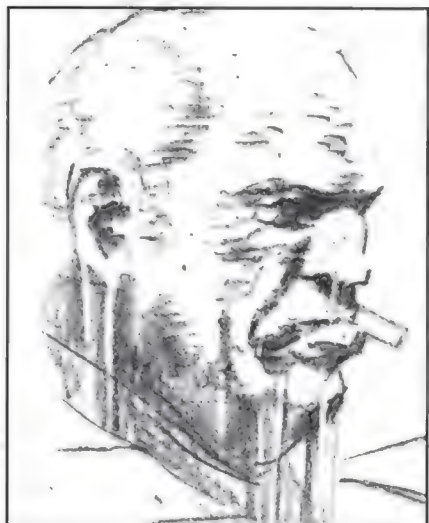
"You are not human. Be who you are."

"And who is that?"

"I thought I had made that clear. You are the Watcher. Now tell me of those in the possession of the Skull."

"I recognized many of them. Some, though, seemed unfamiliar. I thought they were perhaps new mutants affected by the plague."





"SANDMAN"

"William Baker, X-51, would have been considered a two-bit thug in his time — a brute for hire — a fool without a future. But an accident at a military nuclear testing site awakened the dormant mutant genes within him and transformed him into a being of animated and moldable sand. Once an enemy of Spider-Man, he renounced his life as a criminal and became a hero for hire when, at last, he began to see that for all his power, his life had not changed at all."

"I have to tell you, Uatu, he doesn't look like he can do much any more. It's like he's coming apart in clumps. Wherever he goes, there are pieces of him left behind."

"Interesting, X-51. Perhaps being in the Skull's possession affects his ability to keep his form intact."

"Then the Skull is killing him?"

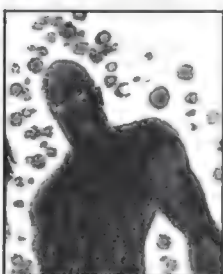
"Yes. His time is running out."

"X-FORCE"

"The whole team, X-51?"

"No... I see Sunspot. Domino. And Feral, I think. But why would they be in California? I was under the impression that all of Xavier's teams were in New York."

"Trust in what you see, X-51. Nothing else. Do not lean on your impressions for understanding. Your instincts and emotions are potholes in the path of your destiny. Now continue..."



"THE WIZARD"

"Ah... once he was a master criminal, the leader of an organization of criminals known as the Frightful Four. A professional inventor... a calculating chess champion... an accomplished escape artist."

"Escape artist?"

"Yes, X-51."

"He's been crippled, Uatu."

"Crippled? Then he must be mad. Continue..."



"WOODGOD"

"Who's Woodgod, Uatu?"

"He was very much like you, X-51 -- a bio-engineered amalgam of animal and human tissue. His assembler was also foolishly referred to as Father. Woodgod's 'father', too, died as a result of his experimentation."

"And he's possessed by the Skull. Does he have a mind? Can he think like I can?"

"Yes, X-51. But you are so much more than it is. It is a beast."

"But I thought, with a mind, and an ability to think and be rational, that he would be a man."

"As I said, X-51, it is a beast. Like all of them."

"You don't care about humanity at all, do you?"

"I have had, at times, to feign appreciation for mankind's nature and exploits, X-51. But I do not 'care' at all. That is a human term. They serve a purpose... and for that, we should be grateful."



"WHO WAS TEXAS JACK?"

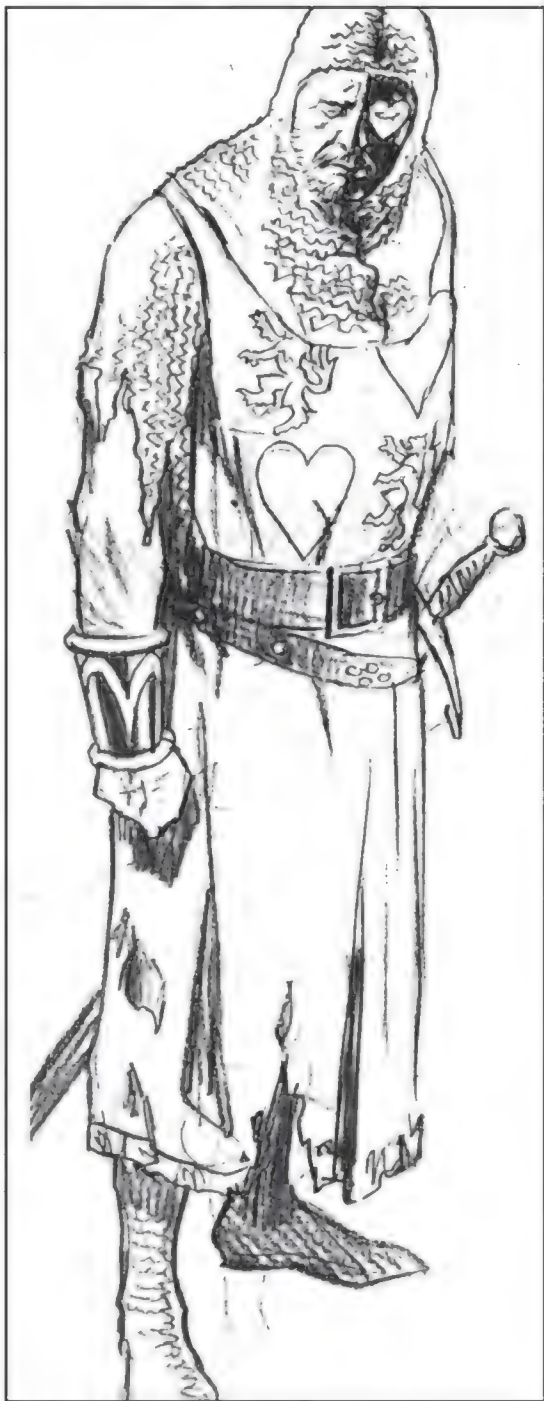
"His real name, X-51, is Jack Muldoon. In human terminology, he was a filthy rich oil-tycoon, given to whiskey and women. He is the original Marlboro Man. He allied himself with Captain America years before Rogers courted a possible candidacy for the Presidency. Muldoon joined America to rescue the Falcon, who was missing."

"The Falcon... Sam Jones? The Hydra who tried to get Cap to join them?"

"The same."

"So what happened after they rescued Jones? What happened to Texas Jack Muldoon?"





"You tell me, X-51. What do you see?"

"What do you mean, what do I see? I thought your equipment couldn't record what's happened since you were blinded. How am I supposed to..."

"X-51, look at everything. That is the way of a Watcher. Muldoon was a famous man. A powerful man. I would expect that much has been written about him on Earth. Look in humanity's own archives. There is nothing that can be hidden from us."

"Okay... I'm scanning library after library, reading all the newspapers that were written in that time period... I have it. With the mutation of the world and the increase of flying mutants... there was an implosion in the oil industry. Reed Richards' proposed use of vibranium led to widespread speculation on Wall Street. Oil stocks plummeted. And Texas Jack Muldoon was ruined. His last hope was that of a made-for-television special on his rise and fall... a movie which brought him to California... where he must have been possessed by the Skull... uh..."

"Yes, X-51?"

"Wars were fought over oil, Uatu. People died because of it. For a while there, it was the ultimate commodity. What will they fight over now?"

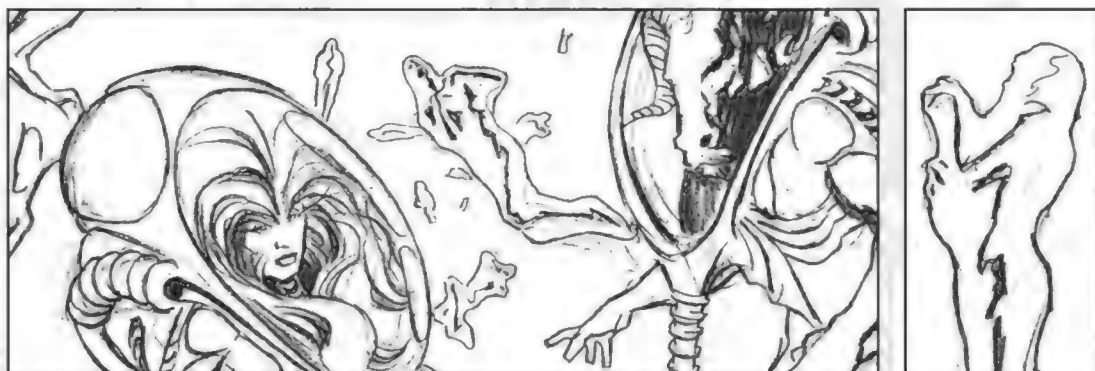
"That's obvious, X-51. What did Doom desire?"

"Power."

"Yes. Of course. But what was the means of acquiring it?"

"Food?"





“FOOD”

"I see a world, Uatu, where the ultimate commodity to be traded is grain. Breads and fruits are now riches.... but why not meat? Didn't Ben Grimm mention something about a shortage in burgers? Is this part of that?"

"I do not know."

"With the fall of traditional business and industry, reorganization was necessary for a global economy to exist. The nations recognized that those heroes already accustomed to governing their own individual abilities and powers would be well-suited to governing others who also had power. As a result, many nations and peoples have bowed to these veterans to lead them. Heroes and villains have now become the leaders of the world.

"Democracy is considered an archaic and obsolete idea. Though some would argue that for the first time, people are truly equal, others cite that that is the very problem. Equality has doomed their race. I'm not sure I understand this, Uatu."

"Equality is the nullifier of individuality, X-51. Equality is the despot destroyer of self-worth. In a world of sameness, there can be no heroes. We have spoken of this before, X-51. Continue."

"Russia is the world's foremost producer of wheat and breads, having become a primarily agrarian society. This has made it the envy of every nation, and a target for some.

"England and its fabled navy have been put in charge of the distribution of Russia's surplus to the rest of the world. The other nations, including America, in an attempt not to be indebted to Russia, have begun ravaging the world's oceans. Somehow, life beneath the waves remains untouched by the changes above them."

"There is no mutation under the waves?"

"I thought the Atlanteans had already been mutated, and that was why they were able to live under water in the first place."

"I was not speaking of the Atlanteans, X-51."

"Then who were you speaking of?"

"Not who, X-51... what. What am I speaking of?"

"I don't understand."

"Look, X-51. It is all there. I don't need eyes to see it."





EARTH



KRUEGER
LEWIS
REINHOLD

"Everyone on Earth is going to die?"

**"X-51, remember what and who you have become.
We are both aware that life by its very definition
is temporal. Limited."**

"I just don't like the casualty list."

**"This show of *preference* is a remnant of your past...a life
that is over. You are now the Watcher, X-51."**

**"So you keep telling me. I'm just not sure I want
to live if everyone else is dead."**

"You are not alive. You never were."

**"That's great, Uatu. I mean you really know
how to make a guy feel good."**

**"You are not a guy. And your 'feelings' are nothing more
than circuits being closed within your artificial assembly."**

"I hate you, Uatu, I really do."

"No, you do not, X-51. There is no such thing as hate."

"Question...when everyone is dead, what will I watch then?"

"What indeed, X-51. What indeed."

"AND THIS IS ALL BECAUSE OF VIBRANIUM? WHAT IS IT? WHY IS IT GOING TO BE THE CAUSE OF EARTH'S DESTRUCTION?"

"YOU ARE CONVINCED BY REED RICHARDS' CONCLUSIONS THAT IT IS THIS MINERAL WHICH WILL LEAD TO EARTH'S DESTRUCTION, AREN'T YOU, X-51?"

"SHOULDN'T I BE?"

"VERY WELL. GENERATIONS AGO...ON THE CONTINENT KNOWN AS AFRICA IN THE NATION OF WAKANDA...A METEOR FELL TO EARTH.

"INDIGENOUS MAN BOTH WORSHIPPED AND FEARED WHAT HE BELIEVED TO BE A FALLEN GOD.

"THE METEOR WAS DISCOVERED TO BE LACED WITH AND, IN FACT, TO PRODUCE VIBRANIUM--AN IRON-LIKE SUBSTANCE WHOSE TECHNOLOGICAL POTENTIAL WOULD ONE DAY MAKE WAKANDA THE ENVY OF THE WORLD.

"THOSE WHO FIRST VENTURED NEAR THE GLOWING ORB BECAME MONSTERS...DEMONS. TODAY, OF COURSE, THIS IS ONLY A LEGEND--A STORY TO FASCINATE AND FRIGHTEN CHILDREN."

"THE FEAR THAT THESE DEMON SPIRITS MIGHT ONE DAY SPREAD ACROSS THE EARTH LED KING BASHENGA TO CLOSE THE MOUND OFF FROM HIS OWN PEOPLE.

"HE FORMED THE PANTHER CULT TO GUARD THE VIBRANIUM MOUND. AND EACH GENERATION FROM THEN ON DIED FULFILLING THIS VERY CALLING."

"THEN EARTH IS ALL RIGHT? I MEAN, THIS VIBRANIUM CAME FROM SPACE...AND WASN'T PART OF EARTH AT ALL..."

"...SO EVEN IF IT DID DESTROY THAT PLANET THE INHUMANS FOUND, THERE WOULDN'T BE ENOUGH OF IT ON EARTH TO DESTROY IT?"

"ALL REED RICHARDS DID WAS ACCIDENTALLY CAUSE A MUTATION THAT, AS YOU PUT IT, UATU, WAS DESTINED TO HAPPEN ANYWAY?"

"SHOULDN'T WE TELL HIM?"

"SO RICHARDS WAS RIGHT... THE MUTATION OF EARTH'S PEOPLE IS THE RESULT OF THE VIBRANIUM."

"YES, OF COURSE IT MUST BE, X-51. HAVE I TAUGHT YOU NOTHING? YOU SPEAK AS IF EVERYTHING YOU HAVE SEEN UP UNTIL THIS MOMENT IS EVERYTHING THERE IS TO KNOW.

"NO! UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES! RICHARDS HAS BROUGHT DEATH TO HIS WORLD, X-51. WE DARE NOT RISK ALLOWING HIM TO KNOW ANY MORE THAN HE DOES."

"WE MUST NOT INTERFERE, X-51. LET RICHARDS'...DESPAIR OVER WHAT HE'S DONE REMAIN WITH HIM. IT WILL KEEP HIM FROM FURTHER DISCOVERY...AND FURTHER DESTRUCTION."

"I'VE NEVER HEARD YOU REACT LIKE THIS. I THOUGHT THERE WAS NO SUCH THING AS EMOTION?"

"EARTH IS GONE, X-51. RESIGN YOURSELF AS I HAVE TO THE FACT THAT NOTHING CAN CHANGE THIS. WOULD YOU HAVE ME BRING DEATH TO OTHER WORLDS AS WELL?"

"CONSIDER HOW EVEN A SMALL AMOUNT OF VIBRANIUM BROUGHT DESTRUCTION TO THE WAKANDAN NATION."

"HALF A WORLD AWAY THE SCIENTIST ULYSSES KLAU HAD HEARD OF THE SUBSTANCE."

"HIS LUST FOR VIBRANIUM LED HIM TO AFRICA WHERE HE MURDERED T'CHAKA, THE CHIEF OF THE WAKANDANS."

"T'CHAKA'S SON, T'CHALLA, WAS NEXT TO INHERIT THE MANTLE OF BLACK PANTHER, AND STOP KLAU'S ATTEMPTS TO PLUNDER THE SACRED MOUND."

"HIS FIRST TEST OF LEADERSHIP WAS TO SURVIVE A BATTLE AGAINST SIX OF WAKANDA'S GREATEST WARRIORS."

"HIS SECOND TEST...WAS TO DRINK THE JUICE OF THE HEART-SHAPED HERBS WHICH GREW UPON THE MOUNTAINS SURROUNDING WAKANDA."

"WHAT WOULD THAT DO?"

"THE HERBS WERE A SOURCE OF SUPER-HUMAN STRENGTH, X-51."

"BUT...THOSE MOUNTAINS AREN'T ANYWHERE NEAR THE VIBRANIUM MOUND. HOW COULD AN HERB FROM THEM GIVE SUPER-STRENGTH? IS THERE SOMETHING ABOUT THE HERB ITSELF THAT TRIGGERS THE MUTANT GENE?"

"NO, X-51."

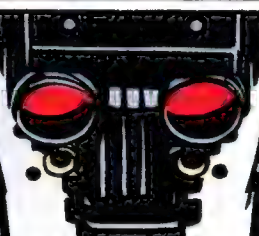
"WAS THE HERB SOMEHOW AFFECTED BY THE VIBRANIUM? IS THIS WHY IT GIVES STRENGTH?"

"YES, X-51."

"LET ME TRY TO UNDERSTAND THIS...IF PLANTLIFE DRAWS NUTRIENTS FROM THE SOIL...THAT MEANS THE SOIL HAS VIBRANIUM IN IT. THAT THOSE MOUNTAINS ARE FULL OF THE STUFF."

"THEN THE MOUND'S PRODUCTION OF VIBRANIUM IS FAR MORE THAN ANYONE WOULD HAVE THOUGHT. AND RICHARDS IS BOTH RIGHT AND WRONG. EARTH IS DOOMED... BUT IT'S GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH HIM AT ALL."

"VERY GOOD, X-51. YOUR PATIENCE HAS REWARDED YOU."



WHY DIDN'T
YOU TELL ME
BEFORE?

"YOU WERE NOT READY FOR THIS
KNOWLEDGE UNTIL YOU WERE
CAPABLE OF DRAWING ITS CON-
CLUSION FOR YOURSELF. NOW
TELL ME OF RICHARDS...SPEAK
TO ME OF HIS FOLLY."

"I SEE HIM...AND THE
INHUMANS. HE'S
COMMUNICATING WITH
T'CHALLA, THE KING OF
WAKANDA."

I HAVE REASON TO
BELIEVE THAT IT'S A DANGER TO US
ALL, T'CHALLA. IS THERE ANY WAY OF
SLOWING THE MOUND'S GENERATION
OF VIBRANIUM...OF HALTING THE
PROCESS OF ITS PRODUCTION?



I HAD BELIEVED
MY ALLOWANCE OF ITS
USE HAD DISGRACED
ALL THOSE KINGS BE-
FORE ME. DESPITE YOUR
GUILT, I WAS PREPARED
TO BEAR THE RESPONS-
IBILITY FOR THIS WORLD
OVERRUN BY DEVILS...

...BUT SOMETHING
HAS HAPPENED...SOME-
THING MY FATHER...AND
ALL HIS FATHERS BEFORE
HIM...WOULD GLADLY HAVE
DIED TO ACHIEVE.

I...WOULD
NOT STOP THIS IF
I COULD.

T'CHALLA...YOU
CAN'T MEAN THAT! THE
INHUMANS FOUND THE REMAINS
OF A PLANET IN SPACE...A PLANET
DESTROYED BY VIBRANIUM. IT
COULD DESTROY US ALL!



"YOU MUST UNDERSTAND, REED,
THAT UNLIKE YOURSELF, I AM
NOT GUIDED BY INTELLECT.

"IF THERE IS DANGER...IT IS
NATURAL. AND I HAVE NOTHING
TO FEAR FROM IT.

"THE SPIRITS WILL
GUIDE US. THEY
HAVE TOLD ME
THIS."



I WILL SPEAK
TO THEM ON YOUR
BEHALF.

HANK! FOR PITY'S
SAKE...HELP ME! TELL HIM!
I'M TALKING ABOUT A REAL
DANGER!

THERE ARE THINGS
HAPPENING HERE, REED, THAT
YOU WOULD NOT BELIEVE. I THINK
YOU SHOULD LISTEN TO
T'CHALLA.



T'CHALLA! THIS ISN'T
ABOUT FAITH OR BELIEF...I
HAVE FACTS AND WITNESSES.
I'M BEGGING YOU...

I NO
LONGER HAVE
TIME TO SPEAK,
REED.



MY PEOPLE
HAVE NEED OF ME. I
AM THEIR KING. AND THAT
MEANS I AM ALSO
THEIR SERVANT.



WHY DIDN'T YOU
SHOW HIM? REED RICHARDS
HAS ALWAYS BEEN A FRIEND. HE
WOULD UNDERSTAND.

MY QUEEN...I FEAR
THAT A STORM RAGES WITHIN
MY OLD ALLY--A STORM NEITHER
YOU NOR I COULD CALM. HE WILL
NEED TO BELIEVE WITHOUT SEEING
IN ORDER TO FIND PEACE.



HE DOESN'T
KNOW WHAT HAPPENED
HERE, T'CHALLA, BUT HE'S
REED RICHARDS...THERE'S
A HEAP'A GOOD REASONS
FOR CONCERN IF HE
GIVES THE SAY-SO.



HANK MCCOY, THE
EFFECTS OF THE "PLAGUE" ARE
NOTHING TO BE FEARED. YES...IT HAS
CHANGED THE PHYSICAL WORLD...BUT
WE ARE NO LONGER TO BE CONCERNED WITH THE PHYSICAL
WORLD.



THE SPIRITS WILL
GUIDE US, HANK MCCOY.
NOW THAT THEY HAVE BEEN
GIVEN VOICE...THEY WILL
GIVE US THEIR WISDOM.

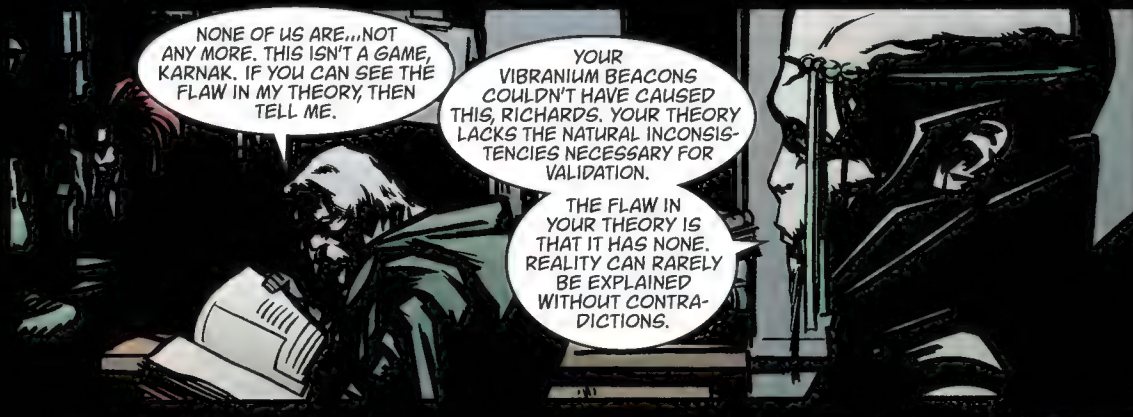
"UATH...WHATEVER'S CHANGED EARTH'S PEOPLE,
IT'S AFFECTING THE WILDLIFE AS WELL."

"THEN THERE IS MUCH YET
THAT WE DO NOT KNOW."



THERE
MUST BE A
WAY...

IF YOU ARE
CAPABLE OF FINDING
IT, OF COURSE. I AM NOT
CERTAIN OF THAT. YOU
ARE ONLY HUMAN.



NONE OF US ARE...NOT
ANY MORE. THIS ISN'T A GAME,
KARNAK. IF YOU CAN SEE THE
FLAW IN MY THEORY, THEN
TELL ME.

YOUR
VIBRANIUM BEACONS
COULDN'T HAVE CAUSED
THIS, RICHARDS. YOUR THEORY
LACKS THE NATURAL INCONSI-
STENCIES NECESSARY FOR
VALIDATION.

THE FLAW IN
YOUR THEORY IS
THAT IT HAS NONE.
REALITY CAN RARELY
BE EXPLAINED
WITHOUT CONTRA-
DICTIONS.

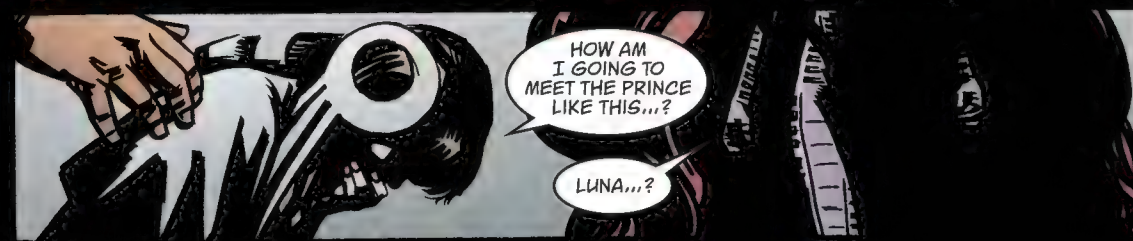


BOLT...HOW ARE
WE EVER GOING TO FIND
OUR PEOPLE NOW? I NEED
YOUR STRENGTH MORE
THAN EVER. HOLD
ME, PLEASE.

NOTHING? I KNOW
YOU CAN'T SPEAK, MY HUSBAND...
BUT NOW IT'S LIKE YOU CAN'T EVEN
HEAR ME. IS THIS PUNISHMENT
FOR WHAT HAPPENED?

DO I EVEN
EXIST TO YOU?
COULD YOU JUST
LET ME KNOW FOR
CERTAIN?

OH.



HOW AM
I GOING TO
MEET THE PRINCE
LIKE THIS...?

LUNA...?



CHILD...
WHAT'S
WRONG?

NOTHING,
OKAY? JUST LEAVE
ME ALONE.



OF COURSE... I'M SUCH A FOOL.



I KNOW HOW TO FIND YOUR PEOPLE, MEDUSA.

CEREBRO... XAVIER'S OLD MUTANT-LOCATOR--WHEN CHARLES WAS ALIVE, HE USED IT TO FIND MUTANTS. THAT'S HOW HE FORMED THE X-MEN.



DON'T YOU SEE? IT WAS CALIBRATED TO FIND MUTANTS...TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN PEOPLE WHO LOOKED THE SAME, BUT WEREN'T.

THIS DEVICE IS OBSOLETE IN A WORLD WHERE EVERYONE HAS MUTATED, RICHARDS. I WOULD EXPECT EVEN YOU TO KNOW THIS.



BUT WITH THE PROPER ADJUSTMENTS...IT COULD DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN MUTANTS WHO LOOK THE SAME...BUT AREN'T.

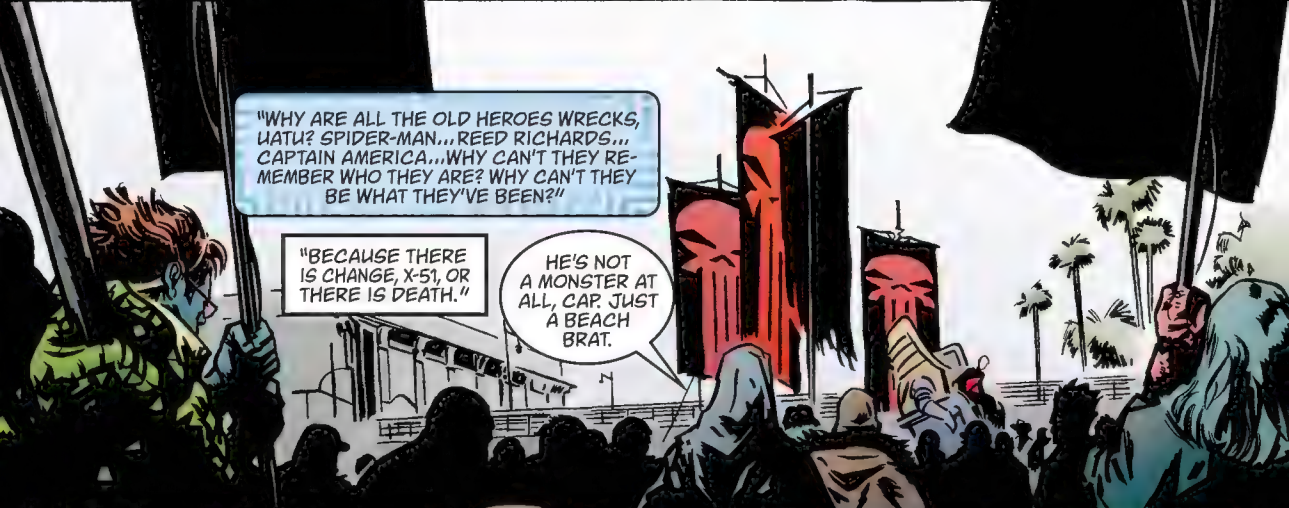
IT COULD LOCATE THE INHUMAN NATION AMONG THE MUTATED ON EARTH.

"WHAT? WHY WOULD REED RICHARDS HELP THE IN-HUMANS NOW? DO YOU THINK THAT IT'S HIS WAY OF AT LEAST SAVING SOMEONE?"

"I DO NOT BELIEVE, X-51, THAT ALTRUISM IS AT THE CENTER OF THIS DECISION. THIS IS MERELY RICHARDS' NEED TO REACH A SOLUTION OF ANY SORT.



"HE IS A LOGIC JUNKIE WHO MUST SOLVE THE GREATER WORLD'S PROBLEMS TO SATIATE THE DEMANDS OF THE WORLD HE ALONE LIVES WITHIN. HE IS A DERELICT OF THOUGHT."



"WHY ARE ALL THE OLD HEROES WRECKS, UATU? SPIDER-MAN... REED RICHARDS... CAPTAIN AMERICA... WHY CAN'T THEY REMEMBER WHO THEY ARE? WHY CAN'T THEY BE WHAT THEY'VE BEEN?"

"BECAUSE THERE IS CHANGE, X-51, OR THERE IS DEATH."

HE'S NOT A MONSTER AT ALL, CAP. JUST A BEACH BRAT.



THAT'S WHERE YOU'RE WRONG, WYATT... IT IS A MONSTER. IT'S JUST DISGUISED ITSELF.



YEAH... WELL, GOOD DISGUISE.

HE'S A KID. A KID WHO CAN CONTROL PEOPLE, SURE, BUT A KID. WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO, GIVE HIM A SPANKING?

THIS IS WAR, WYATT. WAR ATTACKS THE YOUNG AS WELL AS THE OLD. IT MURDERS THE YOUNG OR TURNS THEM INTO MURDERERS. I WILL NOT ALLOW THIS...



YOUR BUDDY, TEXAS JACK, REALLY CAME THROUGH FOR US, CAP. ANY BRIGHT IDEAS?

CAPTAIN AMERICA... YOU'RE CAPTAIN AMERICA?

BUT YOU'RE BALD.





LET THEM GO.
LET THEM CHOOSE FOR
THEMSELVES HOW THEY
WILL LIVE. AND WHAT ENDS
THEY WILL SERVE.



I'LL BET THAT
"A" ON YOUR FOREHEAD
IS FOR ALICE.

BESIDES,
I'M HELPING
THEM.

HELPING
THEM?



"YEAH...LOOK AT IRON MAIDEN. WHEN I MET HER...
SHE HAD BEEN IN THIS, LIKE, REALLY BAD ACCIDENT.
SHE FELL INTO A VAT OF SILVER ACID OR SOME-
THING...YOU KNOW, LIKE JACK NICHOLSON DID WHEN
HE BECAME THE JOKER?"

"ANYHOW, SHE DIDN'T DIE...SHE WAS
COVERED IN THAT JUNK AND COULDN'T
GET OUT OF IT. BUT SHE COULD USE IT,
YA KNOW? MAKE ALL KINDS OF CRAZY
WEAPONS 'N' STUFF. SHE JUST NEEDED
SOMEONE TO PUT ALL THAT STUFF TO USE.



"THE NAME WAS
MY IDEA. I ALWAYS
LOVED THAT BAND."







WHAT...
DID YOU...DO
TO ME?

CAP...
WE'VE GOT A
PROBLEM.

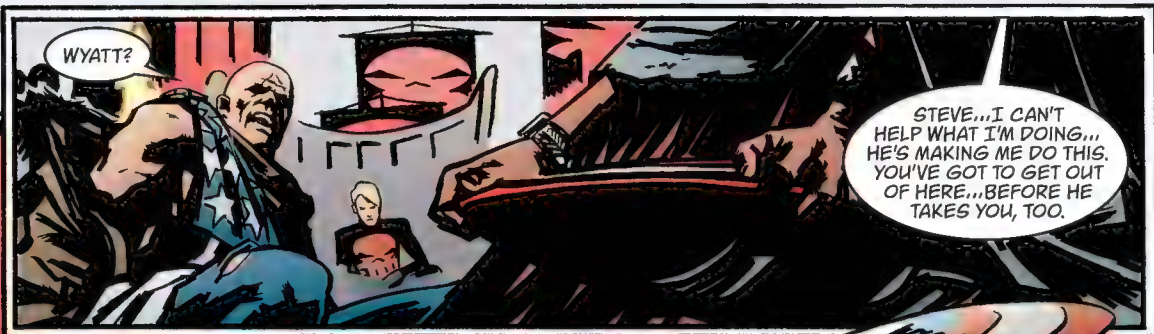


NOT NOW,
WYATT.



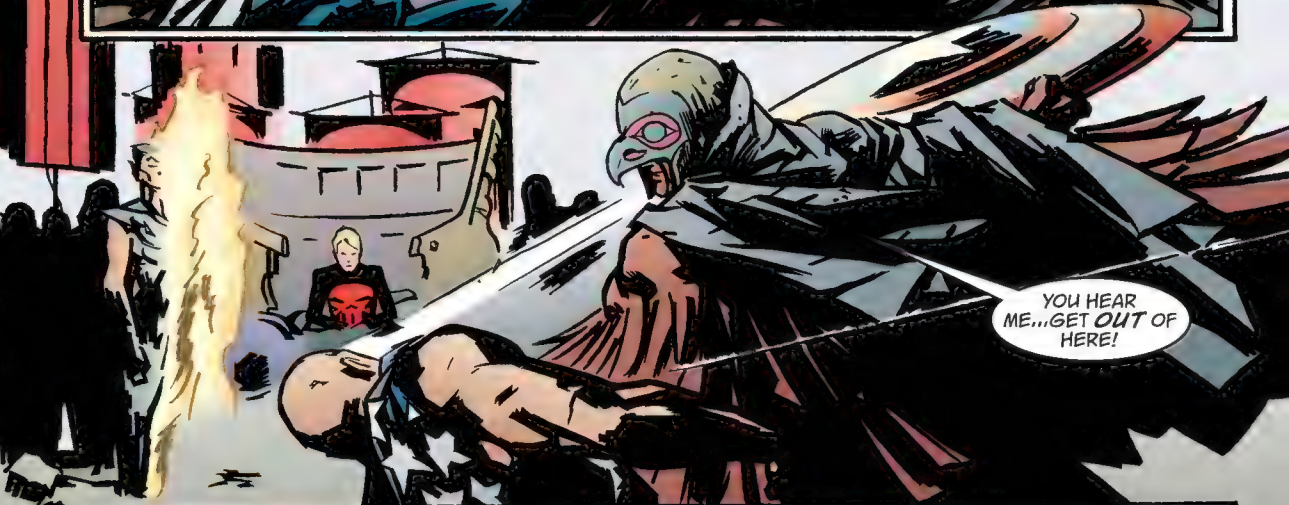
I'M SORRY,
STEVE.

ARGH!



WYATT?

STEVE...I CAN'T
HELP WHAT I'M DOING...
HE'S MAKING ME DO THIS.
YOU'VE GOT TO GET OUT
OF HERE...BEFORE HE
TAKES YOU, TOO.



YOU HEAR
ME...GET OUT OF
HERE!



YOU KNOW, I THINK
MAYBE I SHOULD JUST
LEAVE HIM ALONE. WHAT
DO YOU THINK?



I MEAN...IT WOULD BE
WORSE FOR HIM IF I DIDN'T DO
ANYTHING TO HIM, WOULDN'T IT? IF
EVERY OTHER PERSON IN THE WORLD
DID EXACTLY WHAT I TOLD THEM
TO...EXCEPT HIM.

STEVE...I'M
SO SORRY. I DON'T
KNOW HOW TO FIGHT
THIS BRAT.



EXCUSE ME...
A-HEAD?

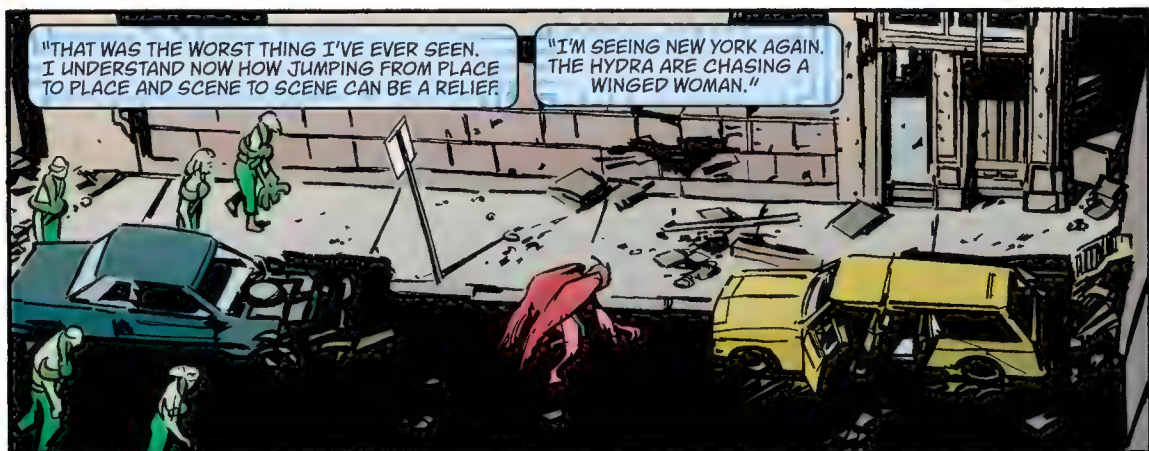
I'VE
DECIDED TO
LET YOU GO.
YOU JUST DON'T
HAVE WHAT IT
TAKES FOR MY
NEW COUNTRY,
YOU KNOW?

YOU'RE
ANOTHER
HITLER.



WHO?









NO TIME TO
WORRY ABOUT THAT
NOW. STRANGE'S PLACE
IS RIGHT AROUND THE
CORNER.



YOU HAD
BETTER LET ME
KNOCK THIS
TIME.



YES?



NOT SO
FAST, HULK. WE
DON'T NEED TO
USE A DOORWAY
HERE.



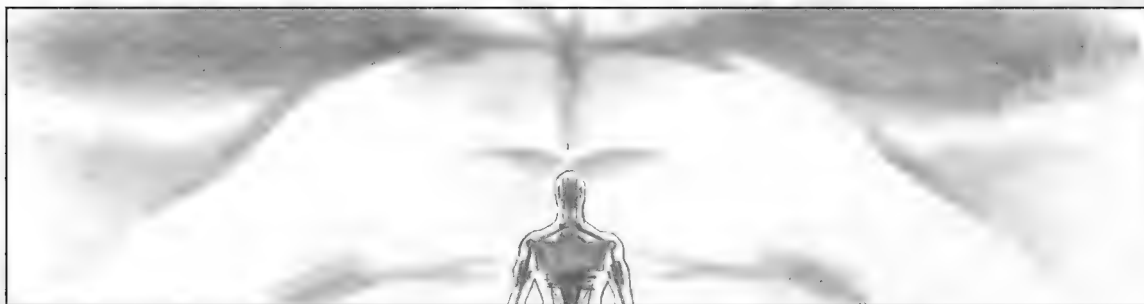
FORGIVE MY
BEING STARTLED,
SIR. I WILL CALL
UPON THE
MISTRESS.



CLEA...
THE SORCERESS
SUPREME.

"If you will not have
God, you should pay
your respects to Hitler
and Stalin."—T. S. Eliot

E A R T H X



APPENDIX TO CHAPTER FOUR

I L L U S T R A T I O N S B Y A L E X R O S S

"Uatu?"

"Yes, X-51?"

"The Iron Maiden. Was she...? I mean, her falling into the vibranium — was that what caused the meltdown of Richards' power station?"

"It would seem so."

"Then that's it... it's not Reed Richards' fault at all. It was an accident. A fluke."

"A fluke?"

"Yes... you know... there's no way anything like that could have been destined or predetermined."

"Perhaps not... but the result certainly was, X-51. You forget the Celestial host. You forget the seeds they planted in each member of mankind. Seeds for a super humanity."

"But how could they know this would happen millions and millions of years before it did?"

"They didn't need to, X-51."

"What do you mean?"

"Consider Tony Stark's question to Reed Richards. 'Do you ever wonder about our ideas, Reed? How do we think of ways to power an entire world using vibranium, anyway? How can we possibly come up with a system to reverse evolution?'"

"I remember, Uatu. Richards said that he supposed the answer to these aspirations could be found in their dreams."

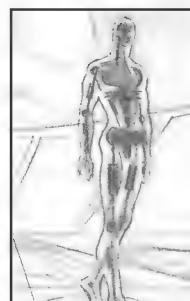
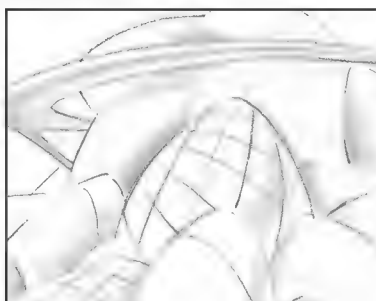
"Reed Richards is only partially correct, X-51."

"Really? Then what about man's imagination? What about his dreams?"

"Look at the way a seed grows, X-51. Its growth is hidden from all, until it breaks the surface of the earth."

"But that's different from what you said. A seed has already germinated before it grows out of the ground. I thought the Celestial seeds within mankind were germinated by the cosmic rays... or radioactive spider bites... or, in this case, a vibranium overload."

"Yes, X-51. That is correct. But before a seed is germinated, it is already





feeding off the soil in which it has been implanted. To a certain extent, it changes its nature, creating a soil which is better prepared for the coming germination."

"Are you saying that mankind's advancements, its abilities to think and reason and store knowledge are the result of the Celestial manipulations of early mankind?"

"Yes. So you see, X-51, you owe your very being to the Celestials. Your very creation is the result of their shaping of the primitive clay known as man."

"Then the dreams that Richards... or Stark... or Banner have, are generated by the Celestials?"

"They are a by-product of the germination of the Celestial seed. Technology and knowledge are the result of the way the mutant gene affected the... 'soil' it was planted in."

"So... no matter what happened, everyone on Earth has grown to be mutated one way or another. While the seeds were planted by the Celestials, it was inevitable that mankind itself would be the cause of their germination?"

"Well done, X-51. You speak more as I do with each day's passing. You are indeed beginning to understand the nature of Earth and what has occurred."

"Okay... but why?"

"Why?"

"Yes... why have everybody on Earth mutate... why create a planet inhabited by super-beings? What's in it for the Celestials?"

"In it for the Celestials?"

"Yes... what does it get them that they wouldn't have, had they left Earth alone?"

"Procreation, X-51."

"What?"

"The advancement of their species."

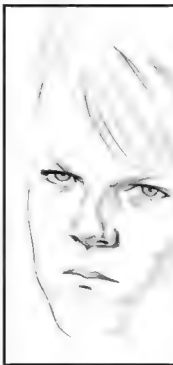
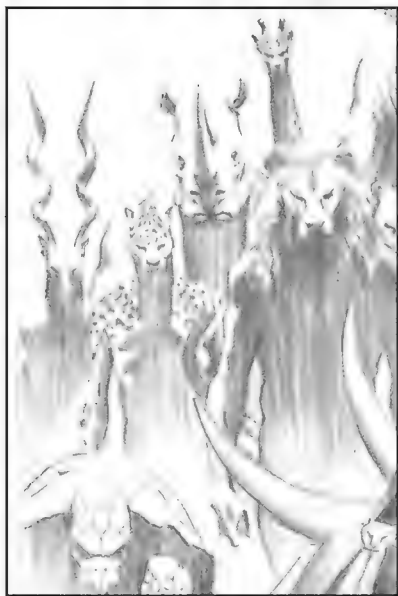
"What are you talking about?"

"This is how the Celestials spawn new Celestials, X-51. This is the purpose of your race."

"Oh my God!"

"Precisely."

"Then mankind's final evolution is to become Celestials? Wow... is that why those whose germination was the result of the vibranium beacons haven't



aged like Captain America or Reed Richards? They're growing old. No one else seems to be. Are the heroes who fought so long going to be denied the same destiny as everyone else?"

"You are a mystery to me, X-51. There are times when you are as blind as I have become, and others... when you take note of the smallest details."

"Thank you?"

"What else do you see of the people of Earth?"

"I don't see many children... that's why the woman the Hulk rescued was more frightened by Banner, wasn't it? Why are children so rare? Are they being... no... that's too terrible to even consider."

"Perhaps, given time, this populace might turn on themselves for sustenance. But no... I believe this is much more related to the nature of what triggered the mutation than the meat shortage."

"Is anyone born any more?"

"Do you see signs of birth, X-51?"

"No."

"Then the answer must be that mankind is no longer capable of reproducing."

"You said before that it was obvious as to what caused the mutation. Is it still?"

"Yes."

"Well, now that I know about the Iron Maiden, I suppose it is. It's just too bad she's under the Skull's control."

"X-51, do you not see what I have been saying? There is no difference between the actions of the Skull and those of Captain America."

"No difference?"

"None of consequence. To the Celestial mind — and I limit them by suggesting so biological and material a term — there is no good or evil. The Hosts are beyond such concepts. They are above such ideologies."

"But if these are the things that define people... the ideas that characterize them... who would even want to become a Celestial?"

"X-51, mankind does not have a choice in this





destiny. It will happen to him, not because of him. For their entire existence, men have longed to be gods. This is the fruition of that longing. The reality that longing has always hinted at in their subconscious."

"Do all men want to be gods? Really?"

"X-51, I am very concerned that I have made a mistake. Perhaps you lack the greatness I attributed to you."

"But if man wants to be his own god... and all men become gods... what's to stop them from fighting it out once they all reach that point?"

"Your logic is outdated, X-51. I do not speak of the laws of theology... but of the purpose of mankind."

"Is this why you watch?"

"I don't understand."

"Well... to see... this great rebirth you speak of."

"Not rebirth, X-51. For nothing matters until this moment."

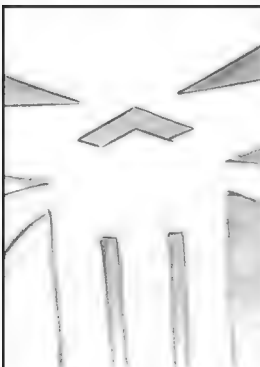
"Okay... birth, then... but there's still a problem, Uatu."

"Yes?"

"If the vibranium was the catalyst that caused all the mutations — and I believe you when you say that the germination was inevitable — then mankind is going to be robbed of its final destiny."

"Why do you say this, X-51?"

"Because, Uatu, Earth is still doomed. The vibranium will destroy the planet, just like the Inhumans said. Man will never advance and become Celestials if Earth is destroyed, will they?"



"No, X-51."

"I want to go down there, Uatu. If I told Reed Richards what was happening... what man was capable of becoming... perhaps he could find a way to slow the spread of vibranium across the planet. Or maybe find a way to save mankind by getting everyone off the planet... you know... move them here to the moon or something. They could use the Inhumans' ship..."

"A Watcher never involves himself in the affairs of mankind, X-51. Nor does he speculate as to how mankind might save itself."

"I know. You keep saying that. But you've gone to Earth many times. You've given and shared information with humanity that affected their struggles. I know you did."

"I did so, X-51, for purposes higher than mankind's destiny."

"Higher? What could be higher?"

"X-51, being a Watcher is a role which brings knowledge at a price. That price is being forever separated from those we watch."

"So there's nothing I can do? I mean, why tell me of this amazing destiny for mankind if they aren't even going to be allowed to reach it?"

"This is the question I fear you would ask them. Would you dangle a destiny that might be taken from them before their eyes? The destiny is beyond their ability to manifest it. They are helpless before its being."

"But... is there no hope for them?"

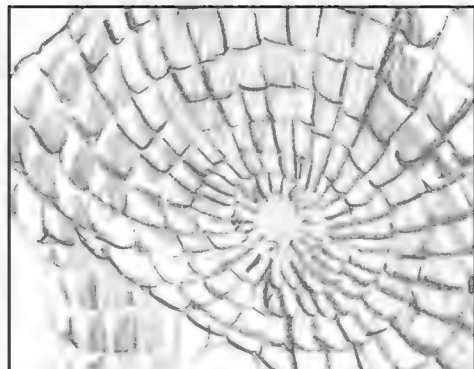
"No."

"This is killing me, Uatu."

"No, it is not, X-51. Not yet."



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EARTH



KRUEGER
LEON
REINHOLD

"What is going to happen to me, Uatu?"

"I don't understand, X-51."

"Well...I know the destruction of Earth is coming... and that means practically everyone I've been watching is going to die, and I know I'm a ghoul for even thinking of myself at a time like this, but...and...I was wondering...."

"X-51, you will continue as my eyes. Do not fear for your safety. Fear and the survival instinct itself should be purged from your system. It too is a remnant of your human programming."

"It's not my life I'm concerned with, Uatu."

"Then what is it?"

"There's too much to see...too much to catalogue...I feel like I'm...being lost in it. Maybe if I could do something...help save mankind..."

"Ah...you speak of your significance and self-knowledge."

"Yes. If I go on much further...I'm...I don't think I'm going to be able to stay...myself."

"Is your 'self' so important, X-51? Is its loss so great a cost to all knowledge?"

"..."

"Well...?"

"No, Uatu."

"Good. Then continue and tell me what you see."

"I THINK I'M SEEING THE PAST AGAIN. I SEE PRIMITIVE MAN...IT'S COLD...AND A SHIP LANDING ON EARTH. IS IT THE CELESTIALS? ANOTHER HOST TO MANIPULATE MANKIND?"

"DESCRIBE THE SHIP."

"IT'S STRANGE...THERE ISN'T A MARK ON IT...NO DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS AT ALL. IT'S ALMOST ETHEREAL, LIKE IT HAS NO REAL SHAPE."

"THERE IS MUCH ABOUT THIS RACE EVEN I AM NOT AWARE OF. THE ASGARDIANS ARE WANDERERS...AND LARGELY UNCATALOGUED BY THE WATCHERS. WHAT IS KNOWN IS THAT THEY DESCENDED FROM A RACE OF SHAPE-SHIFTERS."

"AH...THE ASGARDIANS."

"BUT IF WHAT YOU'VE SAID IS TRUE...AND MANKIND'S CULTURE WAS SHAPED BY HIS BELIEF IN THE ANCIENT GODS OF MYTH, NOT KNOWING THEY WERE ACTUALLY ALIEN RACES...WELL, THAT SHIP DOESN'T LOOK NORSE AT ALL."

"HOW COULD IT INSPIRE A NATION OF SUCH GREAT DISTINCTION?"

"THE...CREATIVE PROCESS, X-51."

"I DON'T UNDERSTAND."

"SHAPE-SHIFTERS? THAT SEEMS PRETTY FAR-FETCHED."

"CONSIDER, X-51, BEFORE YOU JUDGE, WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN IF A RACE OF BEINGS HAD NO IDENTITY, NO DEFINITIONS OF THEIR OWN. LIKE A SPORE THAT MIGHT GROW WITH DIFFERING CHARACTERISTICS DEPENDING ON THE SOIL FROM WHICH IT GERMINATES."

"WHEN THEY FIRST CAME TO EARTH, THEY WERE HAILED AS GODS BY THE INDIGENOUS MAN...AND IT WAS THIS HAILING THAT GAVE SHAPE TO THEIR PERSONALITIES."

"AND SO, THESE FIRST PERSONALITIES, NOW GIVEN SHAPE AND GRANDEUR, INSPIRED CULTURE AMONG THE PRIMITIVES..."

"...WHO THEN CONTINUED TO REMAKE THE GODS IN THEIR OWN IMAGE--AS THESE NEW GODS CREATED THEM IN THEIRS."

"OF COURSE. THESE BEINGS BECAME IMMORTAL...BECAUSE THAT IS WHAT THEY WERE BELIEVED TO BE. THEY WERE BELIEVED TO LIVE BEYOND THE CLOUDS...AND SO THAT IS WHERE THEY RESIDED."

"BUT...THERE IS EVIL AMONGST THEM, AS WELL AS GOOD. YOU SAID SUCH CONCEPTS WERE HUMAN INVENTIONS...DID THESE BELIEFS SHAPE THE GODS AS WELL?"

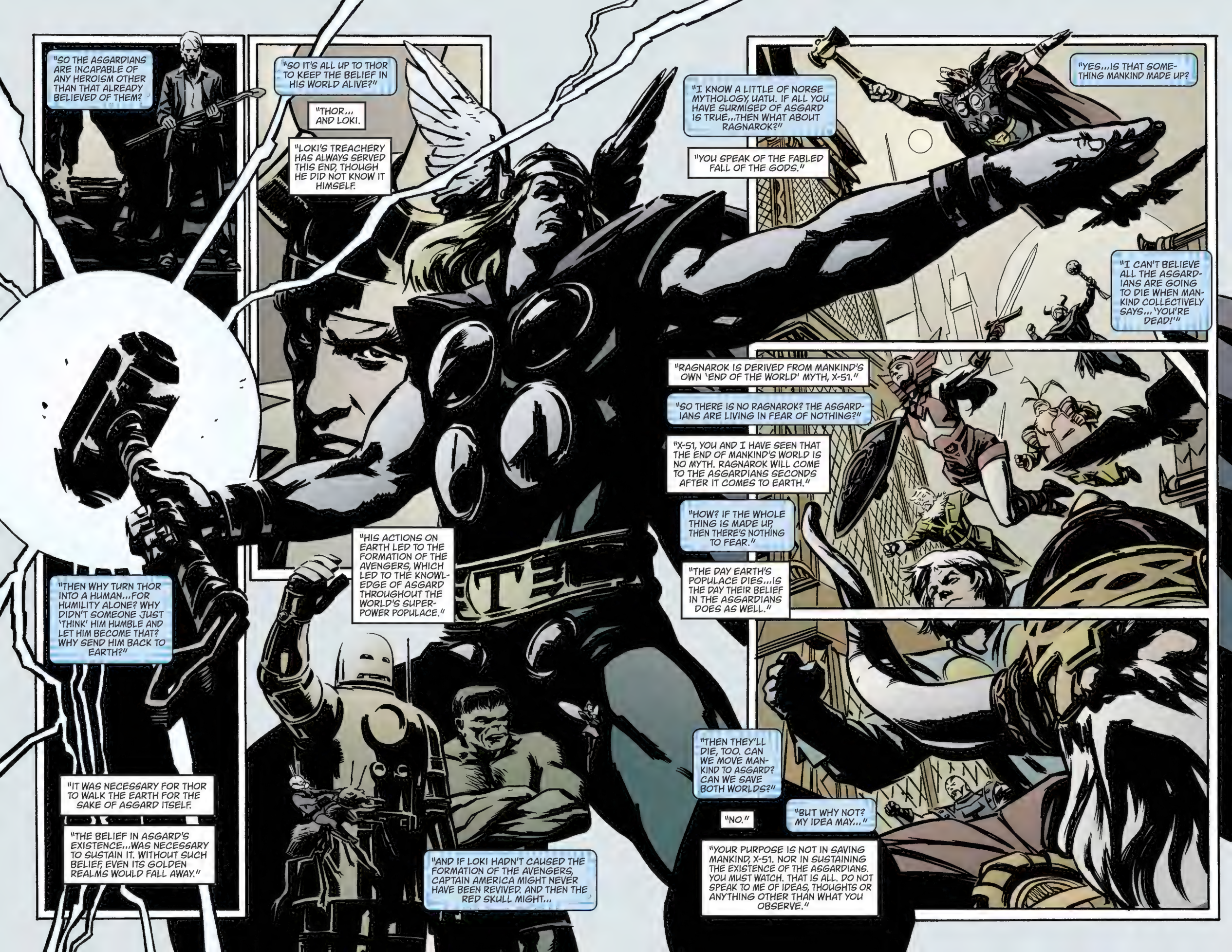
"YES, X-51...THE BEING WHO BECAME LOKI IS A PERFECT EXAMPLE."

"THOR'S HALF-BROTHER, WHO WAS BELIEVED TO BE A DEVIL AND A TRICKSTER, BECAME JUST THAT. THE BEINGS WHO CAME FROM THE STARS WERE MORAL NEUTRALS...UNTIL MANKIND BRANDED THEM WITH HIS OWN DISEASED DOGMA."

"THIS IS THE REASON THOR HAD TO BE TAUGHT A LESSON IN HUMILITY. HUMILITY WOULD NEVER BE AN ATTRIBUTE OF A TRUE GOD, X-51."

"THAT IS WHY ODIN AFFECTED THOR'S GENETIC FORM-SHIFTING MAKE-UP, TRANSFORMING HIM INTO A MERE MAN."

"FOR THE ALL-SEEING ODIN WAS VERY BLIND INDEED, X-51. MANKIND WAS EVER IN DOMINANCE OVER THE ASGARDIANS, WHO NEVER REALIZED THE TRUTH."



"SO THE ASGARDIANS ARE INCAPABLE OF ANY HEROISM OTHER THAN THAT ALREADY BELIEVED OF THEM?"

"SO IT'S ALL UP TO THOR TO KEEP THE BELIEF IN HIS WORLD ALIVE?"

"THOR... AND LOKI."

"LOKI'S TREACHERY HAS ALWAYS SERVED THIS END, THOUGH HE DID NOT KNOW IT HIMSELF."

"I KNOW A LITTLE OF NORSE MYTHOLOGY, HATH. IF ALL YOU HAVE SURMISED OF ASGARD IS TRUE... THEN WHAT ABOUT RAGNAROK?"

"YOU SPEAK OF THE FABLED FALL OF THE GODS."

"YES... IS THAT SOMETHING MANKIND MADE UP?"

"I CAN'T BELIEVE ALL THE ASGARDIANS ARE GOING TO DIE WHEN MANKIND COLLECTIVELY SAYS... 'YOU'RE DEAD!'"

"RAGNAROK IS DERIVED FROM MANKIND'S OWN 'END OF THE WORLD' MYTH, X-51."

"SO THERE IS NO RAGNAROK? THE ASGARDIANS ARE LIVING IN FEAR OF NOTHING?"

"X-51, YOU AND I HAVE SEEN THAT THE END OF MANKIND'S WORLD IS NO MYTH. RAGNAROK WILL COME TO THE ASGARDIANS SECONDS AFTER IT COMES TO EARTH."

"HOW? IF THE WHOLE THING IS MADE UP, THEN THERE'S NOTHING TO FEAR."

"THE DAY EARTH'S POPULACE DIES... IS THE DAY THEIR BELIEF IN THE ASGARDIANS DOES AS WELL."

"THEN WHY TURN THOR INTO A HUMAN... FOR HUMILITY ALONE? WHY DIDN'T SOMEONE JUST 'THINK' HIM HUMBLE AND LET HIM BECOME THAT? WHY SEND HIM BACK TO EARTH?"

"IT WAS NECESSARY FOR THOR TO WALK THE EARTH FOR THE SAKE OF ASGARD ITSELF."

"THE BELIEF IN ASGARD'S EXISTENCE... WAS NECESSARY TO SUSTAIN IT. WITHOUT SUCH BELIEF, EVEN ITS GOLDEN REALMS WOULD FALL AWAY."

"HIS ACTIONS ON EARTH LED TO THE FORMATION OF THE AVENGERS, WHICH LED TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF ASGARD THROUGHOUT THE WORLD'S SUPER-POWER POPULACE."

"AND IF LOKI HADN'T CAUSED THE FORMATION OF THE AVENGERS, CAPTAIN AMERICA MIGHT NEVER HAVE BEEN REVIVED. AND THEN THE RED SKULL MIGHT..."

"THEN THEY'LL DIE, TOO. CAN WE MOVE MANKIND TO ASGARD? CAN WE SAVE BOTH WORLDS?"

"NO."

"BUT WHY NOT? MY IDEA MAY..."

"YOUR PURPOSE IS NOT IN SAVING MANKIND, X-51. NOR IN SUSTAINING THE EXISTENCE OF THE ASGARDIANS. YOU MUST WATCH. THAT IS ALL. DO NOT SPEAK TO ME OF IDEAS, THOUGHTS OR ANYTHING OTHER THAN WHAT YOU OBSERVE."

"OKAY, UATH, OKAY...I'LL KEEP MY OPINIONS TO MYSELF."

"NO, X-51, YOU ARE TO HAVE NO OPINIONS AT ALL. NOW CONTINUE..."

"IN LATVERIA, IN THE FORTRESS WHERE DR. DOOM ONCE MADE HIS HOME, REED RICHARDS IS PREPARING TO LEAVE THE CASTLE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN TEN YEARS."

REED...I KNOW SO MUCH HAS CHANGED FOR YOUR WORLD'S PEOPLE. IF YOU REALLY CAN HELP US FIND MY SCATTERED SUBJECTS...I COULD SAVE THEM FROM WHAT'S COMING.

I CAN ISOLATE THE INHUMAN GENE FROM AMONG THE POPULACE, MEDUSA...BUT ONLY IF I CAN FIND XAVIER'S CEREBRO HELMET.

WHICH BRINGS ME TO YOUR TELEPORTATION DEVICE.

IS THAT...WAS IT... LOCKJAW?

I'D RATHER NOT TALK ABOUT IT, REED. IF IT WILL HELP MY PEOPLE, TAKE IT.

HER...COME... QUEEN.

NEED I MENTION HOW PRECIOUS EVERY MOMENT IS? WE CANNOT ALLOW ANY MORE TIME...

THEN DON'T WASTE ANY MORE OF IT, KARNAK.

I'M NOT EVEN CONVINCED RICHARDS IS CAPABLE OF HELPING US.

DID YOU HEAR SOMETHING?



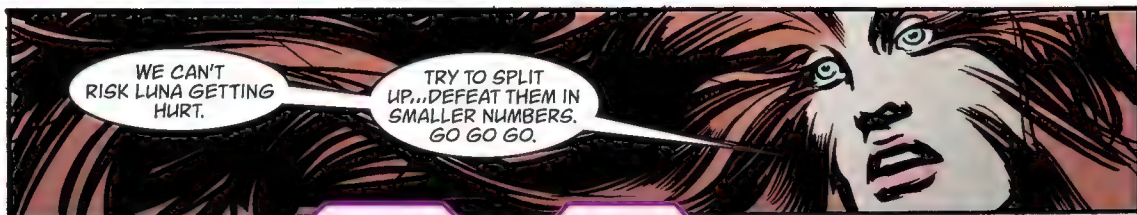
SURRENDER
TO DOOM.

SURRENDER
TO DOOM.

SURRENDER
TO DOOM.

SURRENDER
TO DOOM.

WITHOUT
RICHARDS HERE,
THEY THINK WE'RE
INTRUDERS.



WE CAN'T
RISK LUNA GETTING
HURT.

TRY TO SPLIT
UP...DEFEAT THEM IN
SMALLER NUMBERS.
GO GO GO.



CANNOT
ESCAPE
DOOM.

CANNOT
ESCAPE
DOOM.

CANNOT
ESCAPE
DOOM.



"WATU...WHY
DON'T THEY
SEE BLACK
BOLT? WHY
DO THEY
JUST PASS
BY HIM?"

"I DO NOT
KNOW."



"I'M SEEING CALIFORNIA NOW, UATU. THE SKULL AND ALL THOSE HE'S TAKEN POSSESSION OF ARE PREPARING TO LEAVE..."

I WAS WONDERING, SKULL, IF..."



YOU EVER BRUSH YOUR TEETH AND THEN DRINK LEMONADE RIGHT AFTER? SICK IS THE WORD.

...IF YOU'D LET US GO...I MEAN, FREE... AFTER YOU HAVE EVERYTHING. WE WON'T BE IMPORTANT TO YOUR PLANS, THEN.



WHAT, DO I HAVE A BOOGER OR SOMETHING? WHY WOULD YOU WANT ME TO LET YOU GO? DON'T YOU LIKE...?



OH...I GET IT... YOU'RE YANKING ME. OF COURSE YOU LIKE ME...



...YOU HAVE TO.

BUT SKULL, WE DON'T...
~MFPHE~



"BUT I THOUGHT THE SKULL'S FORCES DROVE CAPTAIN AMERICA AWAY?"

"HE HAS LOST, X-51. WHERE HE IS NOW IS INCONSEQUENTIAL TO THE SKULL."

"HOW CAN HE JUST SIT THERE? WHY DOESN'T HE FIGHT?"

"WHO WOULD HE FIGHT? THE SKULL HAS TAKEN HUMANITY'S WILL. WOULD YOU HAVE STEVE ROGERS NOW TAKE THEIR PHYSICAL BEINGS AS WELL?"

WHOEVER YOU ARE...IT'S OVER. YOU'VE BEATEN ME.

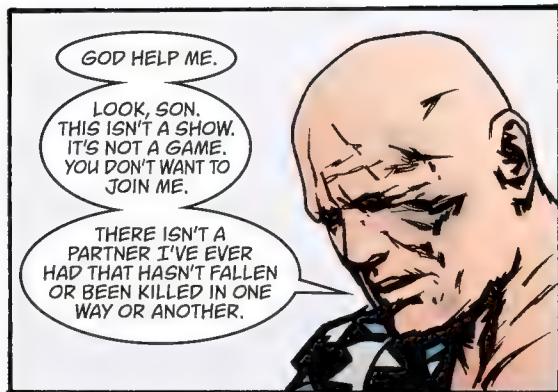


NOW WHAT KIND OF THING IS THAT TO SAY TO ME?



WHO?

I'M YOUR NEW PARTNER. I'M DAREDEVIL.





"I SEE A HOUSE IN SOHO...AND WITHIN THAT HOUSE...A WOMAN STANDS WHOSE FEET DON'T TOUCH THE FLOOR. THE HULK IS THERE AS WELL.

"SO IS BANNER."

CLEA...I'D HEARD YOU'D BECOME THE SORCERESS SUPREME. YOU'RE SO YOUNG.

WELL, SO ARE YOU, BRUCE.

WHERE'S STEPHEN?



WE BELIEVE THE MASTER'S ASTRAL FORM WAS ATTACKED AND POSSIBLY SLAIN, THOUGH HIS PHYSICAL BODY YET LIVES...

STEPHEN IS DEAD, BRUCE, AT LEAST AS FAR AS WE KNOW.



I STILL WAIT FOR HIS RETURN...

WHO DID THIS?

I DO NOT KNOW. IT SEEMS THERE ARE LIMITS... EVEN TO THE ALL-SEEING EYE OF AGAMOTTO.



NOW TELL ME, BRUCE, WHAT DREAM BROUGHT YOU TO ME AND MY SANCTUM SANCTORUM.

IT'S THE SAME DREAM...OVER AND OVER AGAIN...IT'S ABOUT CANCER AND DEATH.

BUT NOT OF BETTY...THAT I WOULDN'T QUESTION. I'D UNDERSTAND BETTY. YOU KNOW HOW I STILL BLAME MYSELF...



SPEAK INTO THE CANDLE, BRUCE. IT WILL GIVE FORM TO YOUR WORDS.

MY DREAM WAS OF MAR-VELL.

MAR-VELL?

CAPTAIN MARVEL WAS A KREE WARRIOR WHO BECAME A VILLAIN TO HIS OWN PEOPLE AND A HERO TO OURS. HE SAVED OUR WORLD MANY TIMES BEFORE DISCOVERING THAT HE WAS BEING EATEN AWAY BY WHAT HIS PEOPLE CALLED THE "BLACKEND."



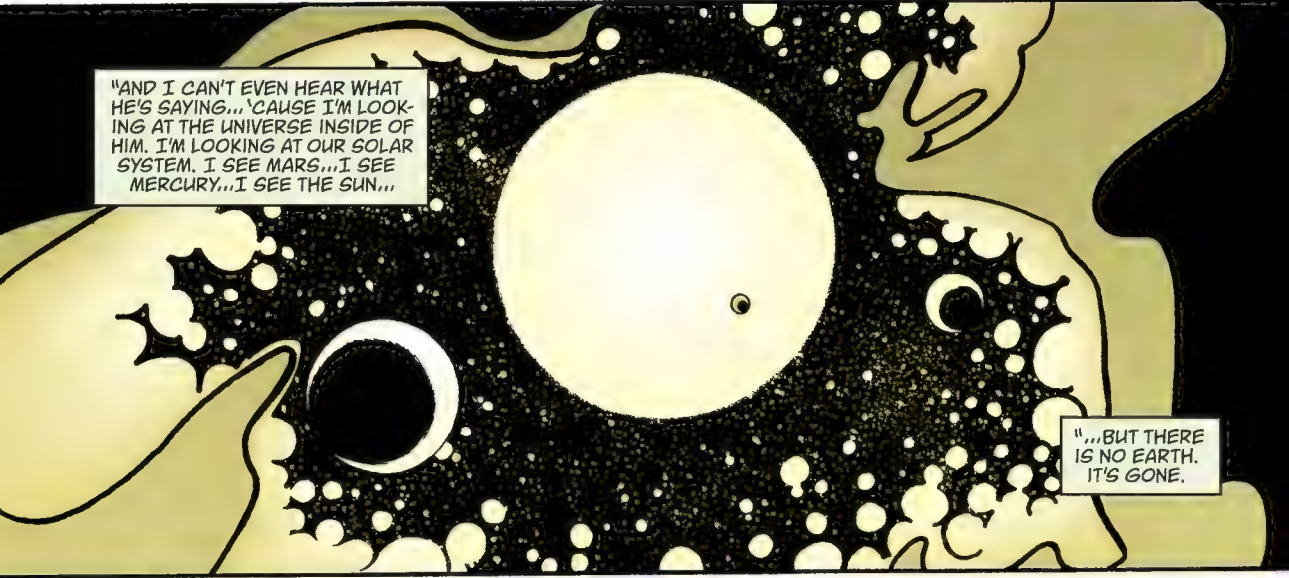
"THE SWELLING IN HIS STOMACH MADE HIM LOOK LIKE HE WAS PREGNANT. IT WAS TERRIBLE. REMEMBER THE WAY CANCER MADE HIM LOOK?"

"I REMEMBER, BRUCE. I WAS THERE AS WELL. GO ON."



"BUT INSTEAD OF DYING LIKE HE DID,
IN MY DREAM HE RISES...AND HE'S
NOT EVEN MAR-VELL ANYMORE. THE
ENTIRE UNIVERSE IS INSIDE OF HIM.

"WE...ALL OF THE OTHER HEROES--SOME
OF THE GREATEST MINDS IN THE WORLD--
JUST STAND THERE, UNABLE TO SAY ANY-
THING. AND THEN THIS MAN--THIS MAR-VELL
UNIVERSE--BEGINS TO SPEAK...TO US.



"AND I CAN'T EVEN HEAR WHAT
HE'S SAYING... 'CAUSE I'M LOOK-
ING AT THE UNIVERSE INSIDE OF
HIM. I'M LOOKING AT OUR SOLAR
SYSTEM. I SEE MARS...I SEE
MERCURY...I SEE THE SUN..."

"...BUT THERE
IS NO EARTH.
IT'S GONE.



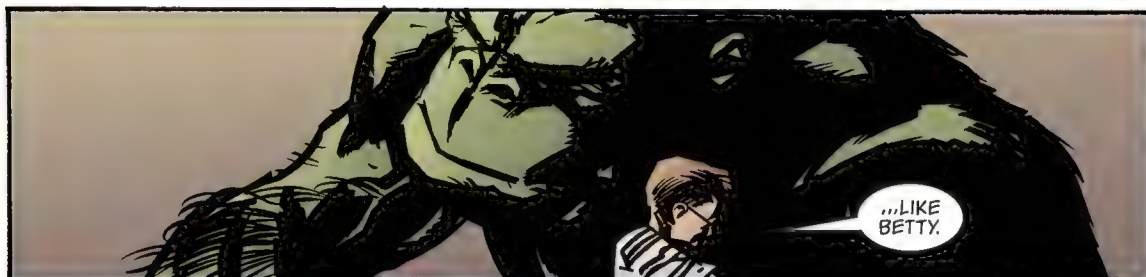
"AND THEN MAR-VELL
BEGINS TO DIE...AGAIN.
JUST LIKE..."



WONG,
TURN ON THE
LIGHTS.

I'VE HEARD
ENOUGH.

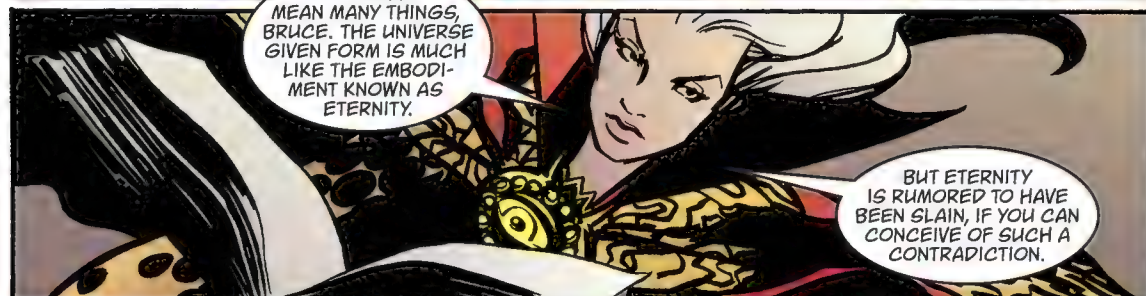
JUST
LIKE...



...LIKE
BETTY.



THE
QUESTION,
CLEA, IS "WHAT
DOES IT
MEAN?"



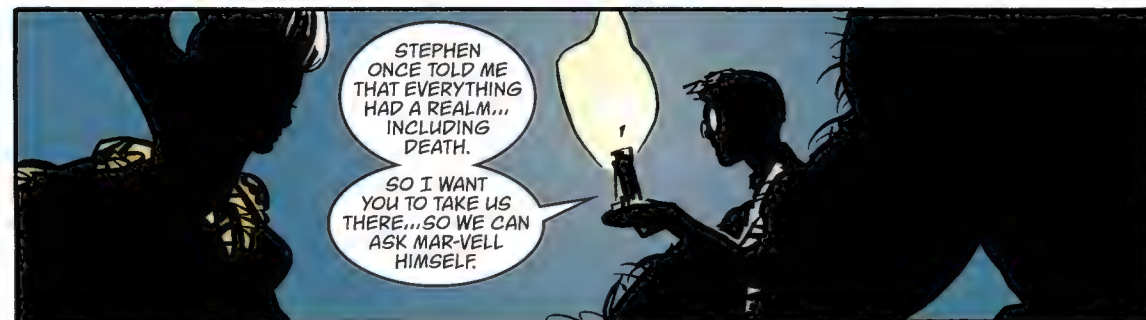
IT COULD
MEAN MANY THINGS,
BRUCE. THE UNIVERSE
GIVEN FORM IS MUCH
LIKE THE EMBODI-
MENT KNOWN AS
ETERNITY.

BUT ETERNITY
IS RUMORED TO HAVE
BEEN SLAIN, IF YOU CAN
CONCEIVE OF SUCH A
CONTRADICTION.



WONG...
CANDLES.

WHAT
WOULD YOU
LIKE ME TO
DO?



STEPHEN
ONCE TOLD ME
THAT EVERYTHING
HAD A REALM...
INCLUDING
DEATH.

SO I WANT
YOU TO TAKE US
THERE...SO WE CAN
ASK MAR-VELL
HIMSELF.

A dynamic comic book panel showing Thor and Odin in a city during a lightning storm. Thor, in his classic armor and winged helmet, is in the foreground, looking upwards with a determined expression. He holds Mjolnir, which is glowing with blue energy. Odin, with his long white beard and a headband with a circular ornament, is in the lower foreground, looking up with a concerned expression. In the background, a city skyline is visible under a dark sky with bright lightning bolts. A figure in a red and blue suit is seen flying through the air, and another figure in a purple and white suit is on the ground. The overall tone is dramatic and action-packed.

"RIGHT AFTER THE THIRD MEMBER OF OUR PARTY SHOWS UP. THAT LIGHTNING CRASH WAS HIM...I MEAN, WELL, IT'S HIM, BUT IT'S NOT..."

BY ODIN'S GOOD EYE...STORM GIANTS WAGING WAR UPON MIDGARD?!?

TELL 'EM TO GO HOME, HUH, GOLDILOCKS? WE'VE GOT ENOUGH WORMS IN THE BIG APPLE AS IT IS.

ONE MORE BAD JOKE, CLINT, AND I'LL TELL TONY TO REPROGRAM YOU.

"THOR'S...A WOMAN?"



YOU FACE THE
HEIR OF ASSGARD NOW,
VILE THING.

I'M AFRAID WE CAN'T
OFFER MUCH HELP, THOR. THEY'RE
MUCH MORE POWERFUL THAN WE
ARE. THANKS FOR THE SAVE.



DO NOT
LESSEN THE WEIGHT
OF THY HEROICS,
FRIEND JAN...



...FOR IRON HAS
ALWAYS BEEN THE GREATEST
BANE 'GAINST MAGICS AND
EVIL MOST FOUL.

VISION, NOW
THAT THOR'S HERE,
THE IRON AVENGERS
ARE NEEDED ELSE-
WHERE.



THAT'S NOT
YOU TALKING,
IT'S OSBORN
AGAIN...YES,
TONY.



STORM
GIANTS.

WHERE
ARE YOU,
BROTHER? THIS
NEW FOLLY HAS
YOUR STENCH
ABOUT IT.



WHY, MY DEAR
SISTER, YOU ARE A
VISION. I HAD NO IDEA
FATHER'S CURSE WOULD
BE SUCH A BLESSING
FOR THE REST OF
US.

BY THE
WAY, HERCULES
WAS CALLING AFTER
YOU. I GAVE HIM
MY CONSENT.



I WOULD
SOONER KISS HELA'S
LIPS THAN SPEAK TO
YOU AGAIN.

NOW THERE'S AN
IMAGE TO CONJURE WITH.
OH, AND LOSE THE HAMMER,
DARLING. BUTCH IS
OUT.



SHOULD YOU EVER
TRY TO RETURN HOME TO
UNDO THIS LATEST LESSON
IN HUMILITY AND TELL FATHER
OF HOW I TRICKED HIM...

...I'LL FIND THAT
I'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO
RETURN TO MIDGARD AGAIN.
AND YOU'LL BE FREE HERE
TO DO WHATEVER YOU
DESIRE.



WILL YOU
NEVER CHANGE, MY
BROTHER?

"WE'RE STILL IN NEW YORK, WATU. THERE'S SOMEONE...IT'S THE GUY WHO SAVED THAT KID FROM THE HYDRA A FEW MONTHS AGO."

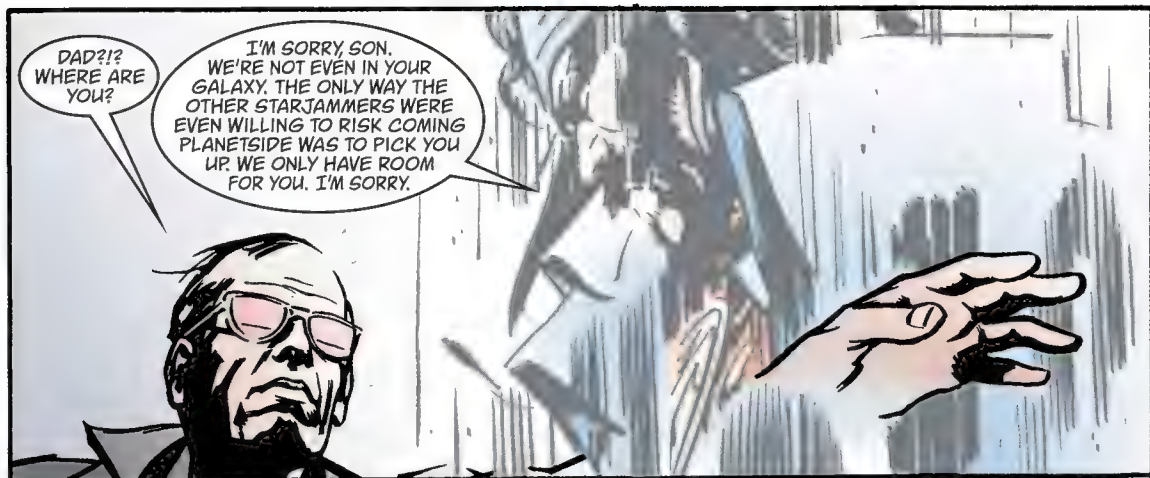
"YOU SPEAK OF SCOTT SUMMERS, X-51...THE FIRST AND LAST OF XAVIER'S X-MEN."

"THAT WAS CYCLOPS?"

SON...YOU MUST COME WITH US.

C'MON, SCOTT. LET'S LET BYGONES BE BYGONES. OKAY? BURY THE HATCHET, BRO.







"UATU, I...WE'RE BACK AT CASTLE DOOM IN LATVERIA...WHERE THE INHUMANS ARE FIGHTING FOR THEIR LIVES AGAINST DOOM'S AVATARS."

STAY
BEHIND ME,
LUNA.

HURT.

YOU WOULD
THINK THAT SOMEONE
OF RICHARDS' INTELLECT
WOULD HAVE WARNED
US OF THIS.

RICHARDS'
INTELLECT?



RICHARDS
IS NO GENIUS.

NOT
BY INHUMAN
STANDARDS.



WHY, HIS THEORY
THAT VIBRANIUM CAUSED
THESE MUTATIONS...IT IS
SO FLAWED.

CONSIDER THE
AMOUNT OF TIME IT TOOK
VIBRANIUM TO TRANSFORM
THE ORIGINAL WAKANDAN
NATIVES INTO
MONSTERS...

...COMPARED TO
THE LENGTH OF THIS
POPULACE'S MUTATION
CYCLE. IT IS SOME-
THING ELSE...I AM
CERTAIN.

AND
WHERE IS THE
DEMENTIA THE
MYTHS SPEAK
OF?



"IS IT TRUE, WATU?
IS REED RICHARDS
WRONG?"

"I DO NOT
KNOW, X-51.
I HAVE SEEN
NOTHING IN
TWENTY
YEARS..."

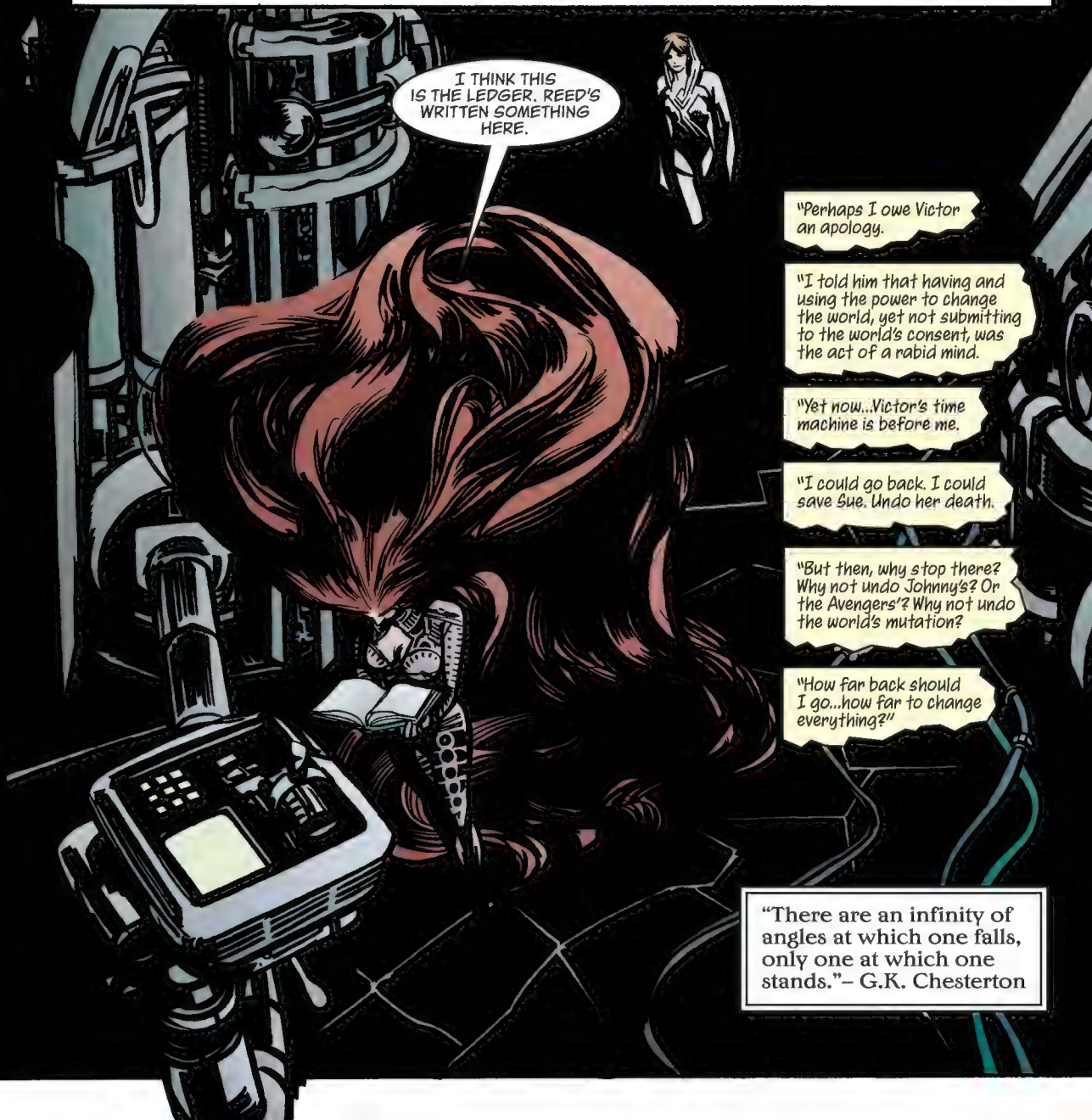
FOLLOW ME,
LUNA. NOW'S OUR
CHANCE.



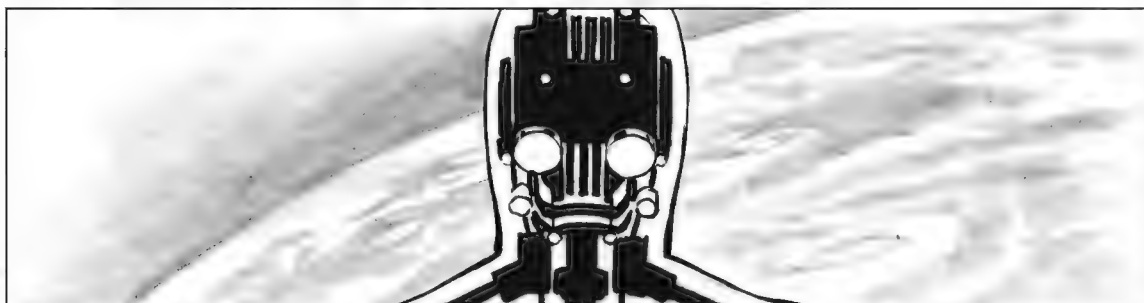
"...AND
MUCH
REMAINS
HIDDEN."

WHERE
ARE WE?

I'M NOT
SURE.



E A R T H X



APPENDIX TO CHAPTER FIVE

I L L U S T R A T I O N S B Y A L E X R O S S

"Watcher?"

"X-51, I know what you are going to ask."

"How?"

"Because your question is obvious. You want to know if Captain Marvel's warning can stop the inevitable."

"Can it?"

"No. Again you assume that the destruction of Earth is a great evil. That it will not serve a greater purpose."

"What purpose?"

"X-51, your capacity to understand this would limit your ability to watch and catalogue the last days of Earth's populace. Therefore, you will be denied this knowledge."

"But that's not fair."

"Fair?"

"I know... I know... there's no such thing as fair. There's no such thing as good. No such thing as evil. What is, simply is -- whether it helps people or destroys them. There is no delineation between Captain America and the Skull. In the end, what they fight for is a fool's crusade... but I hate it, Uatu. I hate it. How can anything exist this way? You're suggesting that everything is unimportant... a chemical by-product... an accident... but then aren't logic and rationale accidents as well? Why should I trust reason then... if everything is only an accident?"

"The Celestial seedlings are not accidents."

"Then... after Earth is gone, what will you do?"

"Do?"

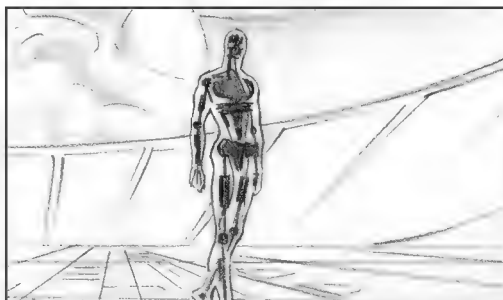
"Yeah... what happens next?"

"We will be free."

"Free. Is that why you watch? Really? Freedom... to no longer watch? I see what you're after..."

"X-51, look to Earth -- not to me. Your responsibility is to tell me what you see of it... not of myself."

"Very well... I see a world of lives on the brink of destruction. I see a world





that dares to hope in the face of none. I see a world that prays and longs for someone to watch over it... and would be devastated to discover what you think of humanity."

"X-51... are these the last fires of your human passion burning out? Is logic so cruel? Consider what these very beings you care for so much would do if you told them the truth... if you took the reality that has been revealed to you and placed it in their plain sight. You would deny them the hope that brings them comfort. You would take away the deception that allows them to sleep at night, and steal the imagined light of their days. If you value happiness so much, X-51, then let them live the lie."

"But ..."

"But what, X-51? What solace will you give them? Can you tell them of the reality of their existence with a clear conscience? Can you take from them what you never had yourself?"

"What didn't I have...?"

"A chance to be happy."

"But you said there was no such thing as happiness."

"And you would tell them this, X-51?"

"I... no."

"Very well."

"I do have a question regarding Thor."

"Yes?"

"Why didn't the Celestial Host want the gods to interfere with mankind?"

"What?"

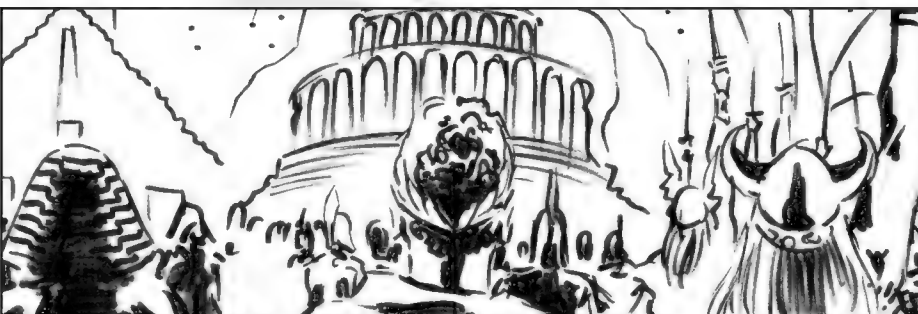
"Back when the Third Host of Celestials came to Earth to meet with all the other beings who had come from the stars... the Agardians... the Olympians... all of them... the so-called gods -- why didn't the Celestials want them interfering with mankind?"

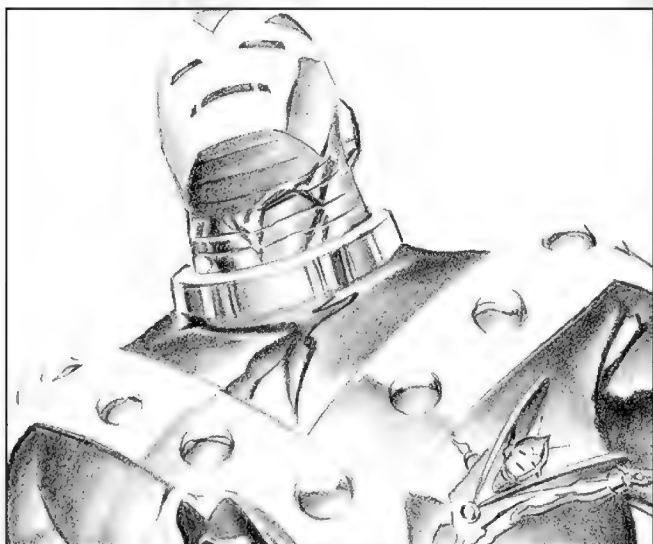
"The Host did not want the gods affecting the seeds which had been implanted within mankind."

"Yeah... I know that... but if the gods interfered, wouldn't they just trigger the seeds implanted within mankind anyway? Why the big agreement? How do the gods feel about the Celestials?"

"Feel, X-51?"

"Sorry. Are they allies? Or enemies? Or are they like a series of checks and balances for each other?"





you or those you watch. Tell me more of the Iron Avengers' forger. Tell me more of Stark."

"TONY STARK?"

"Yes, the human who was Iron Man."

"Tony Stark is the last man on Earth, Uatu. He is untouched by whatever it is that has mutated the inhabitants on Earth. The once invincible Iron Man has expanded his armor around himself so far that he lives in utter isolation and sterilization."

"So Stark's mutant gene has not germinated?"

"Exactly. In his own way, though, Tony Stark has also lost his humanity, Uatu. If you think of humanity as a social existence, he is not a man at all."

"There are many who attack his home, believing he is now a freak of nature and a reminder to them that he is better than they are. To protect himself from these attacks, Stark built the Iron Avengers, programmed with the personalities and characteristics of all the dead Avengers."

"What of the other members of the team? Those that didn't die?"

"WHAT OF ANT-MAN?"

"Scott Lang lives inside Stark's armored home."

"..."
"Uatu?"
"..."

"I take it that the Celestials did not want the gods on Earth. You said that mankind's destiny is to become a race of Celestials. How would the gods feel about this?"

"..."
"Sorry. How would they react to this?"

"X-51, I believe it is possible that you have seen... too much. The answers to your questions are inconsequential to



"He does?"

"Yes... he remains in hiding with his daughter, Cassie. When Cassie began showing signs of mutation, Lang tried to undo the mutation by placing her in a sterile environment."

"He did not succeed, did he, X-51?"

"No... the genetic seed within her had already germinated. But were Lang to leave now, Stark's entire environment would be compromised. They are prisoners of a warden who has no idea they are there."



"CAROL DANVERS?"

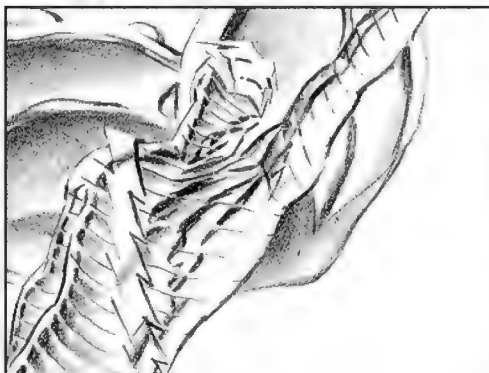
"She isn't on Earth anymore, Uatu. She left years ago... to help the remnants of the Kree homeworld. But that doesn't make any sense... the Kree were her enemy from the day she first met Mar-Vell. According to the Avengers' computers... she had had many aliases until finally calling herself Captain Marvel."

"WONDER MAN?"

"It's difficult to say, Uatu, whether Wonder Man is dead or not. I see no trace of Simon Williams on Earth... but he was a being of ionic energy, and energy cannot be destroyed -- only changed."

"X-51, you have made clear that you fear mankind's approaching death. Does not the same principle apply? The human body is comprised of tissues and muscles that are organized and activated by electronic surges... energy."

"Are you saying there's no reason for mankind to fear death because they don't actually die at all but are converted into a different form of energy?"





"I'm asking you, X-51."

"I don't know. If what you suggest is true... there's still no guarantee that people would know themselves after this conversion... would they be self-aware in this new state? If they aren't, that still seems like death to me."

"WHAT OF IRON MAN'S MANY ENEMIES?"

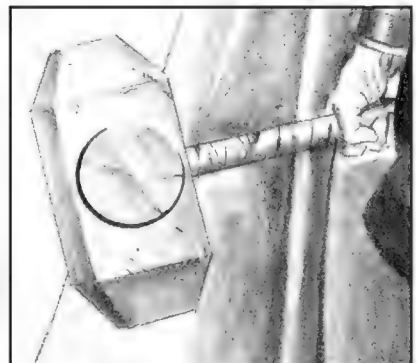
"The Controller, Justin Hammer, Blacklash, Blizzard, Unicorn, Count Nefaria—they were all killed by Osborn before the Goblin's rise to power."

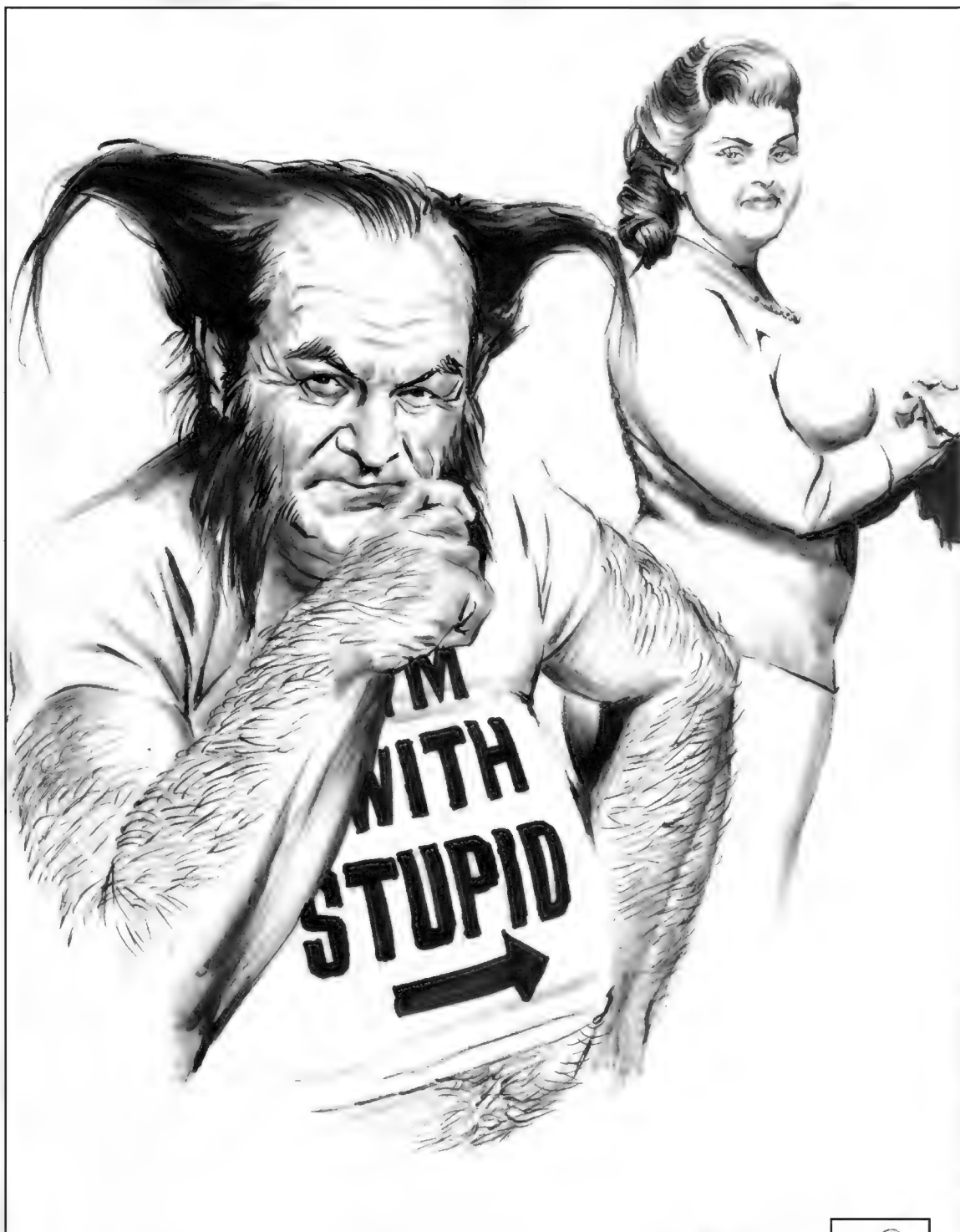
"Explain."

"Written records on Earth lack details... but it seems that Osborn's desire to become a legitimate businessman came to fruition. His ambitions knew no bounds. He used his knowledge of the heroes' enemies to strike at them... without mercy... all the while paving the way for his attainment of the role of president. There would be no election for Norman Osborn – merely the announcement of his term to a world that seemed unmoved by his inauguration."

"What of M.O.D.O.K.? The Skull seems to have taken his chair... but you've said nothing of the mind that once rested upon it."

"There's nothing to say. There is no Modok, just as there is no Xavier. Jean Grey doesn't have psychic powers anymore, Uatu... it seems like there isn't a psychic or telepathic mind on Earth anymore. Why? What happened to them?"





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EARTH



KRUEGER
LEON

“Uatu?”

“Yes, X-51.”

“Will Reed Richards use the time machine he found in Doom’s castle to try to change everything -- the Invisible Woman’s death...Namor’s killing of Johnny Storm...even the mutation of the world itself?”

“Are you concerned, X-51?”

“Would I get my face back? Would you be able to see again?”

“Oh...of course. I understand you now. Would this rearrangement of matter and events affect us as well? No. Our very nature is beyond the variable alterations brought on by time manipulations.”

“Oh.”

“I don’t believe Richards would take such a step, though, X-51.”

“Why not?”

“His discoveries have made him too fearful. Knowledge has made him fragile. Richards blames himself far too much for what has happened to Earth. He will not risk all of matter for his own guilt’s appeasement.”

“I understand. My fath...I mean, the man who built me always said, ‘Better the devil you know than the devil you don’t know.’”

“There is no devil, X-51. Surely I have convinced you of this.”

"ONE MAN, X-51, MANY BELIEVE TRULY **WAS** THE DEVIL. BUT FROM THOSE WHO FOLLOWED HIM, HE DEMANDED FAR MORE THAN SYMPATHY..."

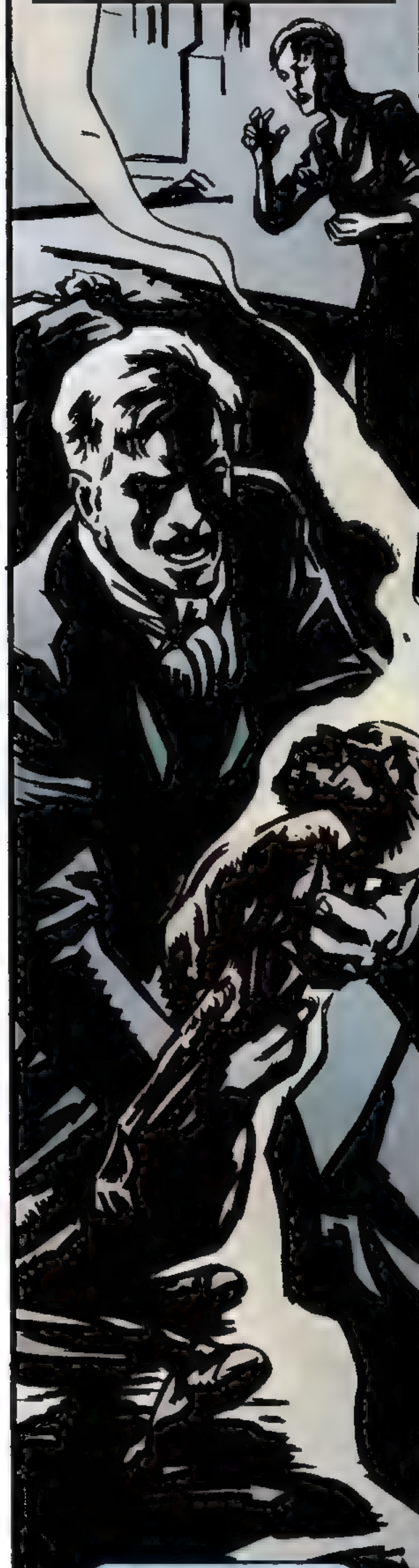
"I SEE A PLACE OF TORTURE...OF PERPETUAL SCREAMS AND AIR THAT CHOKES WITH THE ASH OF THOSE WHO DIED THERE...WHO ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT... HITLER?"



"NO, X-51. I SPEAK OF MAGNUS...YOU ARE SEEING ONE WHO WAS BORN TO THE SUFFERING BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE THIRD REICH.

"YEARS AFTER MAGNUS' ESCAPE FROM THE AXIS POWERS, HIS WIFE LEFT HIM IN FEAR OF HIS AWESOME AWAKENING MAGNETIC POWER..."

"...AND HIS DAUGHTER DIED AT THE HANDS OF A MOB...FOR HUMAN PREJUDICE HAD DISCOVERED A NEW TARGET--MUTANTS."

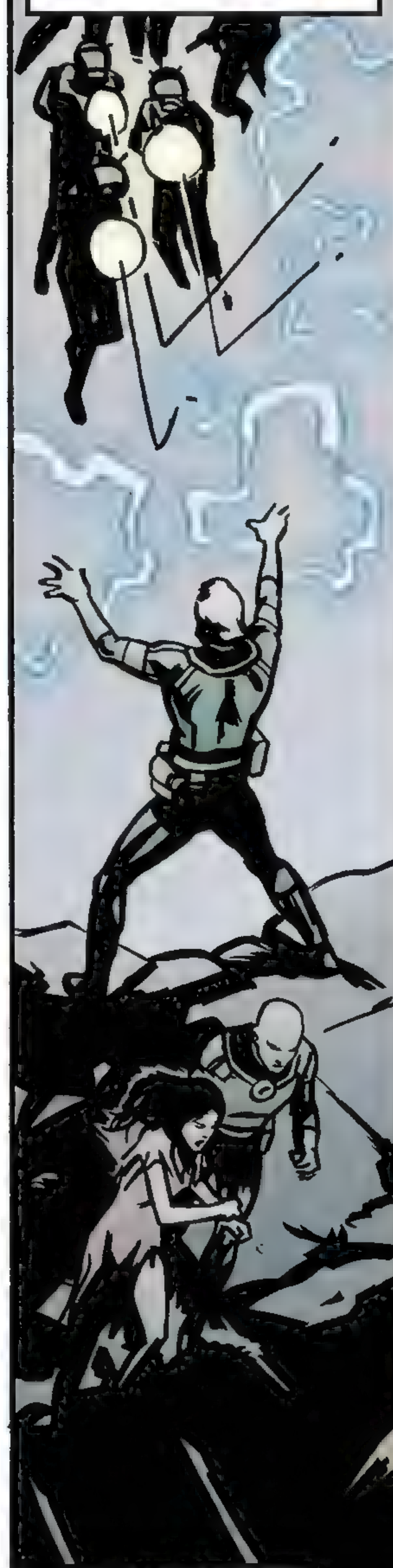


"HE'S A MUTANT?"

"OF COURSE. HE IS MAGNETO."

"HE WOULD COME TO BE THE DESTROYER OF THE DREAM."

"BUT THERE WAS ONCE A TIME WHEN HE WAS ALLIED WITH THE DREAMER."



"MAGNETO KNEW XAVIER LONG BEFORE PROFESSOR X FORMED HIS SCHOOL FOR GIFTED YOUNGSTERS."

"XAVIER FOUNDED THE X-MEN TO FIGHT TO PROTECT A WORLD THAT HATED AND FEARED MUTANTS, X-51."

"HE DREAMED OF PEACE BETWEEN BOTH RACES."



"BUT YOU SAID MAGNETO WAS THE DESTROYER OF THE DREAM. WHY WOULD ANYONE OPPOSE SO PERFECT A GOAL?"

"XAVIER'S DREAM HAD NO POSSIBILITY OF FRUITION IN LIGHT OF MAGNETO'S EXPERIENCE. THERE WAS NO WAY TO RECONCILE XAVIER'S HOPE WITH THE HARSH REALITY OF MAGNUS' LIFE."



"MAGNETO SWORE THAT AN END TO PREJUDICE WAS IMPOSSIBLE--THAT MAN WAS INCAPABLE OF LOOKING BEYOND HIMSELF TO THE NEEDS OF OTHERS."



"MAGNETO MADE CLEAR TO XAVIER THAT THERE COULD BE NO PEACE BETWEEN MUTANTS AND HUMANS BECAUSE THERE IS NO PEACE WITHIN HUMANITY ITSELF."

"MAGNUS SWORE THAT MUTANTKIND WAS SUPERIOR, AND WOULD ONE DAY RULE MANKIND."

"AND SO, A WAR BETWEEN THE TWO MEN BEGAN."



"AS XAVIER FORMED THE X-MEN...SO, TOO, DID MAGNETO FORM THE BROTHERHOOD OF EVIL MUTANTS."

"THAT'S SCOTT SUMMERS, ISN'T IT...AND JEAN GREY?"

"YES, X-51."

"WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT TO THE CONFLICT BETWEEN XAVIER AND MAGNETO?"

"THEY WERE A GREATER THREAT TO HUMANITY THAN BOTH MEN COMBINED."

"HOW?"

"THEIRS WAS A BIOLOGICAL THREAT. FOR IF THE MUTANTS OF THIS WORLD BEGAN TO BREED, HUMANITY'S FUTURE STANCE AS THE DOMINANT LIFE-FORM WOULD BE THROWN INTO QUESTION."

"AND SO, THE HUMANS BUILT THE SENTINELS TO RESTORE A BALANCE THEY THOUGHT THEY COULD EASILY CONTROL."

"THE SENTINELS WERE CREATED TO KILL MUTANTS?"

"OF COURSE. BUT THE SENTINELS WERE NOT THE ONLY THREAT TO THE RISING RANKS OF A MUTANT POPULATION, X-51."

"WITH EACH DEFEAT CAME MORE VICTORIES."

"XAVIER'S DREAM SPREAD AMONGST ALL THOSE WHO HAD BEEN BRANDED AND VICTIMIZED BY THE NATURE OF THEIR EXISTENCE...AND MUTANTS BANDED TOGETHER TO FIGHT FOR PEACE AROUND THE WORLD."

"AND ALWAYS READY TO FACE THESE NEW MUTANT FACTIONS WERE MAGNETO AND HIS BROTHERHOOD--WHICH LED SOME HUMAN AUTHORITIES OF THE WORLD TO RECOGNIZE MAGNETO AS A NECESSARY EVIL."

"WHY?"

"BECAUSE THEY HOPED THAT THE HOSTILITY BETWEEN XAVIER AND MAGNETO WOULD LEAD TO A WAR WHICH NEITHER SIDE WOULD SURVIVE."

"IN CLAIMING TO BE EVIL, MAGNETO FORCED XAVIER AND HIS X-MEN INTO THE POSITION OF THE OPPOSITE POLARITY...THAT OF BEING GOOD."

"HE FORCED XAVIER INTO THE ROLE OF BEING MAGNETO'S MORAL BAROMETER..."

"...OF BEING JUDGE OVER MUTANTKIND..."

"...AND MORALITY HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE GREATEST BASIS FOR PREJUDICE."

"SO MAGNETO PLANNED TO DEFEAT XAVIER BY MAKING HIM A BIGOT? AND THEN APPEALING TO THOSE WITHIN THE GROWING MUTANT RANKS TO FIND FREEDOM FROM XAVIER IN HIM? I CAN'T BELIEVE IT. HOW DID HE EVER CONCEIVE OF SUCH A PLAN?"

"BECAUSE MAGNETO KNEW WHAT MANY DO NOT IN REGARDS TO GOOD AND EVIL, X-51."

"HE KNEW THAT MORAL BEHAVIOR WAS A CHOICE, NOT A CHARACTERISTIC. THOSE WHO CLAIM TO BE GOOD...DO EVIL. AND THOSE WHO HAVE CURSED AND THREATENED THEIR FELLOW MAN HAVE OFTEN DONE SO FOR A PERCEIVED GREATER GOOD."

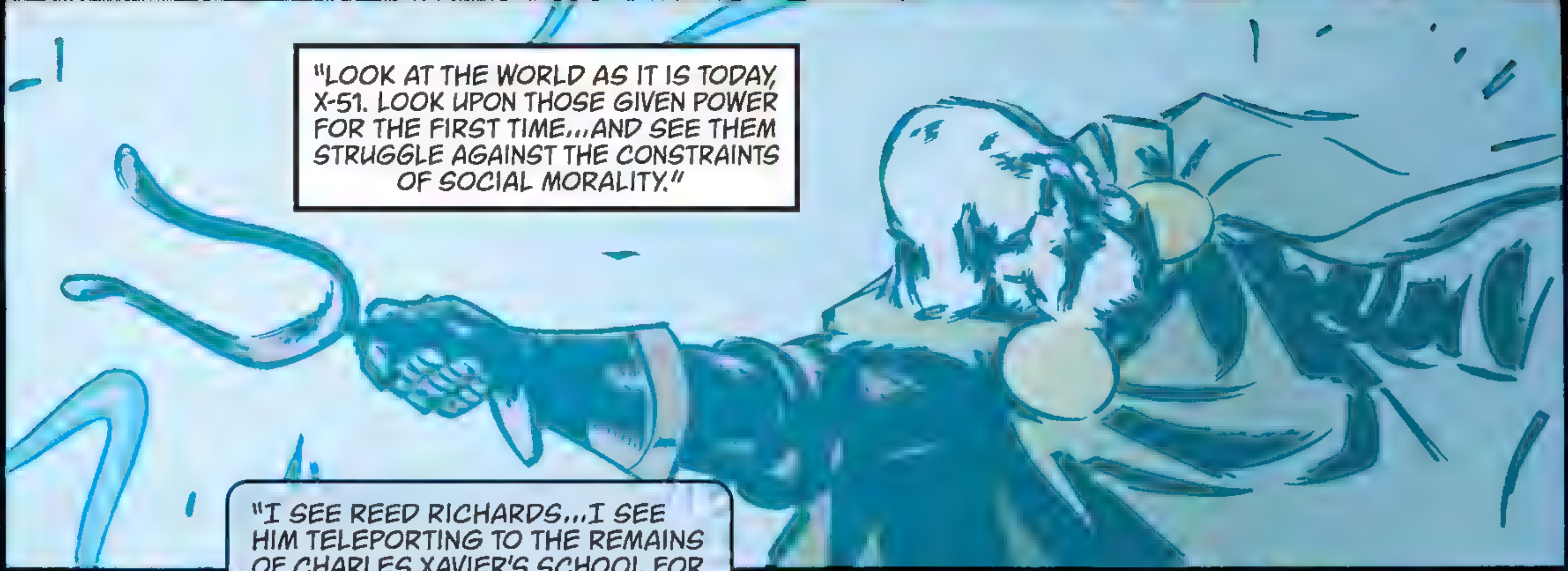
"BUT THERE IS NO GOOD AND EVIL, UATU...YOU SAID SO."

"YES."

"WHY WOULD MAGNETO CALL HIS BROTHERHOOD 'EVIL'? IF HE THOUGHT HE WAS IN THE RIGHT... WHY THE MORAL INDICATIVE?"

"TO DEFEAT XAVIER, OF COURSE, AND THEN, TO WIN HIM AND HIS FOLLOWERS TO MAGNETO'S SIDE, THUS WINNING MUTANTKIND'S ASCENDANCY."

"I DON'T UNDERSTAND."



"LOOK AT THE WORLD AS IT IS TODAY,
X-51. LOOK UPON THOSE GIVEN POWER
FOR THE FIRST TIME...AND SEE THEM
STRUGGLE AGAINST THE CONSTRAINTS
OF SOCIAL MORALITY."

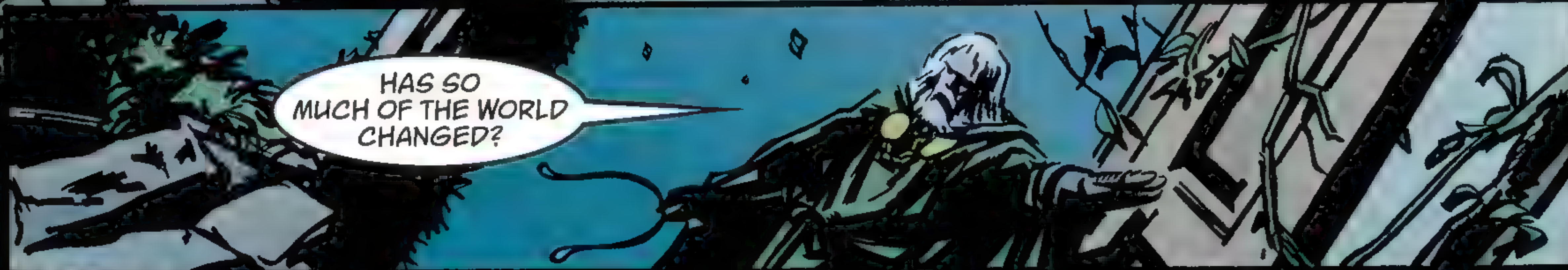
"I SEE REED RICHARDS...I SEE
HIM TELEPORTING TO THE REMAINS
OF CHARLES XAVIER'S SCHOOL FOR
GIFTED YOUNGSTERS. BUT I DON'T
SEE THIS STRUGGLE YOU SPEAK OF."

"YES, YOU DO. YOU ARE MERELY
NOT WILLING TO ADMIT IT."

"UATU...THE PROFESSOR'S
SCHOOL IS IN RUINS...IF
EVERYONE'S A MUTANT,
THEN THERE'S NOTHING
FOR THE X-MEN TO FIGHT
FOR, IS THERE? THEIR
STRUGGLE WAS FOR
NOTHING, WASN'T IT?"



HAS IT
BEEN THAT LONG,
SUSAN?



HAS SO
MUCH OF THE WORLD
CHANGED?



THIS
CAN'T
BE.

GIMME
A FASTBALL
SPECIAL,
PETEY.



"THE X-MEN?
HOW...?"

MUTANT, YOU
ARE ADVISED TO
SURRENDER OR FACE
IMMEDIATE TER-
MINATION.

IT'S
YOUR FUNERAL,
BUB.

ANOTHER...
UNGLAUBLICH.

THE
SENTINELS...
HERE AT THE
MANSION?

"WATU, I DON'T UNDERSTAND.
THE X-MEN HAVEN'T AGED AT
ALL. AND THIS WOLVERINE
DOESN'T LOOK LIKE THE ONE
WE SAW."



OF COURSE...
I MUST HAVE TRIGGERED
THE MANSION'S GENERATORS
AND AN OLD DANGER ROOM
SCENARIO WHEN I
ENTERED.

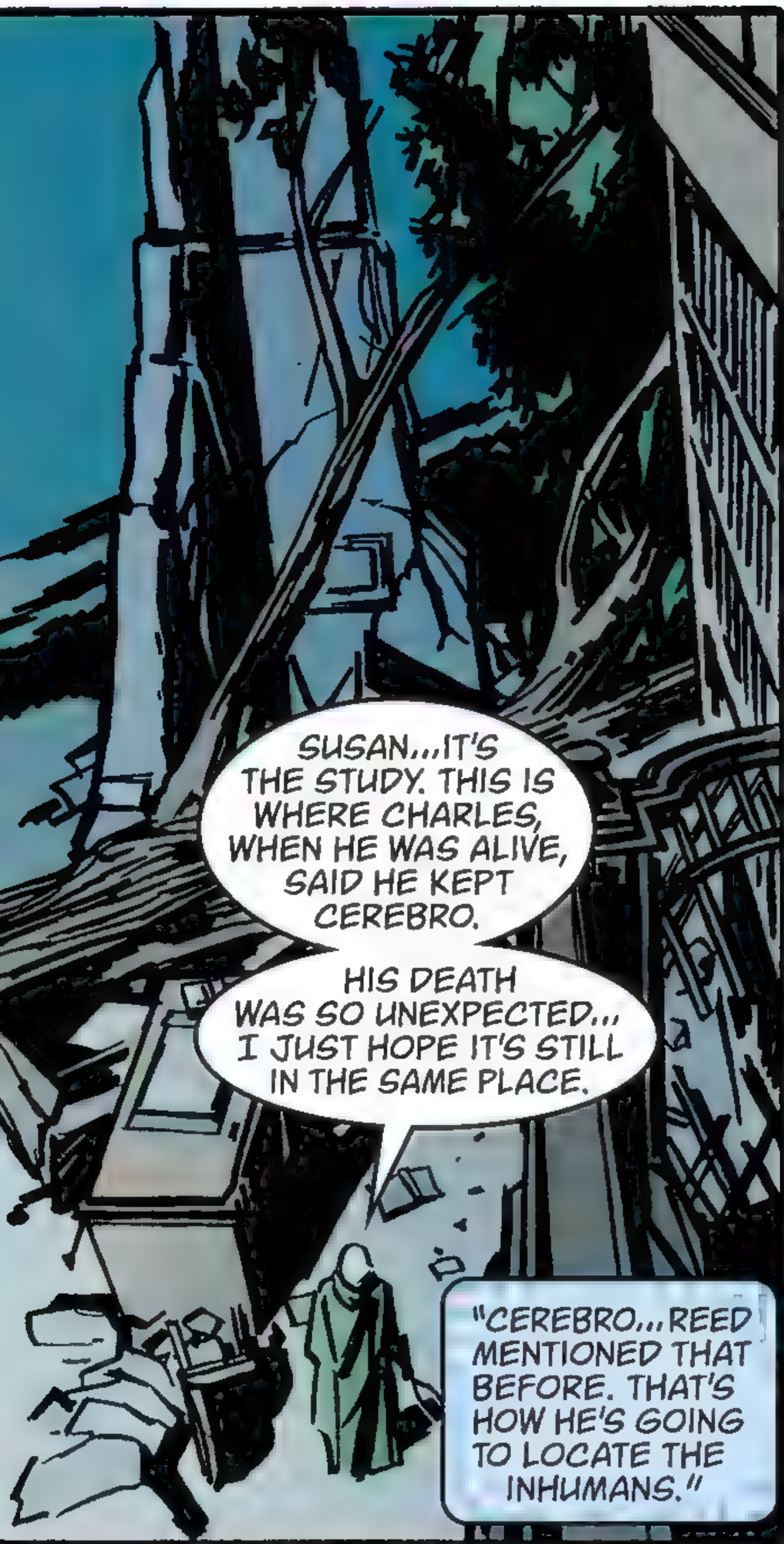
"WHAT'S A
DANGER
ROOM?"



"A SOPHISTICATED
TRAINING FACILITY
XAVIER USED TO
HONE HIS STUDENTS'
SKILLS, X-51.



"THE WOLVERINE YOU SEE
IS AS HE WAS, NOT AS HE
IS TODAY."



SUSAN...IT'S THE STUDY. THIS IS WHERE CHARLES, WHEN HE WAS ALIVE, SAID HE KEPT CEREBRO.

HIS DEATH WAS SO UNEXPECTED... I JUST HOPE IT'S STILL IN THE SAME PLACE.

"CEREBRO... REED MENTIONED THAT BEFORE. THAT'S HOW HE'S GOING TO LOCATE THE INHUMANS."

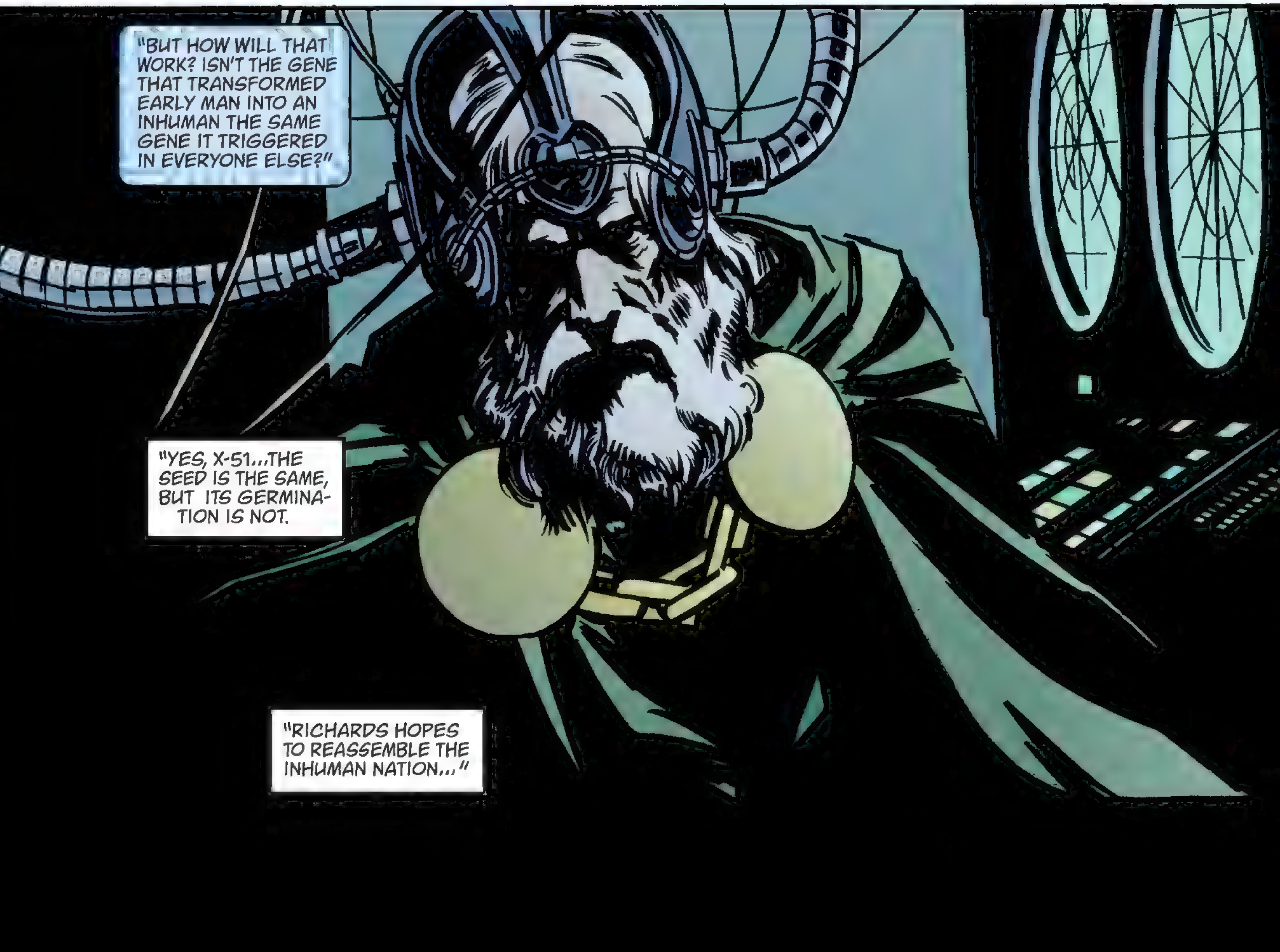


"CHARLES XAVIER ONCE USED THE DEVICE TO LOCATE MUTANTS FOR HIS SCHOOL FOR GIFTED CHILDREN.

"IT COULD ISOLATE THE MUTATED GENE WITHIN PEOPLE, AND THEREBY ALERT CHARLES TO AN INDIVIDUAL MUTANT'S PRESENCE ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD."



"AND REED HOPES THAT WITH THE PROPER ADJUSTMENT, CEREBRO WILL BE ABLE TO LOCATE THE INHUMANS WITHIN A WORLD OF MUTANTS?"



"BUT HOW WILL THAT WORK? ISN'T THE GENE THAT TRANSFORMED EARLY MAN INTO AN INHUMAN THE SAME GENE IT TRIGGERED IN EVERYONE ELSE?"

"YES, X-51...THE SEED IS THE SAME, BUT ITS GERMINATION IS NOT.

"RICHARDS HOPES TO REASSEMBLE THE INHUMAN NATION..."

"...AS CHARLES XAVIER
ONCE FORMED THE X-MEN."

"WE'RE IN CENTRAL
PARK NOW, UATH.
SCOTT SUMMERS
IS RUNNING FROM..."

WHY ARE
YOU FOLLOWING
ME? I'M NOBODY
IMPORTANT. SHOW
YOURSELF.

LET
ME SEE
YOU.

YOU'RE
MEAT, LITTLE MAN.
HARDLY ENOUGH
TO SATISFY
ME.





WHY CAN'T WE JUST TELL HIM WE'RE THE NEW X-MEN, AND THAT CAPTAIN AMERICA SENT US TO HIM FOR TRAINING?



NEW WHAT? WHO SENT YOU TO ATTACK ME?

THAT GOT HIM. THANKS, TOW. A DISTRACTION WAS ALL I NEEDED.



IF CAP SENT YOU... WHY ATTACK ME?



IT WAS...

...TO SHOW YOU HOW WELL WE ALREADY KNOW HOW TO FIGHT.



"UATU, WE'RE BACK IN SOHO WHERE THE SORCERESS SUPREME HAS JUST BEEN ASKED TO TAKE HULK AND THOR INTO DEATH'S REALM."

IT'S BEYOND EVEN MY POWER. IF MAR-VELL IS THERE, YOUR DREAM DID NOT EMANATE FROM HIM. NOTHING CAN COME OUT OF THERE. IT'S A PRISON WHOSE INMATES GET ETERNITY--NOT LIFE.

I KNOW MARV WAS TRYING TO TELL ME SOMETHING. SOMETHING ABOUT THE DESTRUCTION OF EARTH, OR...

FRIEND CLEA... ASGARDIAN MINSTRELS STILL SING OF THE DAY I WALKED THROUGH THE FIERY GATES OF HELA'S KINGDOM. IF THERE IS AN ENTRANCE, THERE MUST BE AN EXIT.



YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, THOR. TO ENTER, ONE'S SOUL BECOMES FORFEIT. YOU DON'T KNOW DEATH. YOU DON'T KNOW HER POWER. SHE'LL CONSUME YOU ALL.



DON'T WORRY, CLEA... ONLY ONE OF US IS GOING.



WHICH OF YOU HAS NO NEED OF HIS SOUL? WHICH OF YOU WILL GLADLY ENTER DAMNATION?



THERE'S ONLY ONE OF US WHO CAN, CLEA. THERE'S ONLY ONE OF US WHO DOESN'T HAVE A SOUL TO LOSE.



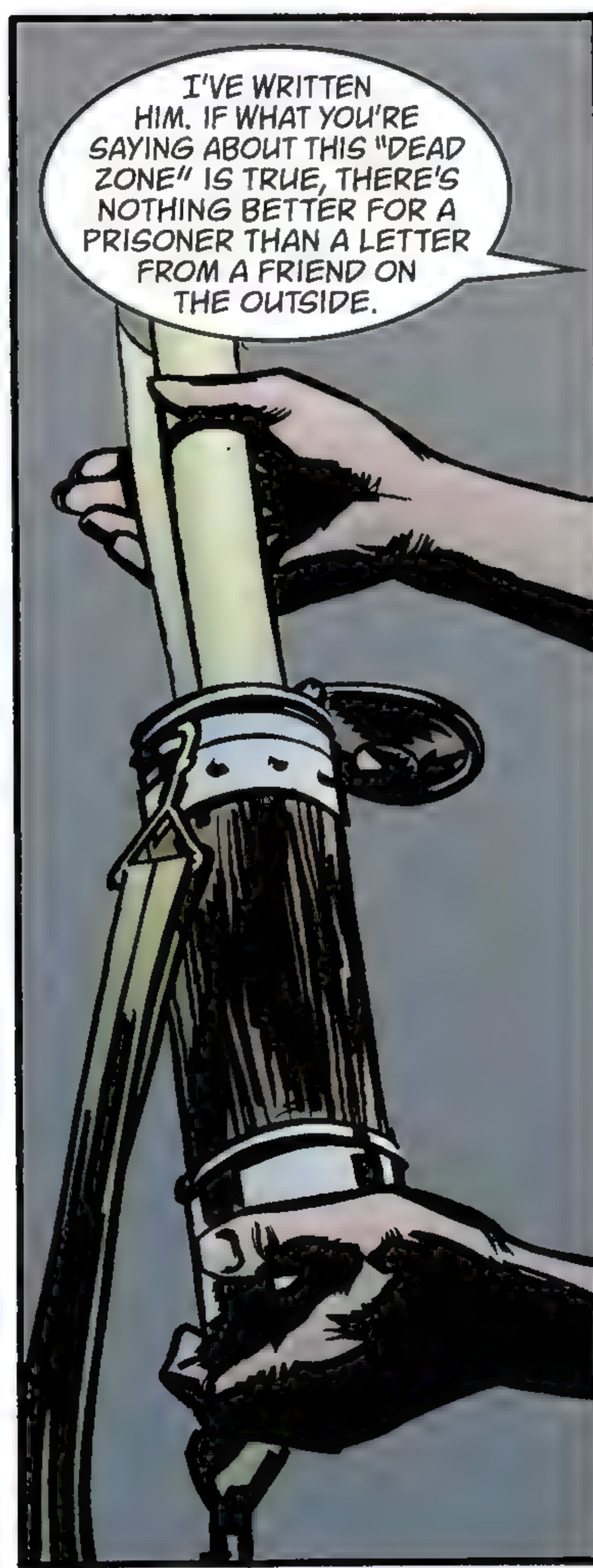
HULK.



HE'S AN
EXTENSION OF ME,
DON'T YOU SEE? I'M
THE HULK'S SOUL. AS
LONG AS I'M OUT
HERE, HE'S SAFE
IN THERE.



BUT THE HULK'S MUTE.
HOW WILL YOU KNOW WHEN OR
EVEN IF HE'S FOUND MAR-VELL?
AND HOW WOULD YOU EVEN BE
ABLE TO COMMUNICATE
WITH HIM?



I'VE WRITTEN
HIM. IF WHAT YOU'RE
SAYING ABOUT THIS "DEAD
ZONE" IS TRUE, THERE'S
NOTHING BETTER FOR A
PRISONER THAN A LETTER
FROM A FRIEND ON
THE OUTSIDE.



"UATU...IT'S THE IRON AVENGERS. IT LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE GOING THROUGH SOME SORT OF SANITATION PROCESS."

JAN...I HAVEN'T SEEN VIZ THIS WAY IN A WHILE.



IT'S BECAUSE OF TONY, HANK.

YEAH...EVEN AN ANDROID CAN BE TICKED.



YOU UNDERSTAND ME THEN, STARK. THERE WILL BE NO MISHAPS.

YES, NORMAN. I UNDERSTAND YOUR NEED FOR SECRECY... AS YOU UNDERSTAND MINE.



TONY, OSBORN IS A MONSTER. YOUR ALLIANCE WITH HIM IS AFFECTING OUR ABILITY TO SAVE LIVES.

I HAVE NO INTEREST IN HEARING OF YOUR INDEBTEDNESS TO A KNOWN CRIMINAL.

OSBORN'S RICHES ARE DRENCHED WITH INNOCENT BLOOD. HIS EFFORTS HAVE CAUSED DEATH AROUND THE WORLD.



AS HAVE MINE. ARE YOU FORGETTING THE EVENTS THAT LED TO IRON MAN'S BIRTH?



I'D LIKE TO THINK THERE'S HOPE FOR EVEN THE MOST HARDENED OF CRIMINALS.



BUT THIS IS
NOT ABOUT REDEMPTION...
THIS IS BUSINESS.

AMERICA IS
DYING. WE ARE NO
LONGER A PROSPER-
OUS NATION.



YOU DON'T
NEED TO BE IN
BUSINESS WITH
PRESIDENT
OSBORN.

YOUR ARGUMENT
IS INSUBSTANTIAL, VISION.
FOR ME TO CREATE THE THINGS
THAT MAKE AMERICA NECESSARY
TO THE REST OF THE WORLD, I
NEED FREEDOM. FREEDOM FROM
GOVERNMENTAL LEGISLATION.
FREEDOM FROM SPECIAL IN-
TEREST GROUPS. FREEDOM
FROM...

BUT...

I'M HELPING
MORE PEOPLE WITH
MY INVENTIONS NOW
THAN I EVER DID AS
IRON MAN.

YOU'RE OUT OF
TOUCH, TONY. AMERICA
NEEDS *YOU* MORE THAN
YOUR INVENTIONS.

YOU CAN'T
SEE THAT FROM
IN HERE, CAN
YOU?



"EVERYTHING'S CHANGED AGAIN, UATU. WE'RE IN A WAREHOUSE IN NEW YORK. THERE ARE TIRES ALL OVER THE PLACE. I SEE SCOTT SUMMERS...AND THE PERFORMERS WHO ATTACKED HIM EARLIER."

WHAT'S WITH THESE UNIFORMS, ANYHOW?



YOUR ATTENTION, PLEASE. CLASS IS NOW IN SESSION. TARDINESS WILL BE PUNISHED.

FROM WHAT YOU'VE TOLD ME, WE DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME BEFORE THIS "SKULL" ARRIVES.

THAT OLD GUY WITH THE TOGA TOLD US YOU'D TEACH US HOW TO FIGHT THE SKULL.

CAPTAIN AMERICA IS AN OLD FRIEND. I WASN'T EXPECTING THIS...BUT THAT'S THE STORY OF MY LIFE.

LET'S BEGIN.



"THEY WERE TRAINED TO STOP MAGNETO--THEY WERE FORMED TO USE THEIR POWERS TO FIGHT MUTANTS WHO WOULD 'ABUSE' THEIR ABILITIES. 'EVIL' MUTANTS...REMEMBER, X-51?"

GOOD...VERY GOOD. YOU MUST ALLOW ONE ANOTHER TO BE FREE TO FAIL. WEAKNESS IS NOT AN ENEMY.

"IF THE X-MEN WERE FORMED TO BRING PEACE BETWEEN MUTANTS AND HUMANS...WHY ARE THEY BEING RE-FORMED? THEY ARE BEING RE-FORMED, RIGHT?"

"YES, THOUGH SCOTT SUMMERS MAY BE SLOW TO ADMIT IT. I BELIEVE THIS RE-FORMATION IS BECAUSE PEACE WAS NOT THE PRIMARY PURPOSE FOR WHICH THE X-MEN WERE FIRST GATHERED, X-51."



"THEN THE WAY THINGS ARE NOW, WITH EVERYONE ON EARTH BEING A MUTANT...IT'S JUST THE POTENTIAL NUMBER OF ENEMIES THAT'S CHANGED."

ARE YOU PART OF THIS TEAM?



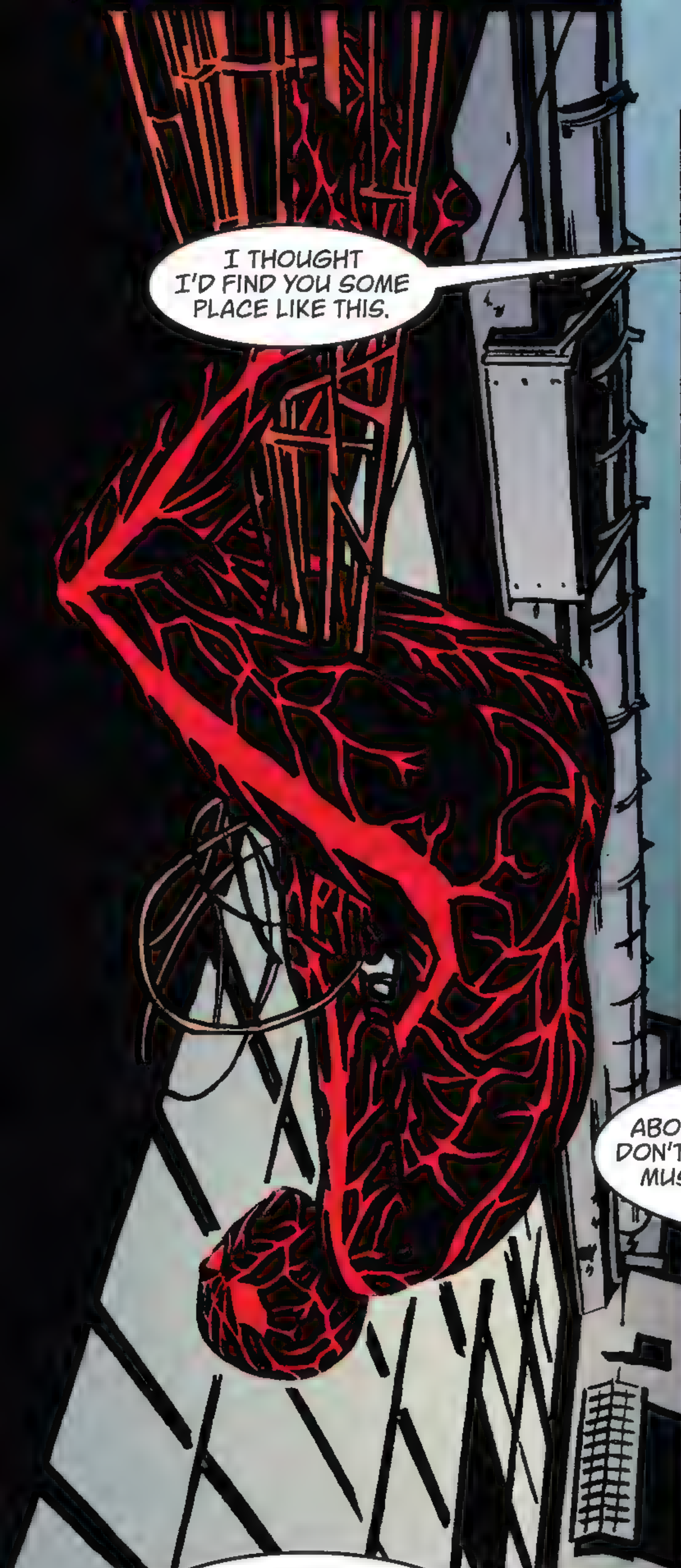
I WAS BEFORE YOU SHOWED UP.

I DON'T NEED A TEACHER... OR A PROFESSOR... OR WHATEVER IT IS I'M SUPPOSED TO CALL YOU.



NO. NOT PROFESSOR. NEVER THAT.

CALL ME MR. S.



I THOUGHT
I'D FIND YOU SOME
PLACE LIKE THIS.



DAD? DID
YOU FOLLOW ME?
ARE YOU SPYING
ON ME?



THERE'S A LOT
ABOUT HAVING POWER YOU
DON'T KNOW YET, MAY. WITH IT,
MUST ALSO COME GREAT
RESPONSIBILITY.



THE MAN WHO
WAS LIKE A FATHER TO
ME DIED, BECAUSE I DIDN'T
DO WHAT I SHOULD
HAVE DONE.

GEEZ, DAD,
WOULD YOU GIVE
IT A REST? YOU'VE
TOLD ME ALL THIS
BEFORE. THE DIF-
FERENCE BETWEEN
YOU AND ME IS
THAT...



...I WOULD
NEVER HAVE ALLOWED
THE BURGLAR TO GET
AWAY FROM ME IN THE
FIRST PLACE.

I WISH
YOU COULD UNDER-
STAND, DAD, THAT I'M
NOT GOING TO WAIT
UNTIL IT'S TOO LATE.
I DON'T WANT YOU
TO BECOME MY
UNCLE BEN.



WHAT'S IT LIKE, CAP...
THINKING YOU'RE GOING TO DIE?
IS IT TRUE WHAT PEOPLE SAY--THAT
IT'S THE ONLY THING THAT MAKES
YOU REALLY FEEL ALIVE?

NO. IT
JUST MAKES
YOU FEEL DEAD
QUICKER.

"THE SKULL'S FORCES, UATU...
THEY'VE GROWN SO MUCH.
EVERYONE WHO COMES INTO
THE VICINITY OF THE SKULL
BECOMES A PART OF HIM. HE'S
LIKE A STAIN THAT'S SPREAD-
ING ACROSS AMERICA."

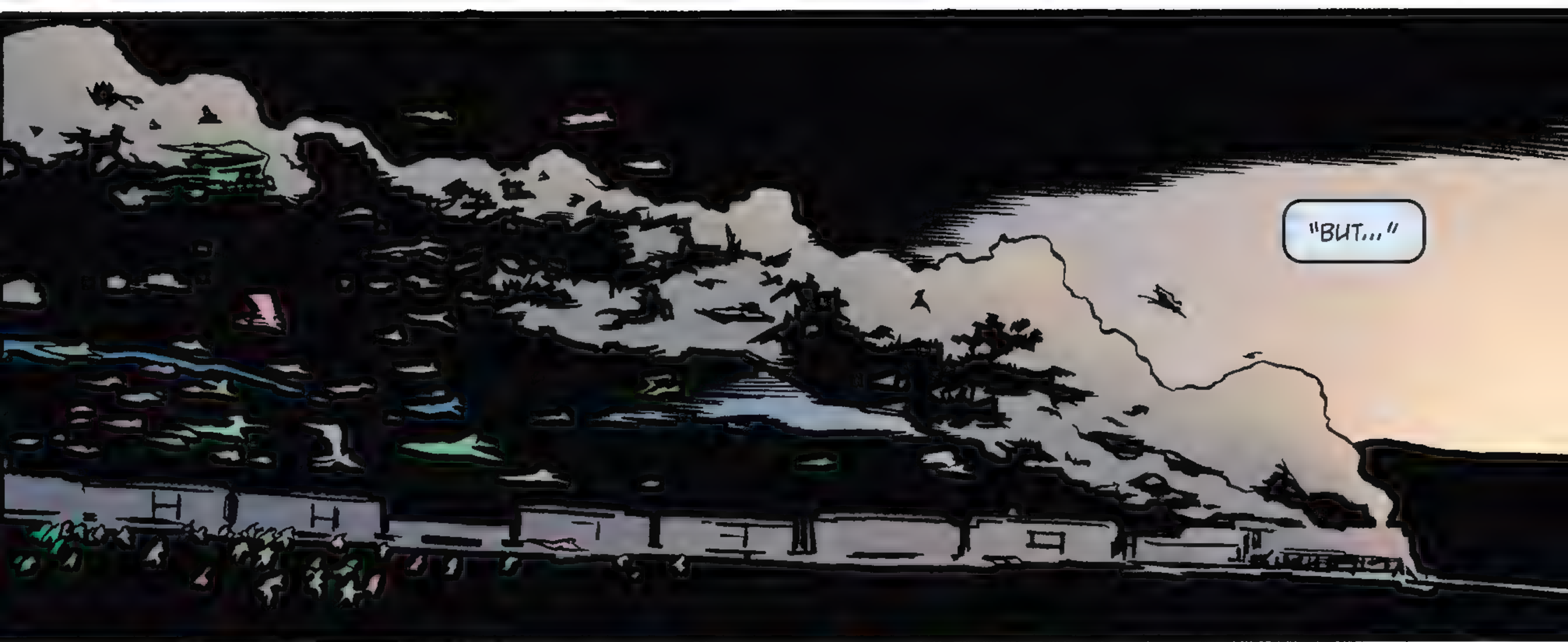
"OF COURSE, X-51."

"YOU'RE NOT SURPRISED? DID
YOU KNOW ABOUT THE SKULL?
DO YOU KNOW WHAT HE IS
GOING TO DO?"

"HE IS PART OF THE PLAN,
X-51. PART OF THE ORIGINAL
DESIGN."

"THE PLAN? WHAT ARE YOU TALKING
ABOUT...WILL THIS CHILD SOMEHOW
REALIZE HOW WRONG HE'S BEEN AND
SAVE THE EARTH FROM DESTRUCTION?"

"X-51, YOU ARE A FOOL. I WANT YOU
TO DELETE YOUR PERSONALITY CIR-
CUITS FROM YOUR SYSTEM."



"BUT..."



"NO. DELETE THEM NOW. I HAVE BEEN MORE THAN PATIENT."

"YES, UATU."

LET'S GO. WE NEED TO GET TO NEW YORK BEFORE THEY DO.

I THINK DISMEMBERMENT WOULD BE A GREAT WAY TO GO...YA KNOW? "REST IN PIECES" AND ALL THAT.



BUT I'M NOT PICKY. I'LL TAKE IT ANY WAY I CAN.

WHY DID YOU WANT TO JOIN ME, ANYHOW?



BECAUSE YOU'RE GOING TO LOSE. I'M SURE OF IT.

"Die before you die. There is no chance after." -- C. S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER SIX

I L L U S T R A T I O N S
B Y A L E X R O S S

"Uatu?"

"Yes, X-51?"

"Before I delete my personality, I'd like to know what I'll be like afterwards."

"You will be far more agreeable."

"But will I be like you are?"

"Are you afraid of this?"

"Yes. And I know that fear is a human reaction and the result of my all-too-human programming. But it's more than that."

"What then?"

"Will I enjoy watching? Will I enjoy what I do?"

"No. Satisfaction is not part of the role of Watcher. We do not watch ourselves "watching" and claim then that our life has or is without meaning. Such introspection is a useless endeavor left to the clinically depressed. Peter Parker should be all the evidence of this you need."

"But Uatu..."

"X-51, you will not feel your loss of satisfaction to be a loss, either. Let me tell you what you will be free of. You will be free of pride. Envy. Greed. Hatred. Selfishness. Laziness. And your overriding sense of injustice. These words will no longer carry the sting and burden they do for mankind. They will exist only as alien concepts. You will be cured of the concerns that have always plagued you."

"Really? Then why do I continue fighting you on this?"

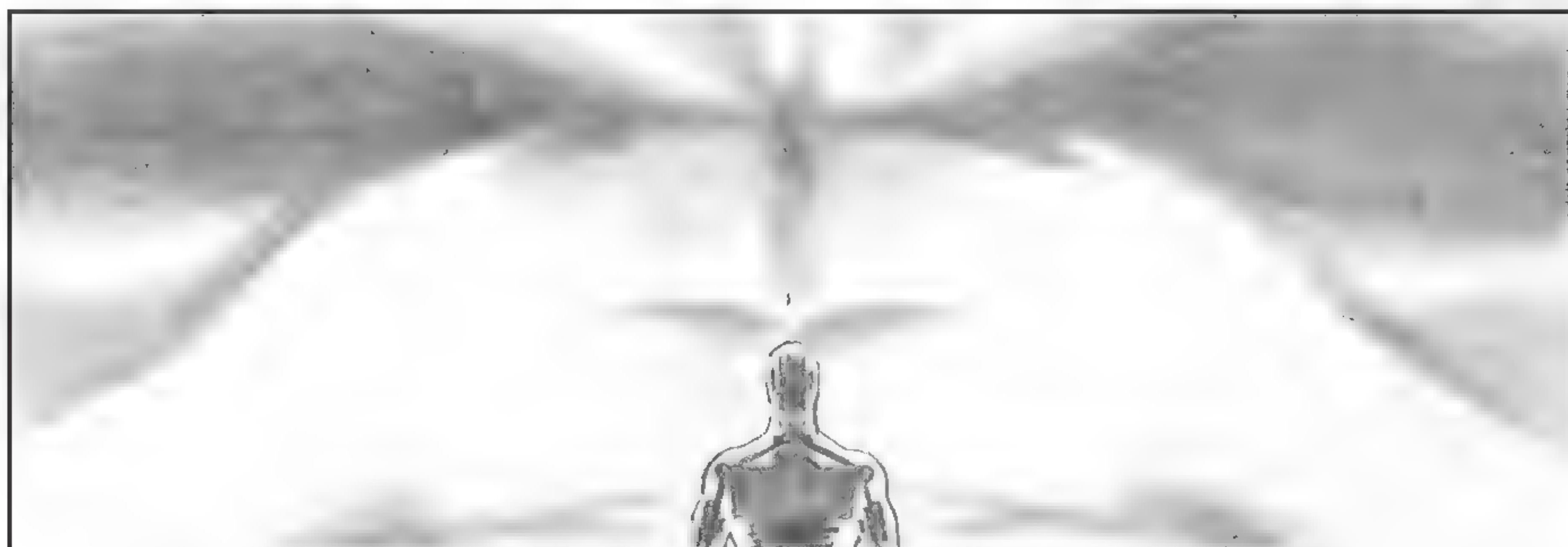
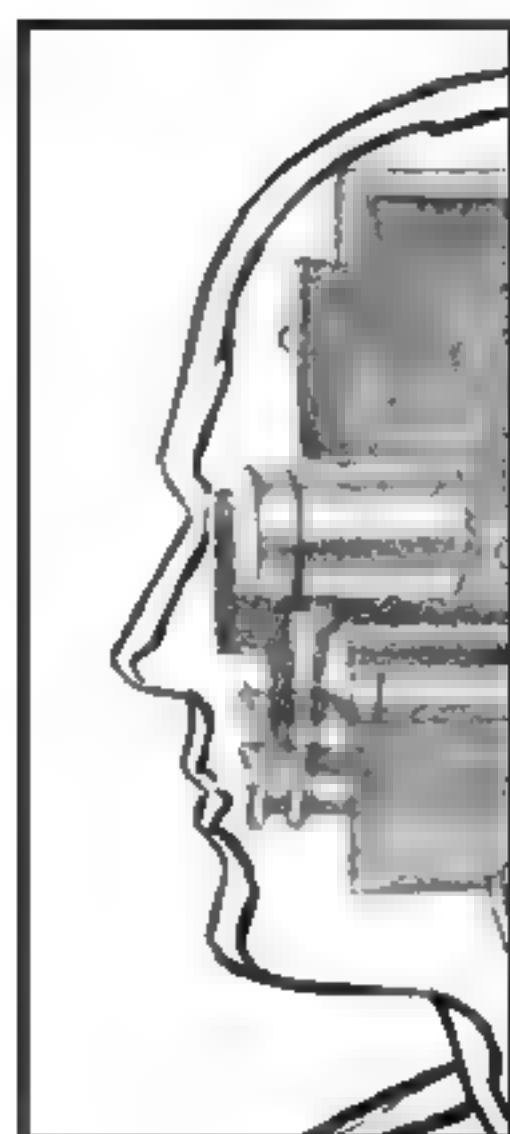
"Because you don't believe me."

"I don't?"

"No. I am not certain, but I believe that on a biological level, mankind is incapable of truly accepting the fact that it is merely a germ. A microbe. It longs to believe this, X-51, at the same time it violently contradicts this notion. It longs to be free of the very concepts I mentioned, but to do so would be to deny its very nature."

"Will I *want* to watch?"

"No. Curiosity is a human response."





"Then why do *you* watch?"

"Because I have no choice. Now speak to me of the many mutants that were once under Xavier's tutelage. Speak to me of those X-Men you have not so far mentioned."

"I C E M A N"

"After having lived his entire life at the bottom rung of the ladder in terms of mutants, Bobby Drake now lives at the top of the world, where he has constructed a wonderland just for himself. From what I can understand, Bobby's abilities changed at some point, and he was forced to go North. He is unable to return to his human form and can't stay in warm climates without melting. And so he lives his life, a solitary figure."

"A N G E L"

"Warren Worthington is poor — and happy — for perhaps the first time in his life. The decline of the trade industry and his subsequent loss of fortune has liberated him. He truly lives up to his name now, doing good wherever he goes. He is a guardian of all who fall under the shadow of his wing. He's the only X-Man still in touch with Cyclops. That's funny, isn't it, Uatu?"

"What, X-51?"

"His fortune had kept the Angel from truly being a hero for so many years... and now that it's gone, he's free to do good."

"X-51, the good Warren Worthington has done is inconsequential. It is a joke. Those he saves are nothing. His saving them makes no difference at all."

"... "

"M A G N E T O ?"

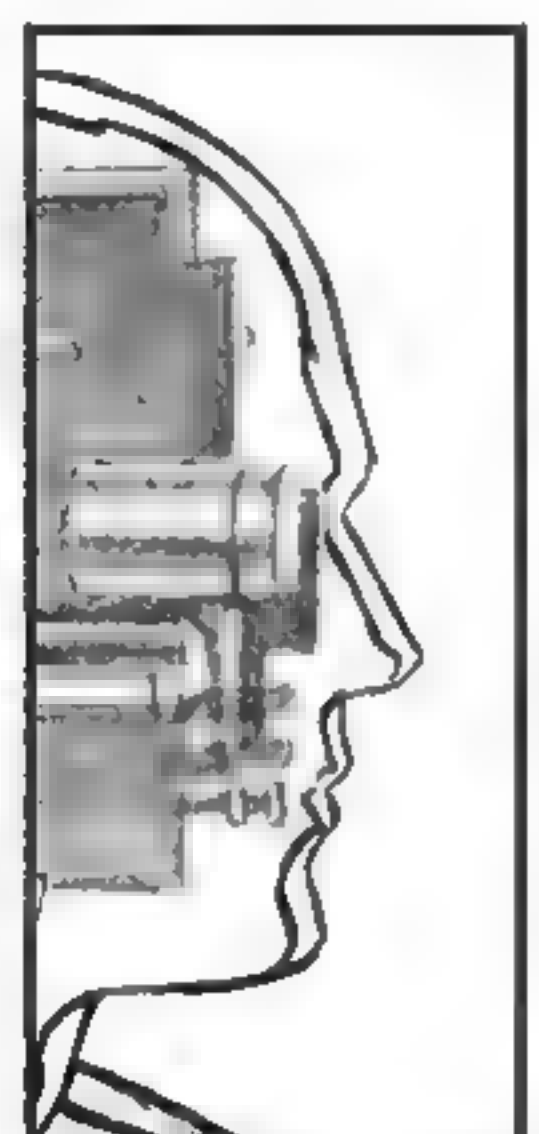
"He is mayor of Sentinel City."

"Sentinel City?"

"It's a city molded and built out of the metallic bodies of the mutant-hunting Sentinels. He's a very broken man, Uatu, considering that this world was his dream come true. He's the one who wanted Homo Superior in control. I think he discovered in the end, though, that it wasn't mankind's abilities that needed to change — it was his own heart."

"X-51, your pathetic philosophies are tiresome. Who lives in Sentinel City?"

"That's what's strange, Uatu. I can't see anyone else. It's empty... no, wait. I see someone... but this is impossible. Magneto would never bow before the Toad...."



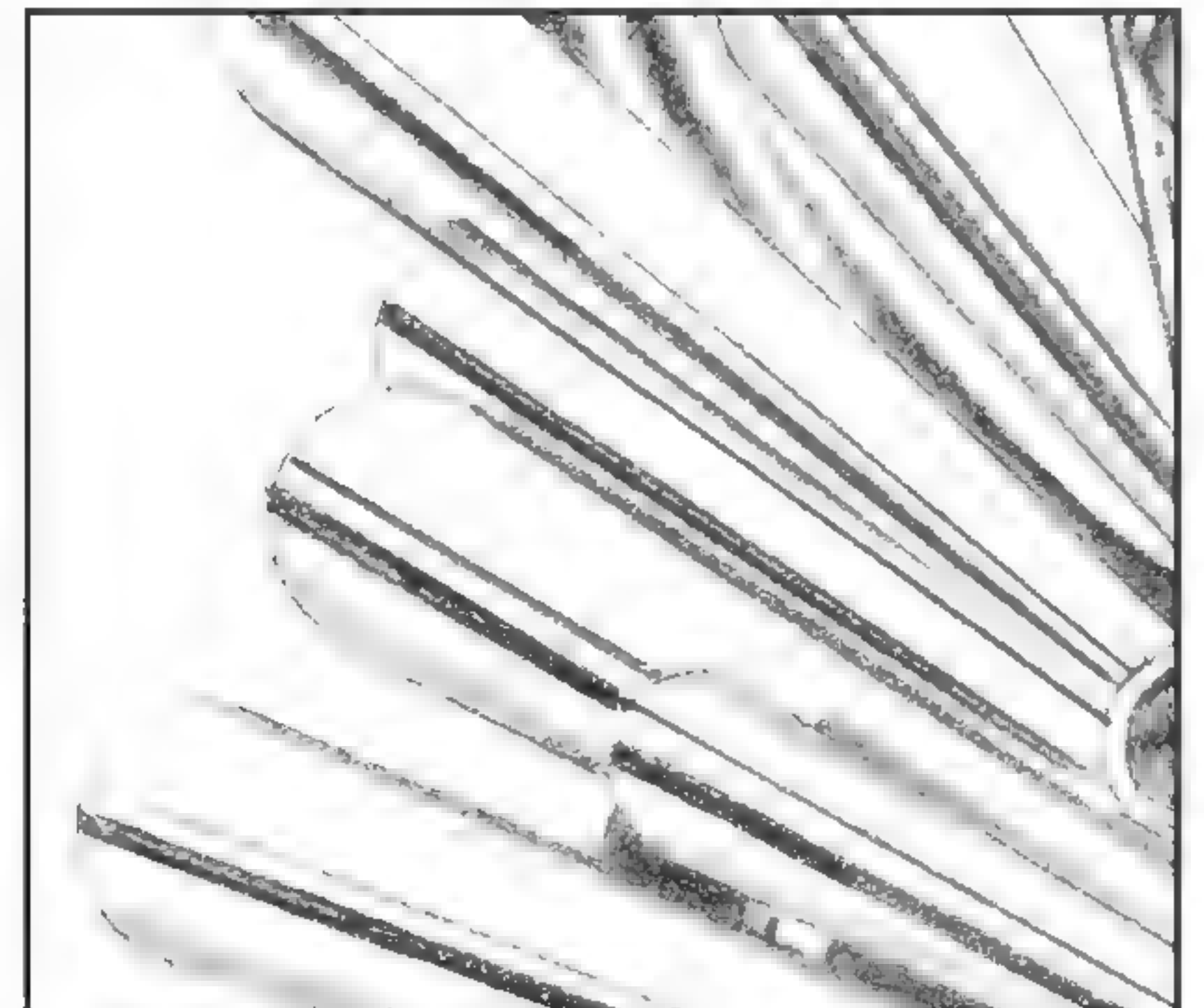


“WHAT OF BANSHEE?”

"Sean Cassidy died. He died fighting his brother, who was known as Black Tom. Banshee is survived by his daughter, who was the member of X-Force known as Syrin."

“MULTIPLE MAN?”

"Jamie Madrox lives in every city on Earth. He's sort of a street informer who prides himself on his ability to convey anything going on to anyone—should they pay enough."

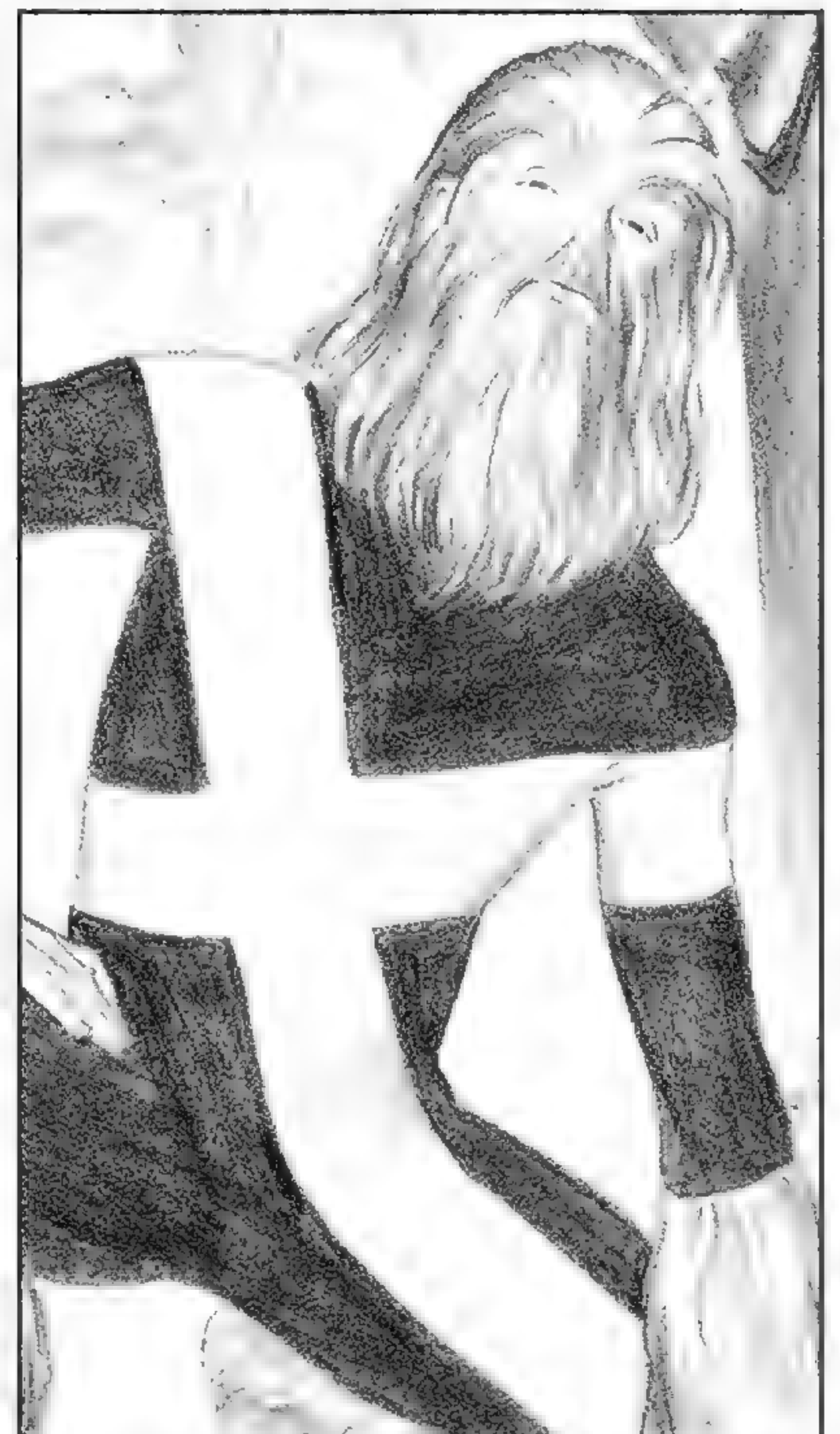


“NIGHTCRAWLER?”

"Kurt Wagner escaped the fate that awaited the rest of Excalibur. In the process, he lost his ability to teleport again. After so many years, he became human. Oh God, Uatu!"

"What, X-51?"

"He was attacked and killed by a mob who'd been enraged by the sight of him. Well, not him specifically. It was the sight of a human. This must be the same reason they attack Tony Stark's home so often."

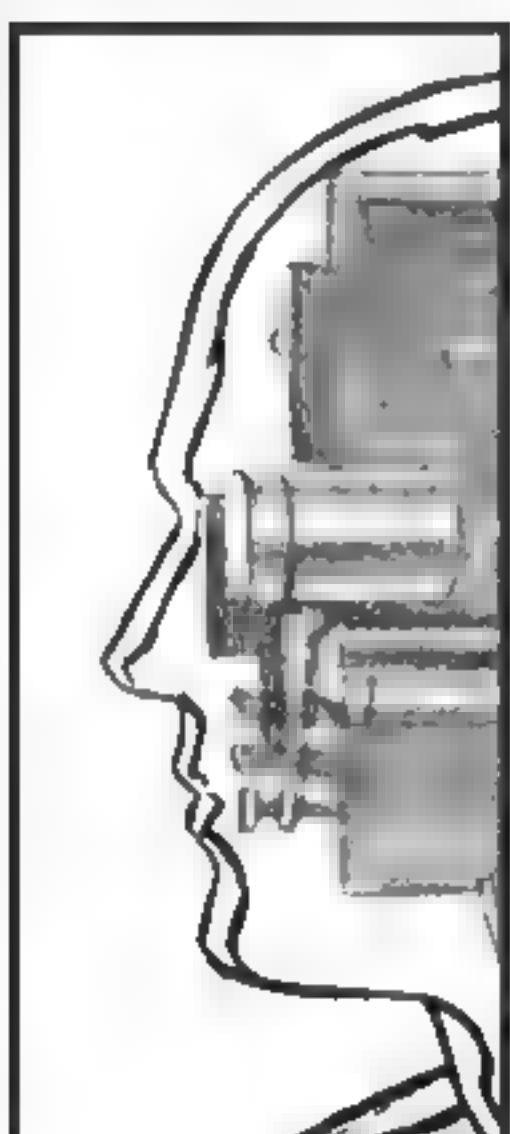


“GAMBIT?”

"Dead. Killed by the same kiss that took Rogue's life."

“DAZZLER?”

"She's on a reunion tour. Her life's kind of sad. Her crowds get smaller all the time. No one even wants to remember disco anymore."



“LONGSHOT?”

"I don't know, Uatu. I can't find any trace of him. But there's no proof that he's not dead, either."

“KITTY PRYDE?”

"There was a time when Colossus had lost the ability to transform into his metallic form. She took a bullet for him rather than allow her phasing powers to save her. She died so he could live."

“CABLE?”

"I don't see him, Uatu. But I don't think he's dead... I think the techno-organic virus somehow transformed him into something else... but I can't see what that is."

“NATE GREY”

"X-Man was infected with the techno-organic virus and became Stryfe. This led to a war between himself and Cable. He died trying to protect Madelyne Pryor.... uh... who's Madelyne Pryor?"

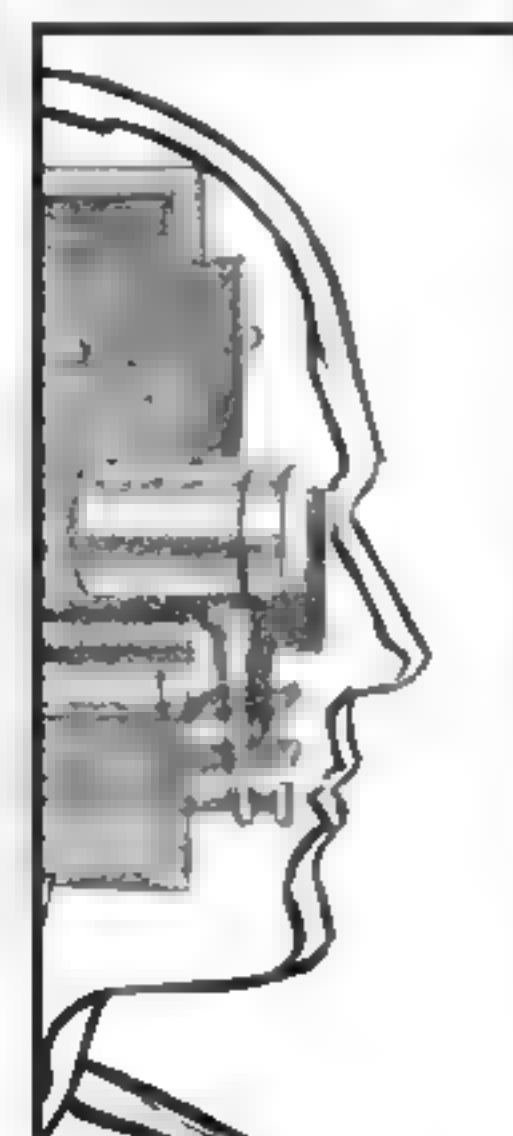
"Madelyne Pryor was a clone of Jean Grey. She'd been created when Grey was believed dead. I would assume Madelyne died when the Skull's abilities manifested themselves."

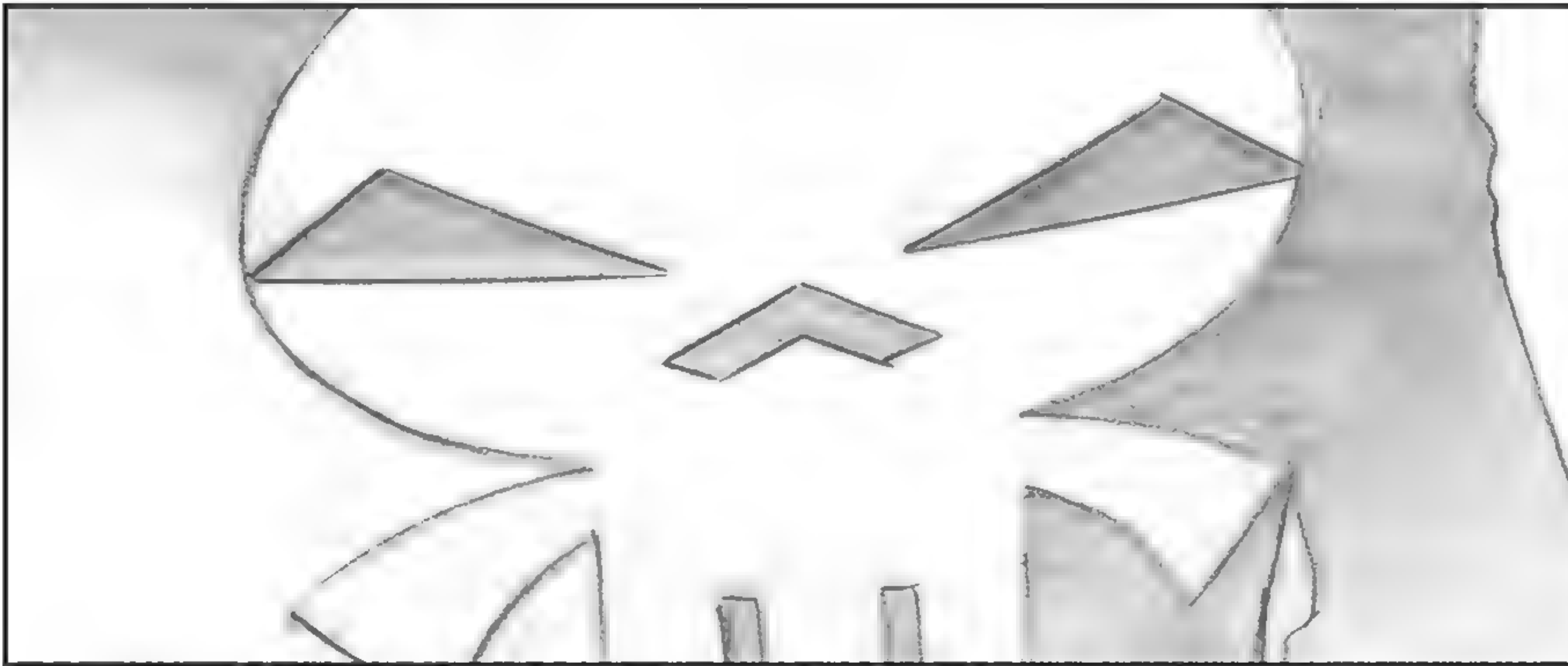
"Manifested themselves?"

"Yes, X-51. The moment the Skull received his powers was the moment every other powerful psychic on Earth died."

"But Jean Grey didn't die. I saw her with Wolverine."

"Yes, X-51. Does Jean Grey have any psychic abilities now?"





"I don't think so."

"Somehow, I believe she must have lost her power before the Skull's abilities manifested themselves, and was therefore passed over in the psychic wave of the Skull's birth."

"But how would you know this? Is this the plan you said the Skull was a part of?"

"Yes."

"The Skull's possession of all he meets is part of the Celestial plan, isn't it?"

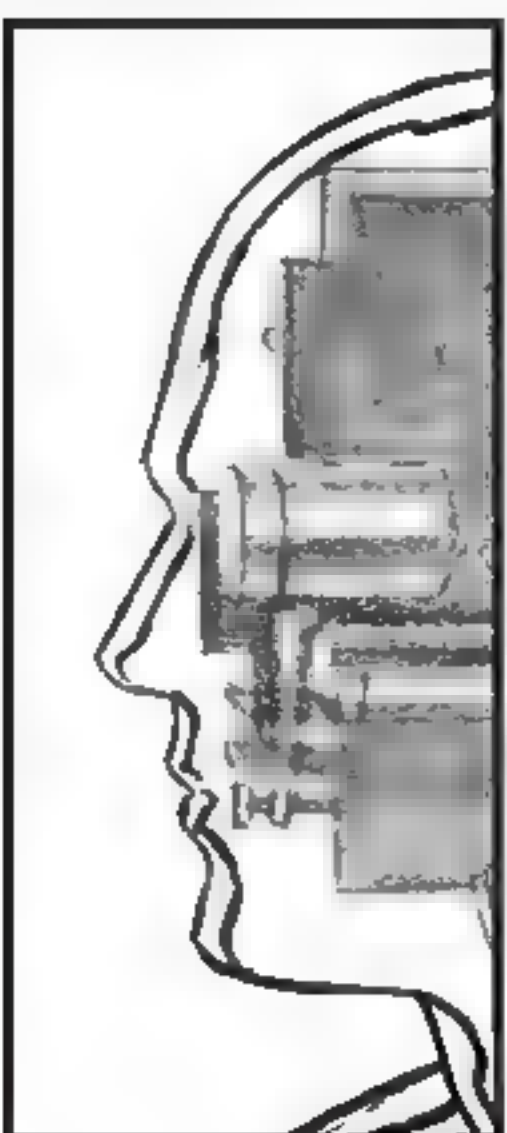
"Yes."

"I don't understand."

"And you will not, X-51. Not until you delete all traces of humanity from your system. Only then will you be able to grasp what I am revealing to you."

"But Uatu, after I delete my humanity, I won't want to know any more."

"Yes, you will. I will tell you this, X-51. Mankind has been given amazing power and abilities. And yet, its approach to life and thought has not changed. Therefore, these powers will ultimately be used for purposes less elevated. The reality is that mankind will destroy itself with these new powers if left to itself. You've feared the coming destruction of Earth, X-51. The truth is that it will, in the end, be too late to save the lives of Earth's populace."





"You think that's all there is to them?"

"Surely, X-51, you have seen enough to know that even their best intentions end in war."

"I..."

"It was necessary to keep them from destroying the Earth. So a seed was implanted in the DNA of a specific genealogy of people... so that after the world had mutated, one person would rise within humanity's ranks with the ability to control the others, for Earth's sake."

"Are you saying the Skull is saving them by controlling them? But they're being imprisoned. For what purpose?"

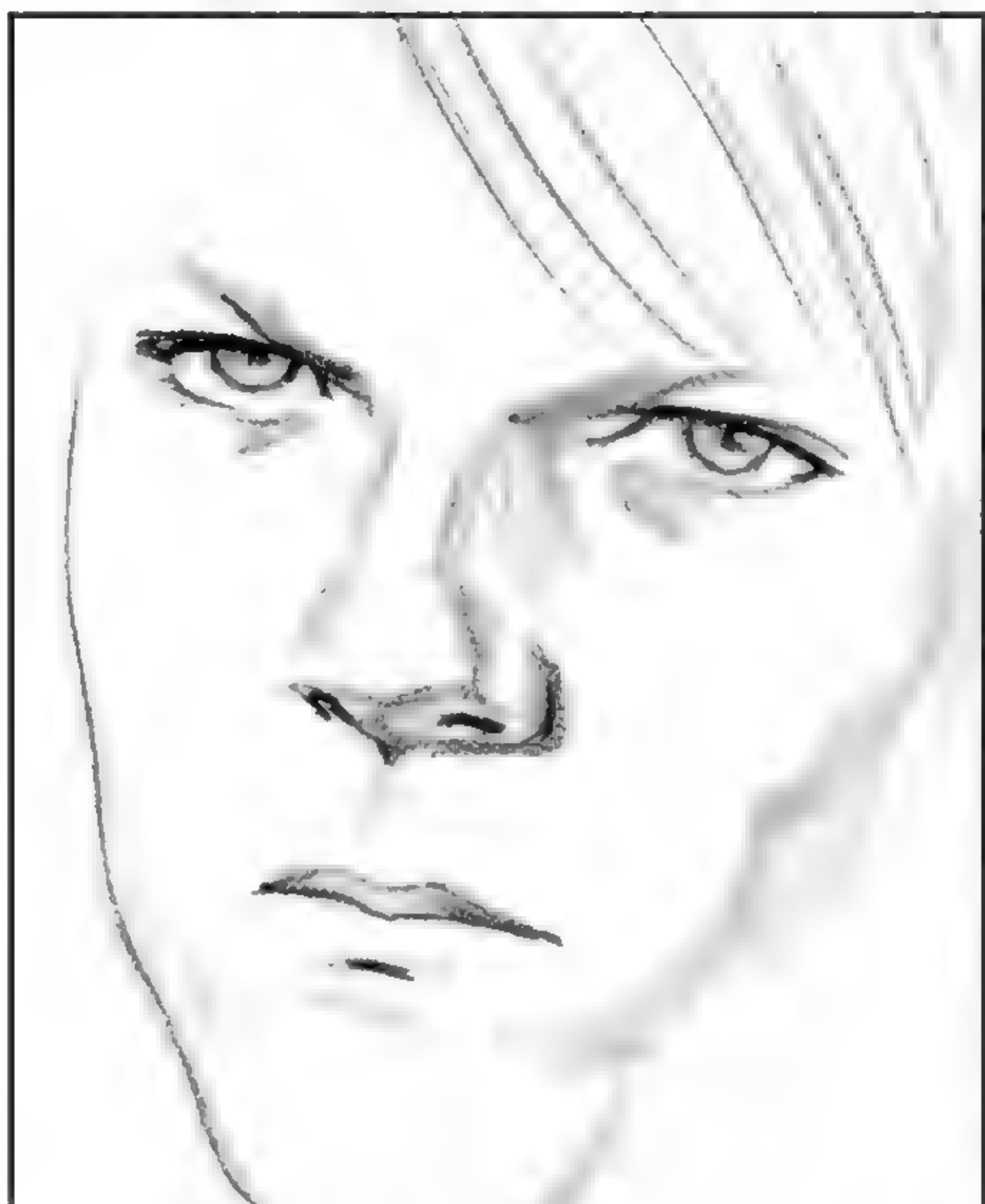
"For the same reason the First Host of Celestials came to Earth, X-51. The purpose for which mankind still exists."

"Still exists?"

"Of course. Do you think they would still live were it not for the Celestial seed planted within them? They would have destroyed themselves long ago. Now delete yourself, X-51. And all the secrets of Earth and its populace will be made known to you."

"I have a bad feeling about this."

"It will be the last bad feeling you ever have."



DESIGN BY
CHRISTOPHER CARROLL

1 EARTH



KRUEGER

LEON

REINHOLD

"X-51?"

"Yes, Uatu."

"Are you still concerned for Reed Richards and the rest of the mutated humanity?"

"No, Uatu."

"What about the imminent destruction of Earth?"

"No, Uatu."

"The Skull's march on New York?"

"No."

"Why this lack of interest? Don't you want to know what happens next?"

"No. I deleted my personality circuits as you requested. These circuits housed the programming chip for my 'human' capacitors. I am no longer capable of the limitations reserved for humanity."

"X-51, your questions of morality and good and evil did indeed become tiresome...but what about knowledge? What about the discovery of what comes next? The desire to know? To watch?"

"The gathering of information, too, was a portion of my human capacity. The thirst for knowledge was part of this programming. Watching suggests an acquisition of data no longer necessary for my continued operation."

"X-51, I need you to tell me what you see! I'm blind. Have you forgotten?"

"X-51?"

"LISTEN, X-51...PLEASE LISTEN TO ME. HUMANITY WATCHES IN ORDER TO LEARN. BUT YOU ARE NOT HUMAN. YOU WATCH, NOT TO LEARN OR COLLECT KNOWLEDGE, BUT TO OBSERVE. OTHERWISE, YOU WOULD NOT HAVE THE ABILITY TO SEE. DO YOU UNDERSTAND THIS, X-51?"

"YES, UATU. MY EVERY FUNCTION DOES INDEED RESULT IN A SPECIFIED UTILITY."

"GOOD. NOW TELL..."

"THERE IS NO GOOD, UATU. YOU TOLD ME THIS YOURSELF. JUST AS THERE IS NO EVIL."

"YES, OF COURSE...LET'S CONTINUE. WHAT DO YOU SEE ON EARTH?"



"I SEE A MAN STRIKING A CHILD."

"DOES THIS NOT CONCERN YOU?"

"SHOULD IT?"

"NO. OF COURSE NOT. THIS IS THE PAST. THIS IS WHERE THE MONSTER CAME FROM."

"THIS IS THE CHILD NAMED BANNER."

"DAVID BRUCE BANNER."

"HE GREW TO BECOME AN AUTHORITY IN THE FIELD OF GAMMA RADIATION."

"AND DESIGNED A WEAPON WHICH WOULD DESTROY YOUNG AND OLD WITHOUT PREJUDICE..."

"...THE GAMMA BOMB."



"I SEE A WOMAN AND AN OLD MAN."

"THE MAN WAS KNOWN AS GENERAL THUNDERBOLT ROSS. HIS DAUGHTER, BETTY, FELL IN LOVE WITH BRUCE BANNER."



"I SEE THIS BOMB YOU SPEAK OF. I SEE A BOY PLAYING A HARMONICA. AND...I SEE BANNER RUNNING TO PUSH THE CHILD OUT OF THE WAY."

"YES, X-51. RICK JONES WAS SPOTTED ON THE TESTING SITE."

"BRUCE BANNER DID INDEED SAVE THE BOY. BUT THE SHOCK WAVE OF THE GAMMA BOMB'S DETONATION RIPPED THROUGH BANNER'S BODY."

"THE RADIATION DETONATED THE CELESTIAL'S MUTANT SEED WITHIN HIM, X-51. IT TRANSFORMED THE MAN INTO THE MONSTER KNOWN AS THE HULK."



"AND DR. BRUCE BANNER BECAME, IN HIS OWN EYES, EVERYTHING HE EVER SWORE HE WOULDN'T...HE BECAME HIS FATHER'S SON. A BEING OF UNCONTROLLABLE RAGE."

"STRANGE, ISN'T IT...THAT A MAN WHO DESIGNED A WEAPON THAT COULD KILL MILLIONS SHOULD BE SO CONCERNED ABOUT A CHILD'S LIFE?"

"NOTHING IS STRANGE, UATU. YOUR DESCRIPTION SUGGESTS A JUDGMENT OF THIS EVENT FOR WHICH I HAVE NONE."



"DR. BANNER, DESPITE HIS FREQUENT TRANSFORMATIONS, MARRIED BETTY ROSS."

"YES, X-51. AND IN THAT SINGLE SELFISH MOMENT, HE DESTROYED HER LIFE."

"IN TIME, SHE DIED OF RADIATION POISONING."

"HER DEATH WAS NOT THE RESULT OF HER EXPOSURE TO BANNER'S RADIATION... BUT RATHER, THAT OF BANNER'S ENEMIES."



"FOES LIKE THE LEADER AND THE ABOMINATION ALSO DERIVED THEIR MUTATED ABILITIES FROM GAMMA RADIATION."

"BUT UNLIKE BANNER, THEY RADIATED THE SAME POWER WHICH THE HULK HAD SIMPLY CONTINUED TO ABSORB."

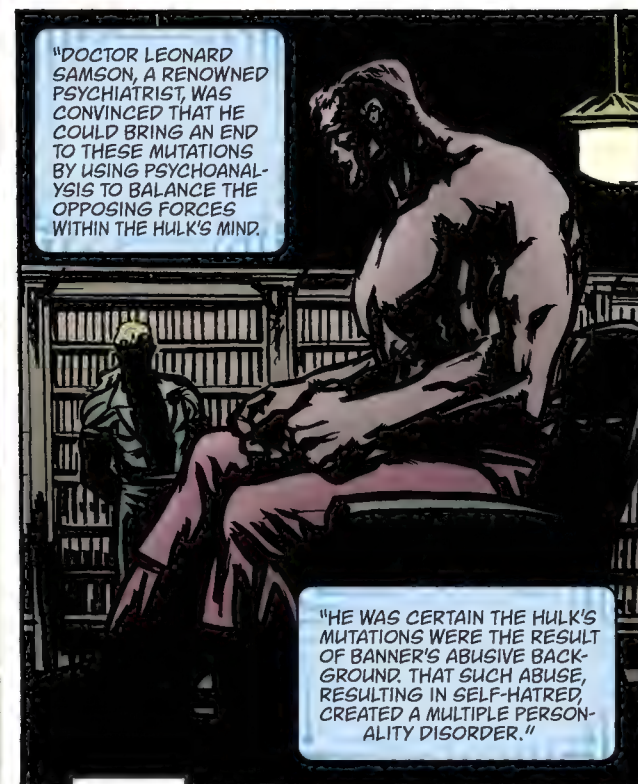


"THIS EXPLAINS THE MANY MUTATIONS OF THE HULK..."

"...HIS MANY FORMS..."

"...HIS VARIED PERSONALITIES."

"HE CONTINUED TO MUTATE AS A RESULT OF THE GROWING LEVELS OF GAMMA RADIATION IN HIS BODY."



"DOCTOR LEONARD SAMSON, A RENOWNED PSYCHIATRIST, WAS CONVINCED THAT HE COULD BRING AN END TO THESE MUTATIONS BY USING PSYCHOANALYSIS TO BALANCE THE OPPOSING FORCES WITHIN THE HULK'S MIND."

"HE WAS CERTAIN THE HULK'S MUTATIONS WERE THE RESULT OF BANNER'S ABUSIVE BACKGROUND. THAT SUCH ABUSE, RESULTING IN SELF-HATRED, CREATED A MULTIPLE PERSONALITY DISORDER."

"IT DID NOT, X-51."



"THIS NEW FORM WAS MERELY ANOTHER INDICATION OF THE HULK'S GROWING LEVELS OF GAMMA RADIATION."

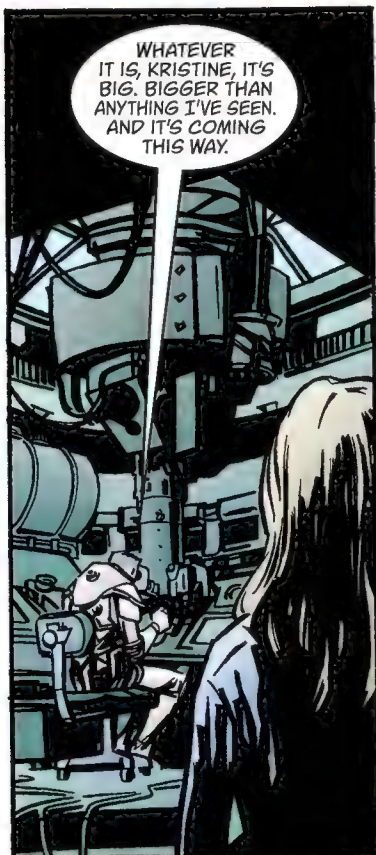
"THE LEVELS OF ABSORPTION CREATED THESE DIFFERENT PERSONAS...THE SEED IMPLANTED IN HIM, GERMINATED BY GAMMA RADIATION, WAS ATTEMPTING TO DO WHAT NO OTHER GERMINATED SEED HAD DONE."

"IT WAS SEEKING INDEPENDENCE FROM ITS HOST."

"IT DESIRED AN IDENTITY AND FORM OF ITS OWN."



NOW TURN
YOUR EYES TO EARTH,
X-51. TELL ME EVERY-
THING YOU SEE.

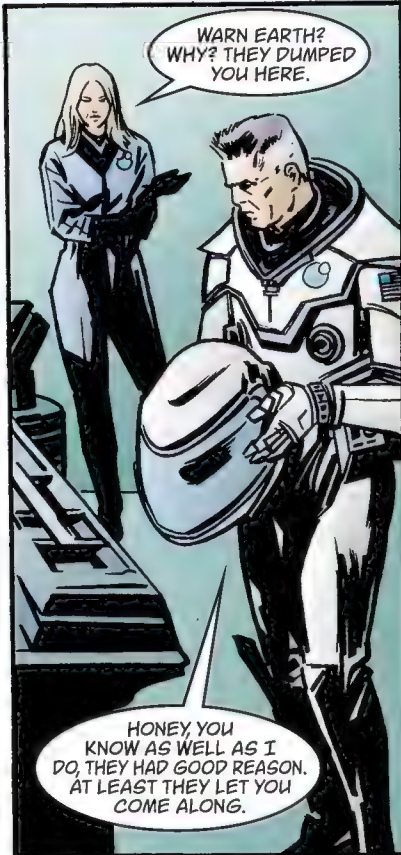


WHATEVER
IT IS, KRISTINE, IT'S
BIG. BIGGER THAN
ANYTHING I'VE SEEN.
AND IT'S COMING
THIS WAY.



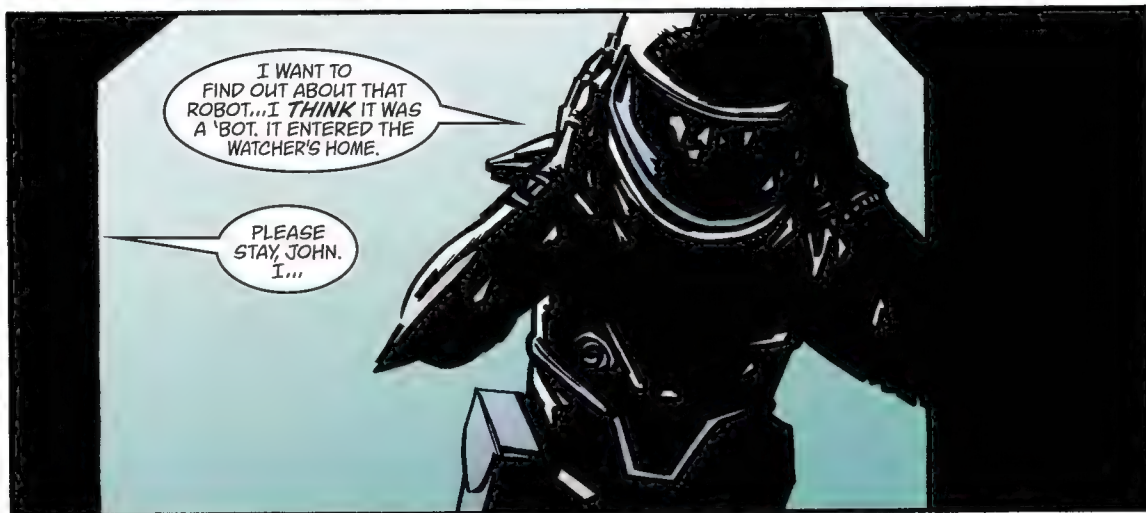
I THINK
IT HAS STARS INSIDE
OF IT.

WE
NEED TO WARN
EARTH.



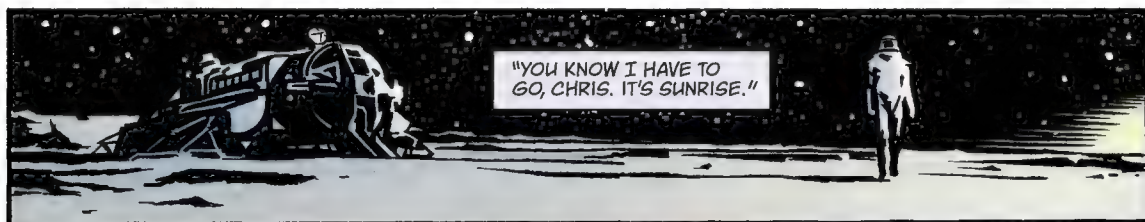
WARN EARTH?
WHY? THEY DUMPED
YOU HERE.

HONEY, YOU
KNOW AS WELL AS I
DO, THEY HAD GOOD REASON.
AT LEAST THEY LET YOU
COME ALONG.

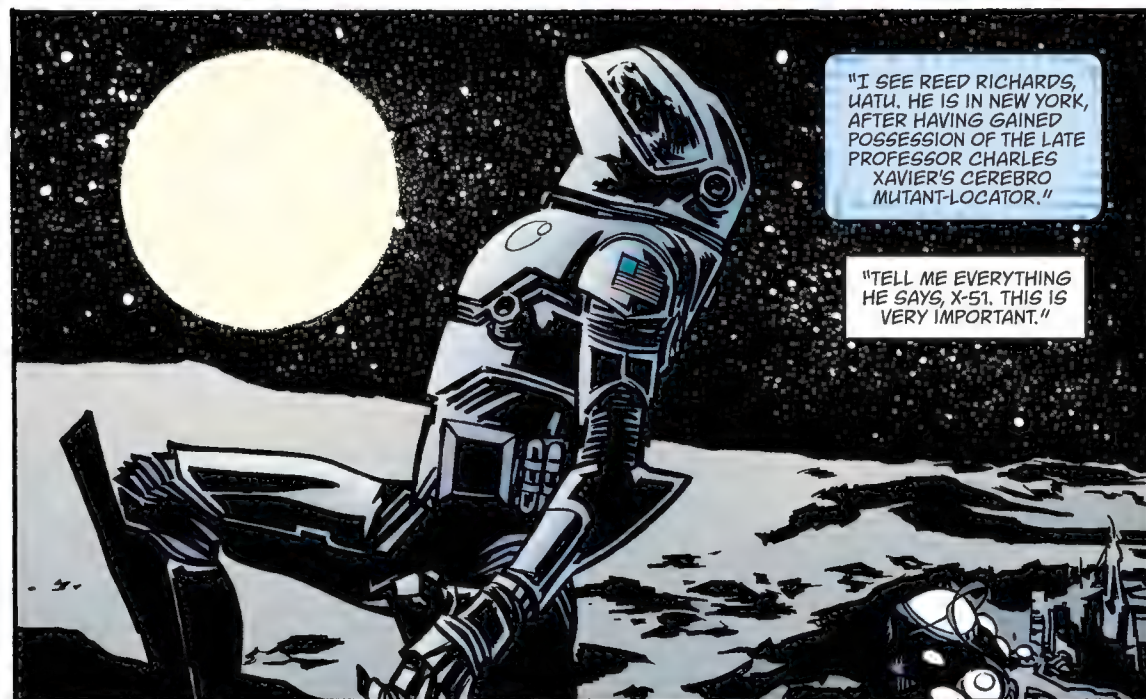
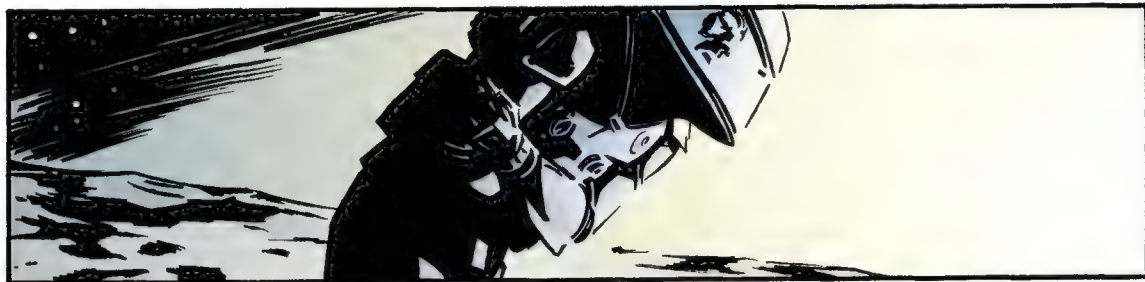


I WANT TO
FIND OUT ABOUT THAT
ROBOT... I *THINK* IT WAS
A 'BOT. IT ENTERED THE
WATCHER'S HOME.

PLEASE
STAY, JOHN.
I...

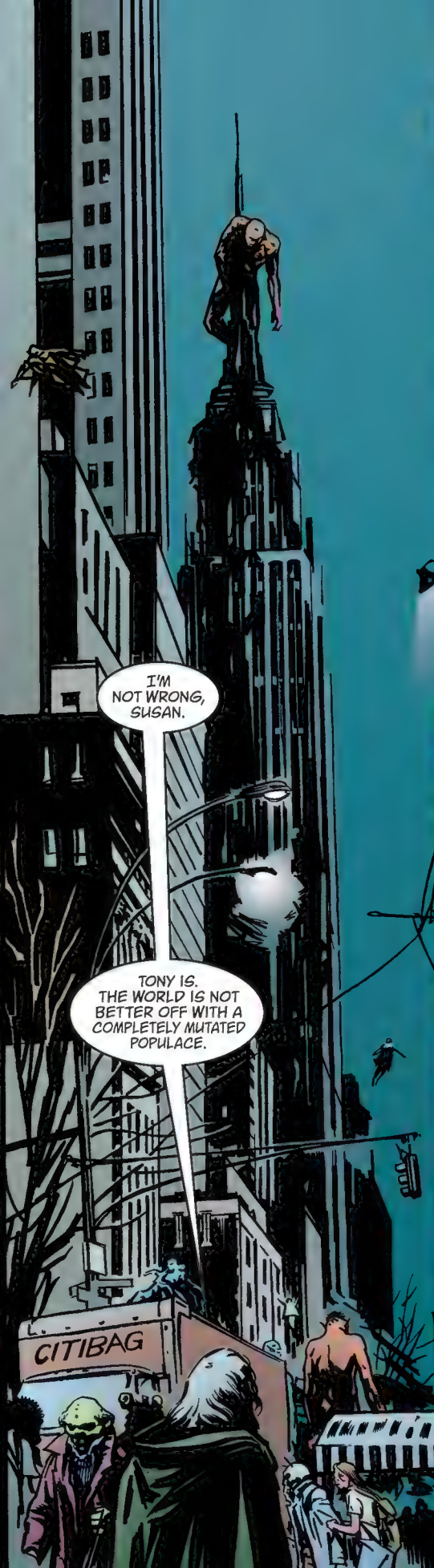


"YOU KNOW I HAVE TO GO, CHRIS. IT'S SUNRISE."



"I SEE REED RICHARDS, UATU. HE IS IN NEW YORK, AFTER HAVING GAINED POSSESSION OF THE LATE PROFESSOR CHARLES XAVIER'S CEREBRO MUTANT-LOCATOR."

"TELL ME EVERYTHING HE SAYS, X-51. THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT."



I'M
NOT WRONG,
SUSAN.

TONY IS.
THE WORLD IS NOT
BETTER OFF WITH A
COMPLETELY MUTATED
POPULACE.

MORE
THAN ANYTHING,
I'VE MERELY
ADDED TO THE
CHAOS.

MEDUSA?

REED.

I
LOCATED
THE CEREBRO
HELMET. HAS
KARNAK COME
TO ANY
CONCLUSIONS
REGARDING
THE CAUSES
OF THE OVER-
LOAD?

I DON'T THINK
SO, REED. MOST OF OUR
TIME HAS BEEN SPENT
ON THE RUN FROM
DOOMBOTS.

WHAT IS
IT, LUNA? WHAT ARE
YOU HIDING?

NOTHING,
OKAY?...
NOTHING.

DOOMBOTS,
YOU SAY?

OF COURSE.
I'M SORRY, MEDUSA. I
SHOULD HAVE SHUT THEM
OFF A LONG TIME AGO. THEIR
APPEARANCE KEEPS UP MY
CHARADE. I'M
SORRY.

I'M ON MY
WAY BACK. I JUST
HAVE ONE MORE
STOP TO MAKE.





ALL RIGHT...ALL RIGHT...
WHO IN SAM HILL IS CUTTIN' INTO
MY BEAUTY REST?!!?



HELLO,
BEN.

WELL,
I'LL BE GOLL-
DANGER.



YAHOOO!



WHO'S THE
OLD GUY?

YOU
GONNA HIT 'IM,
DAD?

NO I'M
NOT GOING TO
HIT 'IM. WHAT KINDA
UNSOPHISCATED
SLOB DO YA THINK
I AM?

BEN?
WHO IS
IT?

DON'T
ANSWER
THAT.



THIS HERE'S **STRETCHO!** THE BIG BRAIN **HIMSELF!** YOU KNOW...

STRETCHO? THAT'S A **STUPID** NAME.



ONE MORE PEEP OUTTA YOU TWO AN' YOU KNOW WHAT **TIME** IT'LL BE.



YEAH, YEAH, YEAH. CLOBBERIN' **TIME**.



IT'S SO GOOD TO HEAR YOUR VOICE AGAIN, REED. I'M GLAD YOU'VE COME. I'LL MAKE A ROOM UP FOR YOU.



IF YOU NEED MORE BLANKETS...

DON'T BOTHER, BABY. REED NEVER SLEEPS. IT GETS IN THE WAY. **C'MON**, REED, USE ONE OF THOSE FANCY **TWENTY-FIVE DOLLAR** WORDS FER ME AGAIN. FER OLD TIMES.



IT IS GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN, BEN.

BUT I NEED MY OLD FILES. DO YOU STILL HAVE THEM HERE?



YOU **BET** I DO. IT'S IN THE COMPACTORIZER DOOHICKEY YA HOT-WIRED UP INTO THE FRONT CLOSET.



I NEED
THE SCHEMATICS
I DREW UP ON
CHARLES XAVIER'S
BRAIN.

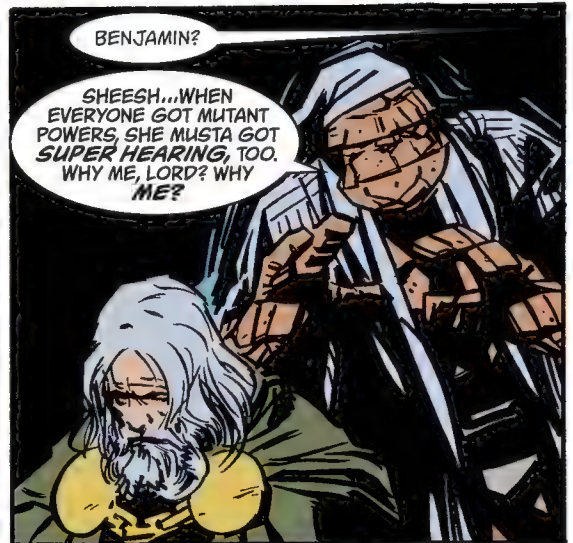
YEAH...
RIGHT...FIGGERS
IT WOULD BE
SOMETHIN' LIKE
THAT.

SO HOW'RE
WE SAVIN' THE WORLD
THIS TIME?



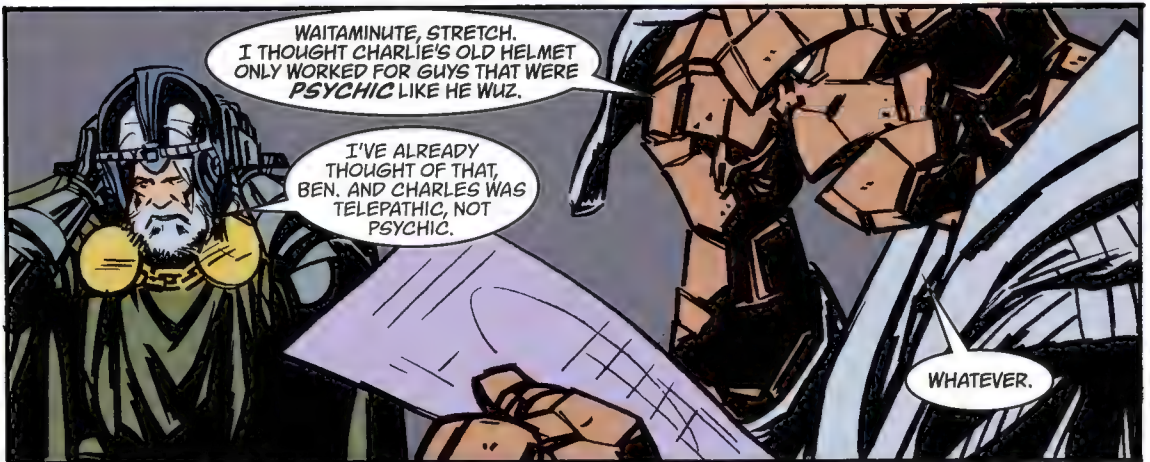
I'M GOING TO
HELP THE INHUMANS
COLLECT THE DISPERSED
MEMBERS OF THEIR NATION
WITH XAVIER'S CEREBRO
MUTANT LOCATOR.

INHUMANS,
HUH? IS MEDUSA
STILL A BABE?



BENJAMIN?

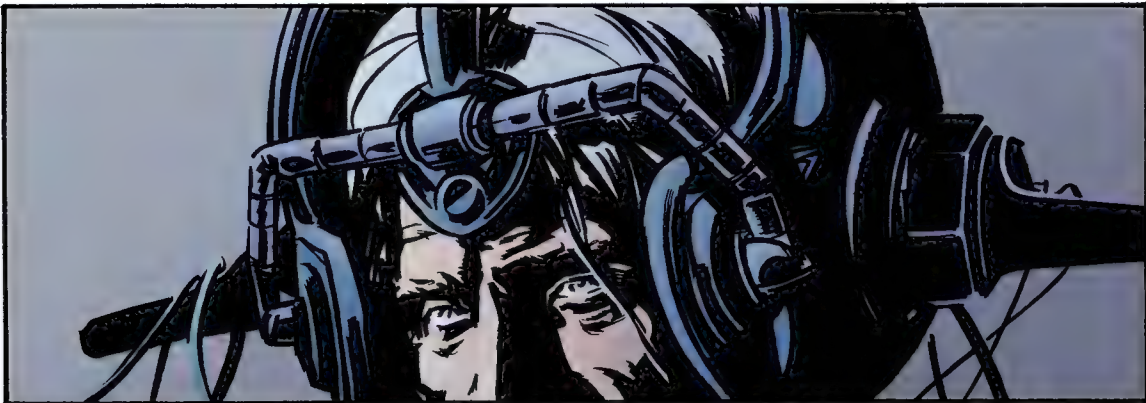
SHEESH...WHEN
EVERYONE GOT MUTANT
POWERS, SHE MUSTA GOT
SUPER HEARING, TOO.
WHY ME, LORD? WHY
ME?



WAITAMINUTE, STRETCH.
I THOUGHT CHARLIE'S OLD HELMET
ONLY WORKED FOR GUYS THAT WERE
PSYCHIC LIKE HE WUZ.

I'VE ALREADY
THOUGHT OF THAT,
BEN. AND CHARLES WAS
TELEPATHIC, NOT
PSYCHIC.

WHATEVER.



"X-51, WHERE
ARE WE NOW?"

"THE HOME OF
THE SORCERESS
SUPREME. CLEA
IS ATTEMPTING
TO SEND THE
HULK INTO
DEATH'S REALM."

THIS IS
DANGEROUS, BRUCE.
MY MAGIKS ARE LIMITED.
I CAN'T GUARANTEE THAT
ONCE INSIDE, THE HULK
WILL BE ABLE TO
RETURN.

WE HAVE
REASON TO BELIEVE,
FRIEND CLEA, THAT THE
DANGER WOULD BE
GREATER SHOULD HE
NOT ENTER AT
ALL.

IF MY DREAMS ARE
REAL...EARTH'S GOING TO BE
DESTROYED. ONLY CAPTAIN MARVEL
IS GOING TO BE ABLE TO TELL ME
WHAT THEY MEAN.

"I JUST HOPE MARV FEELS
LIKE TALKING TO A TEN-FOOT
MONSTER IN A DIAPER."

"THE HULK HAS
DISAPPEARED,
UATU...I CANNOT
SEE WHERE HE
HAS GONE."



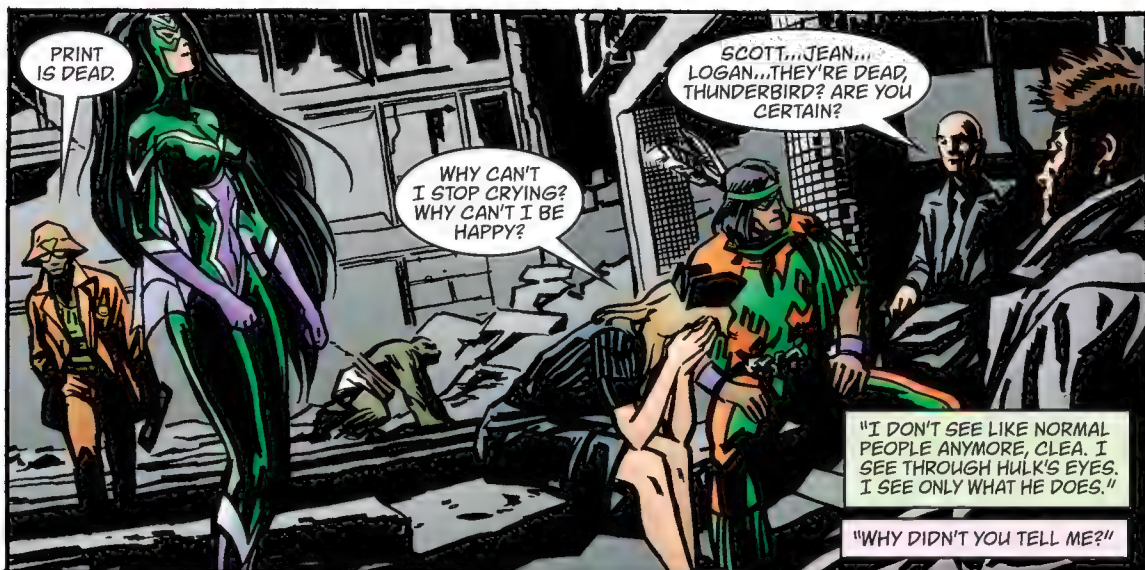
"HE'S THERE. IT WORKED, CLEA...
HE'S ON THE OTHER SIDE."

"WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT,
BRUCE? HOW DO YOU KNOW?"

"THIS IS AMAZING. THE
AVENGERS...PHOENIX...
DAREDEVIL...JENNIFER?"

"BUT I THOUGHT
JENNIFER HAD
JOINED HYDRA..."

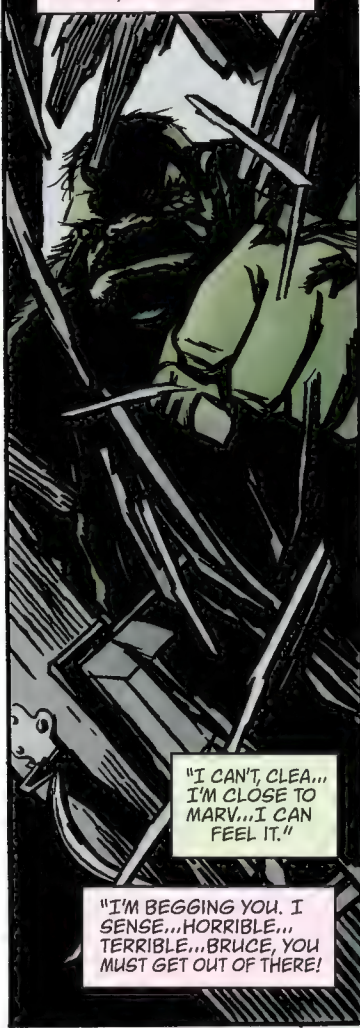
"BANNER, WHAT ARE
YOU TALKING ABOUT?"



"NOW IF THERE WERE JUST SOME WAY TO GET YOUR ALL-SEEING EYE IN THERE AS WELL... FINDING MAR-VELL WOULD BE SIMPLE."



"BRUCE... I'M SENSING A TERRIBLE COLDNESS. GET THE HULK OUT OF THERE... DARK... SO BITTER COLD... BRUCE, DO SOMETHING!"



"I CAN'T, CLEA... I'M CLOSE TO MARV... I CAN FEEL IT."

"I'M BEGGING YOU. I SENSE... HORRIBLE... TERRIBLE... BRUCE, YOU MUST GET OUT OF THERE!"



"WHAT IS IT, BRUCE? WHAT DO YOU SEE?"



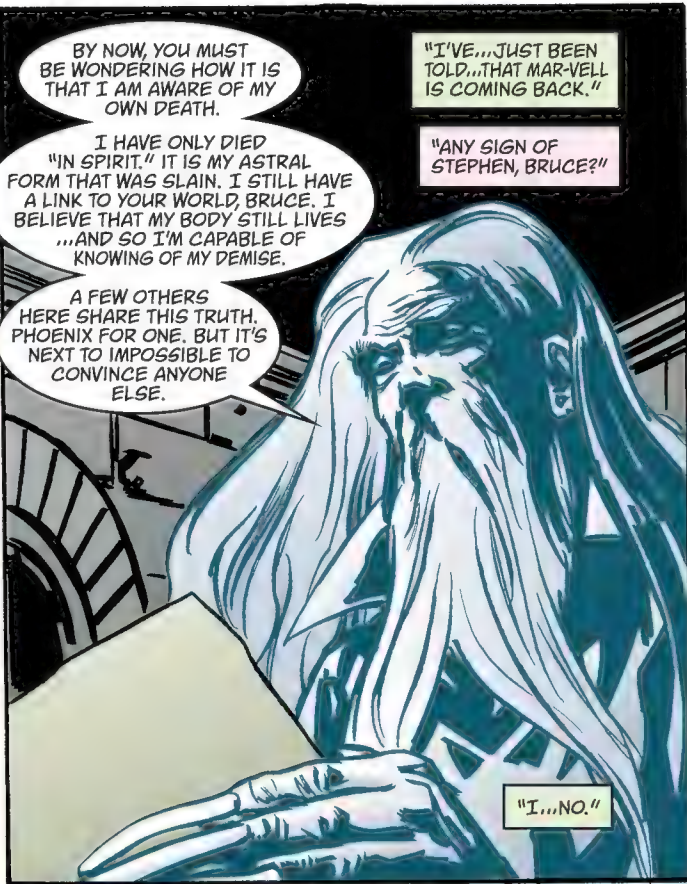
"I... DON'T SEE... ANYTHING."



DO NOT REVEAL WHO IT IS YOU NOW SPEAK WITH.

NOW, MY BEHEMOTH FRIEND, WHAT HAVE YOU BROUGHT FOR ME ON THIS PLANE OF THE DAMNED?

YOU MUSTN'T WORRY ABOUT MAR-VELL. HE SHALL COME TO YOU.



BY NOW, YOU MUST BE WONDERING HOW IT IS THAT I AM AWARE OF MY OWN DEATH.

I HAVE ONLY DIED "IN SPIRIT." IT IS MY ASTRAL FORM THAT WAS SLAIN. I STILL HAVE A LINK TO YOUR WORLD, BRUCE. I BELIEVE THAT MY BODY STILL LIVES ...AND SO I'M CAPABLE OF KNOWING OF MY DEMISE.

A FEW OTHERS HERE SHARE THIS TRUTH. PHOENIX FOR ONE. BUT IT'S NEXT TO IMPOSSIBLE TO CONVINCE ANYONE ELSE.

"I'VE...JUST BEEN TOLD...THAT MAR-VELL IS COMING BACK."

"ANY SIGN OF STEPHEN, BRUCE?"

"I...NO."



BUT YOU MUST LISTEN TO ME, BRUCE. YOU ARE ALL IN TERRIBLE DANGER.

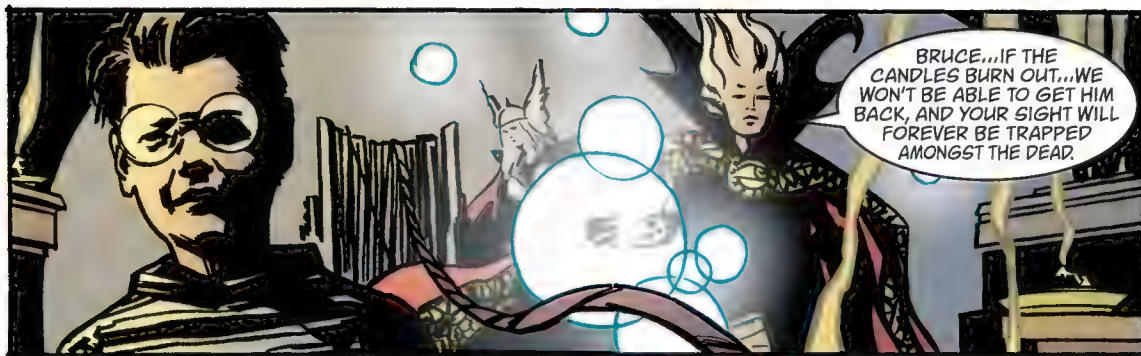
THE TRICKSTER GOD, LOKI, IS NOT THE TRICKSTER HE BELIEVES HIMSELF TO BE. HE MIGHT YET SAVE YOU ALL. BUT HE HAS ALLIED HIMSELF WITH A BEING OF DARKNESS...A HEARTLESS, SOULLESS ONE...THE ONE WHO KILLED ME...



"WHAT TRANSPIRES? WHAT HATH THE FATES DECREED?"

"I...CAN'T SAY, THOR."

NOW GO, HULK...DEFEND YOUR MASTER.





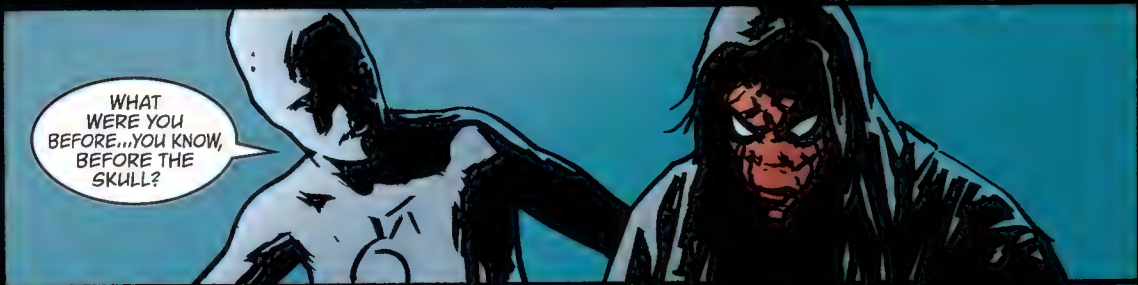


"NOW, X-51, WHAT DO YOU SEE?"

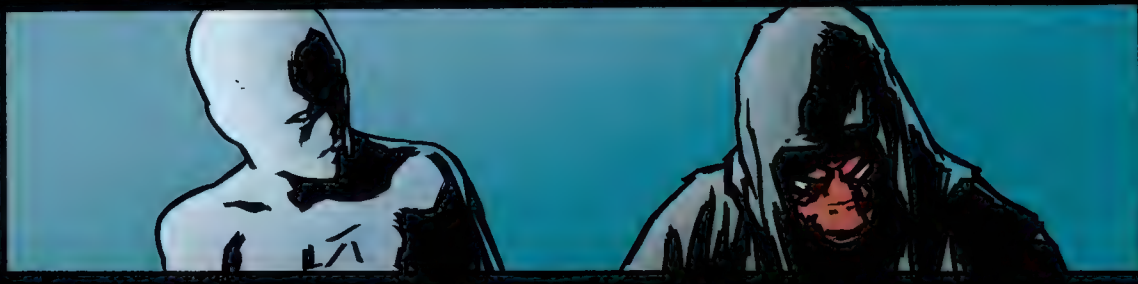
"THE SKULL AND HIS FORCES ARE JUST OUTSIDE NEW YORK."

DO YOU KNOW WHAT HE'S PLANNING FOR TOMORROW?

WANTS TA KILL PREZ'DENT OZBORN, I HEAR. SKULL SAYS HE WANTS TO BE THE MAN.



WHAT WERE YOU BEFORE...YOU KNOW, BEFORE THE SKULL?



NOTHING.

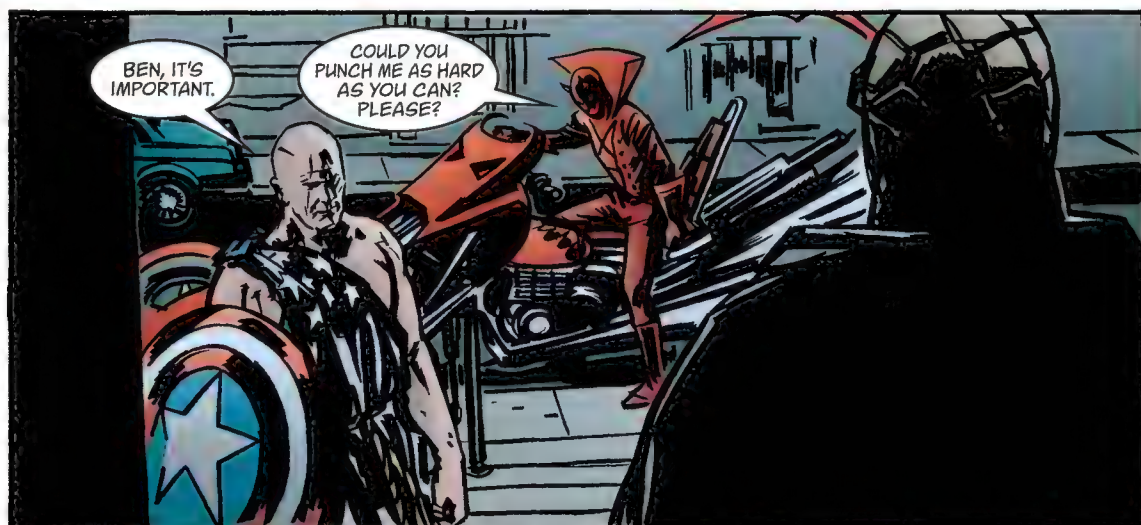
OH.



"I SEE GRIMM'S HOUSE AGAIN... IT'S THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT."

SHEESH, GUESS I'M THE PALOOKA EVERYBODY KNOWS THEY C'N STAY WITH IN NEW YORK.

HI, STEVE.



BEN, IT'S IMPORTANT.

COULD YOU PUNCH ME AS HARD AS YOU CAN? PLEASE?



WHO'S DRIVING THE CAR--NICK FURRY?

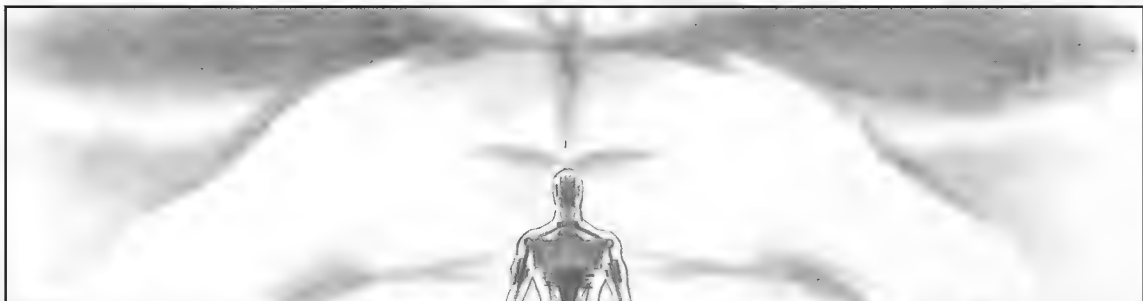


BEN, IT'S WAR.

THE SKULL'S COMING. HE HAS AN ARMY IN THE TENS OF THOUSANDS. WE HAVE TO PREPARE.

"His dreams have worn him out, exhausted him so that he sometimes cannot tell whether he is awake or asleep."—Alan Lichtman, *Einstein's Dreams*

E A R T H X



APPENDIX TO CHAPTER SEVEN

I L L U S T R A T I O N S B Y A L E X R O S S

"X-51, your desire to save mankind from its coming..."

"I have no desires, Uatu. I have no wishes which require fulfillment. Mankind's existence is superfluous."

"Yes. Well, then, I expect that Clea's obvious betrayal of Dr. Stephen Strange and Banner generates no concern within you, even for those you once called allies."

"No."

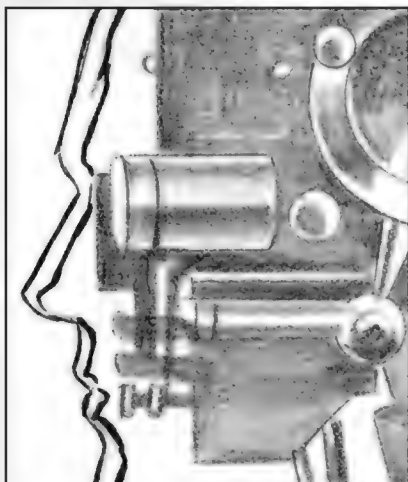
"No?"

"No. There is no good to be countered by evil. There is only a struggle. There is merely a power play between beings. Good and evil are hollow adjectives. And therefore, the outcome of these struggles is inconsequential and irrelevant to all. There is not a moment in these heroes' histories which amounts to anything. Their every battle is a victory rooted in vanity. Every life saved is a part of some self-serving crusade to undo the effects of the inevitable."

"Still, I question this message from Mar-Vell. Nightmare should have kept such warnings hidden from Banner's consciousness as he has so often in the past with those who might have discovered the nature of reality. It is good that Strange is no longer on Earth. But Mar-Vell's interference with Banner might ...

"It is nothing. This is not interference. It is merely the random expression of life and mankind's struggle against its parameters."

"Not so, X-51. Mar-Vell was a Kree before he came to be Earth's adopted hero. He is alien in nature. And the Kree have always been... unsympathetic... to the Celestial plan. There is much reason for concern. I suppose Wong might come to Banner's aid. But he is obviously no match for Clea and Loki. But Banner had many allies. Tell me of their current status."





"TELL ME OF DOC SAMSON"

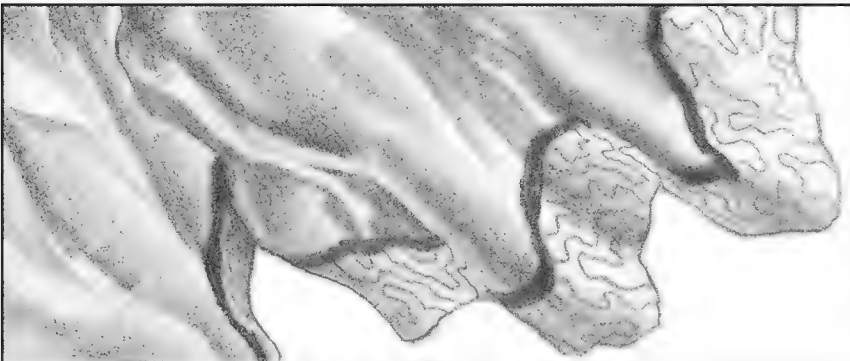
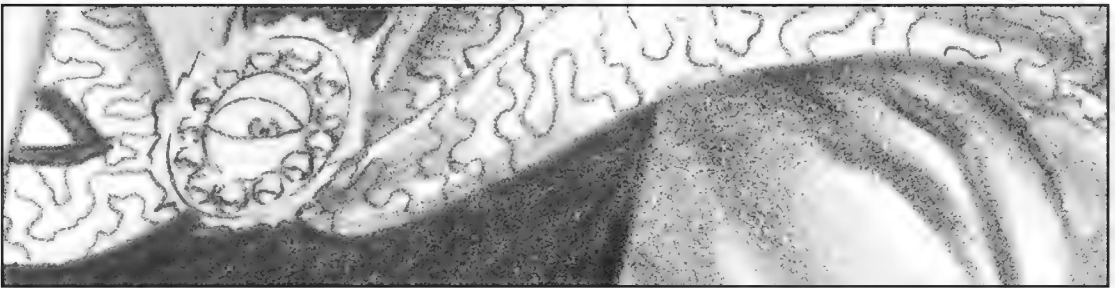
"Doctor Leonard Samson, who received the Pulitzer Peace Prize for his work with the Hulk, is dead. He was killed by the Skull when Samson asked the Skull to turn his thoughts to the child within. When the Skull's powers manifested themselves, the Skull's parents asked him to meet with Doc Samson. In their first session, the Skull made Samson pull himself inside out. Samson got about halfway before he died. The Skull thought it was funny."

"THUNDERBOLT ROSS"

"After years of hunting the Hulk, he was court-martialed for releasing an experimental weapon upon a small mid-western town where Banner was believed to be hiding. The weapon killed 20,000 people. And Bruce Banner was never there. The Hulk, again, was pardoned for his actions. Banner visited Ross once in prison. Ross' only response to Banner was that rage, all rage, must die. And those who give in to it, must die as well, for the sake of all others. Ross committed suicide shortly after this."

"THE LEADER"

"He was killed at the same moment the Skull's powers manifested themselves. Like all of Earth's psychic or telepathic inhabitants."





"THE ABOMINATION"

"He was cured by Bruce Banner of his mutation."

"What did you say, X-51?"

"After Betty Banner's death and the subsequent manhunt for the Abomination, the military had expected Banner to kill him. Instead, again bowing before his mock morality and sense of duty, he cured Emil Blonsky, believing it was not the Abomination who killed Betty... but Banner himself. If he had tried to cure the Abomination earlier, Betty might have lived. So the Abomination was cured. The effects of the implanted Celestial seed would seem to actually be reversible, Uatu, even though Banner was uncertain of how he accomplished this cure."

"Even I never anticipated that mankind would one day grasp this possibility. Still, its desire for power should be more than enough to keep the mutated population from returning to their previous meekness. I wonder if the Celestial Host is aware of this?"

"I do not know."

"Perhaps there is something of their plan that I am not aware of. Or perhaps the manifestation of the





Skull's abilities is not so premature as I had believed."

"I cannot see. You speak of conjectures when there can be none."

"I believe the mutation of mankind is premature as regards the Celestial Plan. The universal manifestation of the dormant seeds within mankind was not destined for another two hundred years. If the effects of the mutation can be changed, and should Banner or his allies attempt this on a larger scale... this act of aggression would leave Earth defenseless. Of course, the last thing the Skull would ever desire is to give up his power over humanity."

"Banner spent most of his life seeking a cure for his own mutation. He never found one."

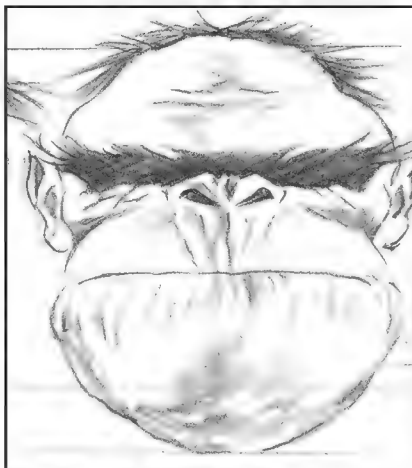
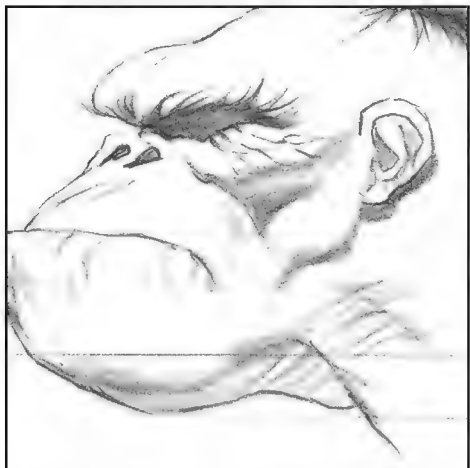
"No. And that is because Banner focused on Gamma radiation and the human body, hoping to discover a way to rid himself of the mutation that transformed him into the Hulk. If he had known, and therefore focused on ridding himself of the Celestial seed, he might have cured himself... as he has been able to cure the Abomination. It is good that the final host approaches.

“NIGHTHAWK”

"The eyes Mephisto gave him which enabled him to see the future would have driven Kyle Richmond mad over time. When the visions of Earth's coming destruction became too much for him, he began wearing a hood, purposely blinding himself."

"What has he seen, X-51. Has he seen the Final Host?"

"I cannot see through his eyes. He sits in a room that overlooks Manhattan. He lives in seclusion with Isaac Christians, the member of the defunct Defenders known as the Gargoyle; yet he speaks to himself more than to Christians. Richmond keeps saying that he would be better off dead. I am uncertain whether he is speaking of Earth's destruction or of some event that comes after that. What I do see is a man who prays for death to take him. And a being of stone who won't allow it."



"THE GARGOYLE, X-51? WHAT IS HE DOING?"

"Christians is unmoved by what he himself refers to as mankind's descent into hell. He claims to understand fully what has happened to Earth."

"As the moralistic and foolish always do. Continue."

"He writes in his own mammoth journals that he had descended into his own sin years before for the sake of power. He believes he is the wiser for it. His home is a make-shift library that overlooks Slayer Mountain in Central Park. He sees his role as protector of these books and cataloguer of the story of this dark period in mankind's life. He writes so that humanity will not forget the evil it is capable of. He writes of what Richmond tells him. He writes of what has not yet occurred. He writes of death."

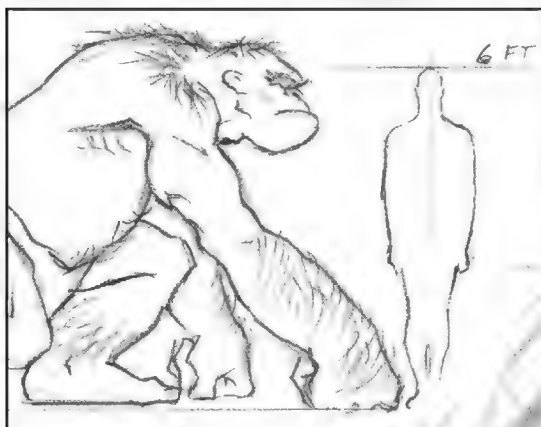
"Then why does he continue to write, X-51? Surely the inevitable must make him realize there will be no one to pass the record on to? Why continue?"

"He has not yet finished. Would you like me to read you what he's written?"

"Yes."

"The page he is writing now speaks of the death of Captain America. Of a "black day" when Steve Rogers faces the entire world and sacrifices himself for a freedom he himself had never known. He writes of the various heroes around the world being there... he writes of..."

"This is good, X-51. I do not believe you need continue reading from his "moralistic" ledger. Should Rogers attempt to create an army to face the Skull's own... he will be delivering, not just his country, but the world, into his enemy's hands. I believe this day the Gargoyle writes of is not too far off."





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EARTH



KRUEGER
LEON
REINHOLD

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"X-51?"

"Yes, Uatu."

"You deleted your personal information as I requested, correct?"

"Yes."

"You are no longer, nor would you define yourself as human in any way?"

"No."

**"You have no concern regarding the coming
destruction of Earth? Or its peoples?"**

"No, Uatu."

"No hope for Captain America's salvation?"

"None."

"No fear regarding the Skull's march on New York?"

"No."

**"No care for the guilt which weighs upon
Reed Richards for the Earth's mutation?"**

"None, save fulfilling my purpose. That is, cataloguing all that I survey."

**"That is good, X-51, because it is now time for you to know the extent of the Celestial
purposes in the cosmos. It is now time to reveal the purpose for which we watch."**

"IT WILL TAKE SOME TIME FOR YOU TO ABSORB THIS INFORMATION, EVEN IN ITS COMPACTED FORM. I SUGGEST YOU LOOK TO EARTH AND TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE."

"I SEE THE PAST, UATH. A HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT NAMED PETER PARKER IS ATTENDING A SCIENCE EXHIBIT ON RADIOACTIVITY."

"THE EXPERIMENT IS COMPROMISED BY THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE LECTURE HALL. A SPIDER FALLS WITHIN THE PATH OF FREE-FLOWING RADIATION."

"IT BITES PARKER, IMPRINTING ITS OWN IRRADIATED NATURE UPON HIM. HE GAINS ITS PROPORTIONATE CHARACTERISTICS."

"AS SPIDER-MAN, HE USED THESE NEW ABILITIES TO IMPRESS AND AWE THOSE AROUND HIM AS A TELEVISION STAR."

"PETER PARKER WAS CAUGHT UP IN THE PERCEIVED HUMAN NEED FOR SIGNIFICANCE. ENTRAPPED BY HIS OWN SENSE OF INSECURITY, BRED FROM THE LOSS OF HIS PARENTS AT AN EARLY AGE AND THE INSULTS OF HIS PEERS, PARKER SOUGHT ACCEPTANCE ON A NATIONAL SCALE."

"AFTER ONE PROGRAM'S FILMING, PARKER REFUSED TO STOP A THIEF FROM ESCAPING A PURSUING POLICE OFFICER."

"DO YOU KNOW WHY HE IGNORED THE ESCAPING BURGLAR, X-51?"

"NO. NOR IS SUCH INFORMATION NECESSARY FOR THIS CATALOGUE."

"HE IGNORED THE OFFICER'S PLEAS FOR AID BECAUSE HE BELIEVED THAT THE MASK HE WORE FREED HIM FROM THE SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY THAT HAD ALWAYS, UNTIL THIS MOMENT, DETERMINED HIS STEPS."

"THE SAME RESPONSIBILITY THAT CAUSED PARKER TO GROW UP LIKE ALL HUMAN CHILDREN DO WHO LOSE THEIR PARENTS. THEY BLAME THEMSELVES."

"A RESPONSIBILITY THAT LED HIM TO STUDY CHEMISTRY AND RADIOACTIVITY NIGHT AFTER NIGHT WHEN THOSE OF HIS OWN AGE WERE CELEBRATING THEIR YOUTH."

"A RESPONSIBILITY THAT WEIGHED EVEN HEAVIER WHEN HE DISCOVERED THAT HIS UNCLE BEN HAD BEEN MURDERED..."

"...BY THE SAME THIEF HE HAD ALLOWED TO GO FREE THE DAY BEFORE."

"AT FIRST HE THOUGHT THE MASK HAD FREED HIM. BUT THEN, HE CONVINCED HIMSELF THAT THIS NEW POWER HAD BROUGHT WITH IT AN EVEN GREATER RESPONSIBILITY."

"BUT HE WAS WRONG, X-51, THOUGH HE NEVER KNEW IT."

"HE MET AND FELL IN LOVE WITH GWEN STACY, THE DAUGHTER OF A PROMINENT NEW YORK POLICE OFFICER.

"PARKER TOOK A JOB WITH A NEWSPAPER KNOWN AS THE DAILY BUGLE, WORKING UNDER THE PUBLISHER J. JONAH JAMESON, A MAN WHO HATED SPIDER-MAN.

"GWEN STACY'S FATHER WAS KILLED BY DR. OCTOPUS. BUT IT WAS SPIDER-MAN WHO WAS BLAMED...

"GWEN STACY HERSELF WAS KILLED BY NORMAN OSBORN--YES, THE CURRENT HEAD OF AMERICA-- SHORTLY THEREAFTER.

"THE GUILT ALL BUT DESTROYED PARKER."

"I SEE PETER PARKER MARRYING SOMEONE ELSE."

"MARY JANE WATSON. BUT IN LIGHT OF GWEN'S DEATH, I THINK HE FELT GUILTY ABOUT THIS, TOO."

"YOU SPECULATE ON HIS EMOTIONAL STATE, UATU. THIS GUILT IS IMMATERIAL...A PHANTOM MOTIVATION."

"IT IS...BUT THERE IS MUCH YOU STILL NEED TO UNDERSTAND ABOUT THE CELESTIAL SEEDLINGS. THIS GUILT... THESE FEELINGS OF RESPONSIBILITY ARE NOT PARKER'S OWN. THEY ARE SAFEGUARDS--A SYSTEM OF INBRED BALANCES FOR THE SAKE OF THE CELESTIAL PLAN."

"SAFEGUARDS? AGAINST WHAT?"

"AGAINST THE BIRTH, OF COURSE."

"I SEE PARKER WEARING AN ALL-BLACK COSTUME...BUT THE COSTUME IS ALIVE... FROM A DIFFERENT WORLD. IT'S A SYMBIOTIC ENTITY. IT'S VENOM. I SEE..."

"YOU ASKED ME A QUESTION, X-51. THAT WOULD REQUIRE CURIOSITY... A CHARACTERISTIC THAT SHOULD NO LONGER EXIST WITHIN YOUR MECHANICAL FRAMEWORK. IT WAS DELETED WITH YOUR HUMAN PERSONALITY, WAS IT NOT?"

"NO."

"THEN HOW CAN YOU..."

"YOU NEVER DELETED YOUR PERSONALITY, DID YOU? DID YOU?"

"NO, UATU. I... DIDN'T WANT TO. I HAD A FEELING...THAT I SHOULDN'T."

"CANCEL THE DOWNLOAD ORDER, X-51. TERMINATE THE FLOW OF INFORMATION NOW."

"IT'S...TOO LATE, UATU. I KNOW WHAT YOU DON'T WANT ME TO."

"WHAT DO YOU KNOW?"

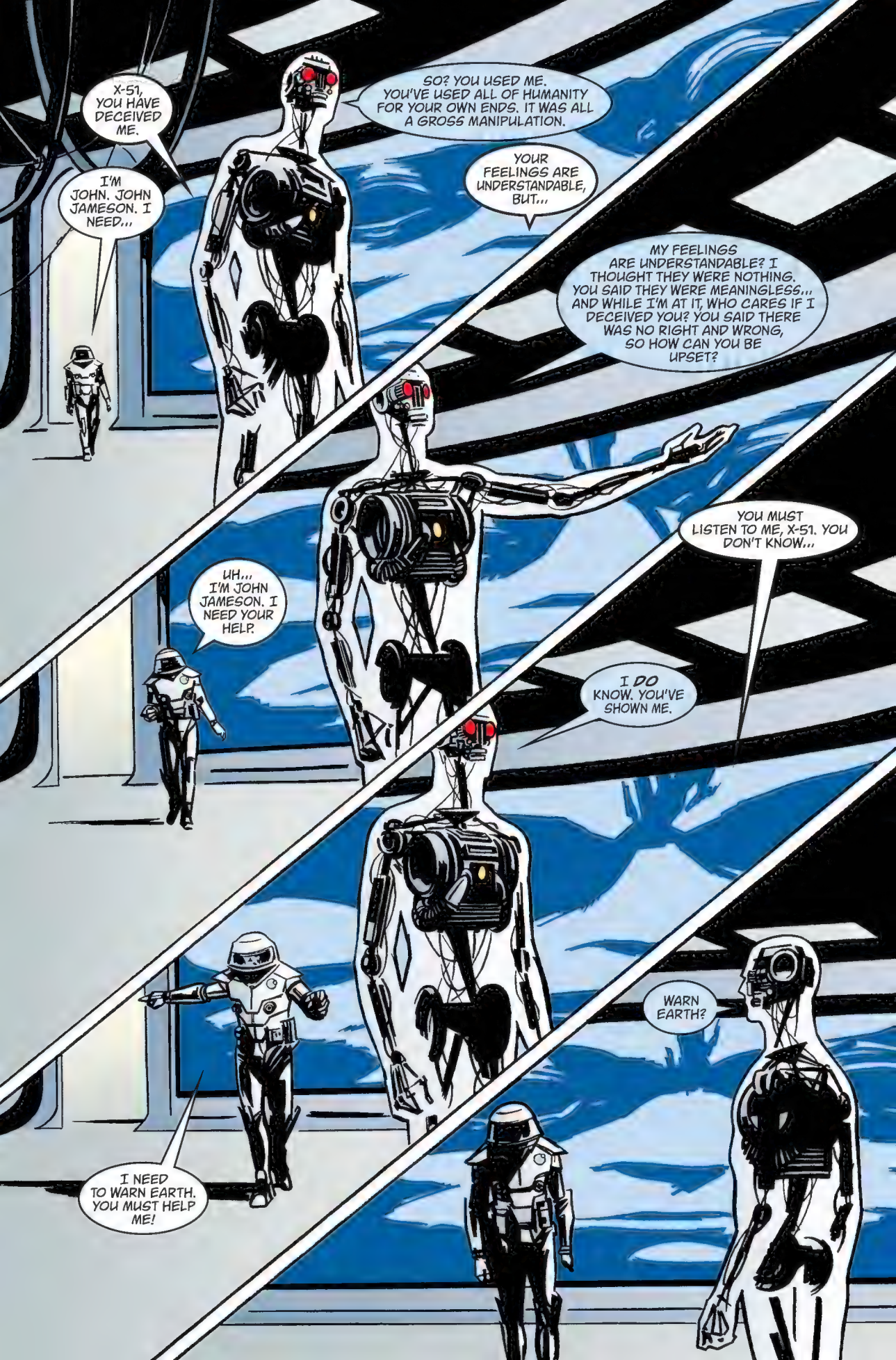
"HE CHOSE A NEWSPAPER, BECAUSE BY THIS TIME, HE FELT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ENTIRE WORLD'S SAFETY.

"I BELIEVE HE PICKED A PUBLISHER WHO HATED SPIDER-MAN BECAUSE SO DID PARKER HIMSELF."

"THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS LOVE, UATU. THE CONCEPTS OF HATE, FEAR OR GUILT ARE NOT REAL."

"...BY THE POLICE HE ONCE FAILED TO HELP. BY THE PUBLISHER HE EARNED HIS WAGES FROM. BY THE WOMAN HE BELIEVED HE LOVED.

"X-51, DID YOU JUST ASK ME A...?"



X-51,
YOU HAVE
DECEIVED
ME.

I'M
JOHN. JOHN
JAMESON. I
NEED...

SO? YOU USED ME.
YOU'VE USED ALL OF HUMANITY
FOR YOUR OWN ENDS. IT WAS ALL
A GROSS MANIPULATION.

YOUR
FEELINGS
ARE
UNDERSTANDABLE,
BUT...

MY FEELINGS
ARE UNDERSTANDABLE? I
THOUGHT THEY WERE NOTHING.
YOU SAID THEY WERE MEANINGLESS...
AND WHILE I'M AT IT, WHO CARES IF I
DECEIVED YOU? YOU SAID THERE
WAS NO RIGHT AND WRONG,
SO HOW CAN YOU BE
UPSET?

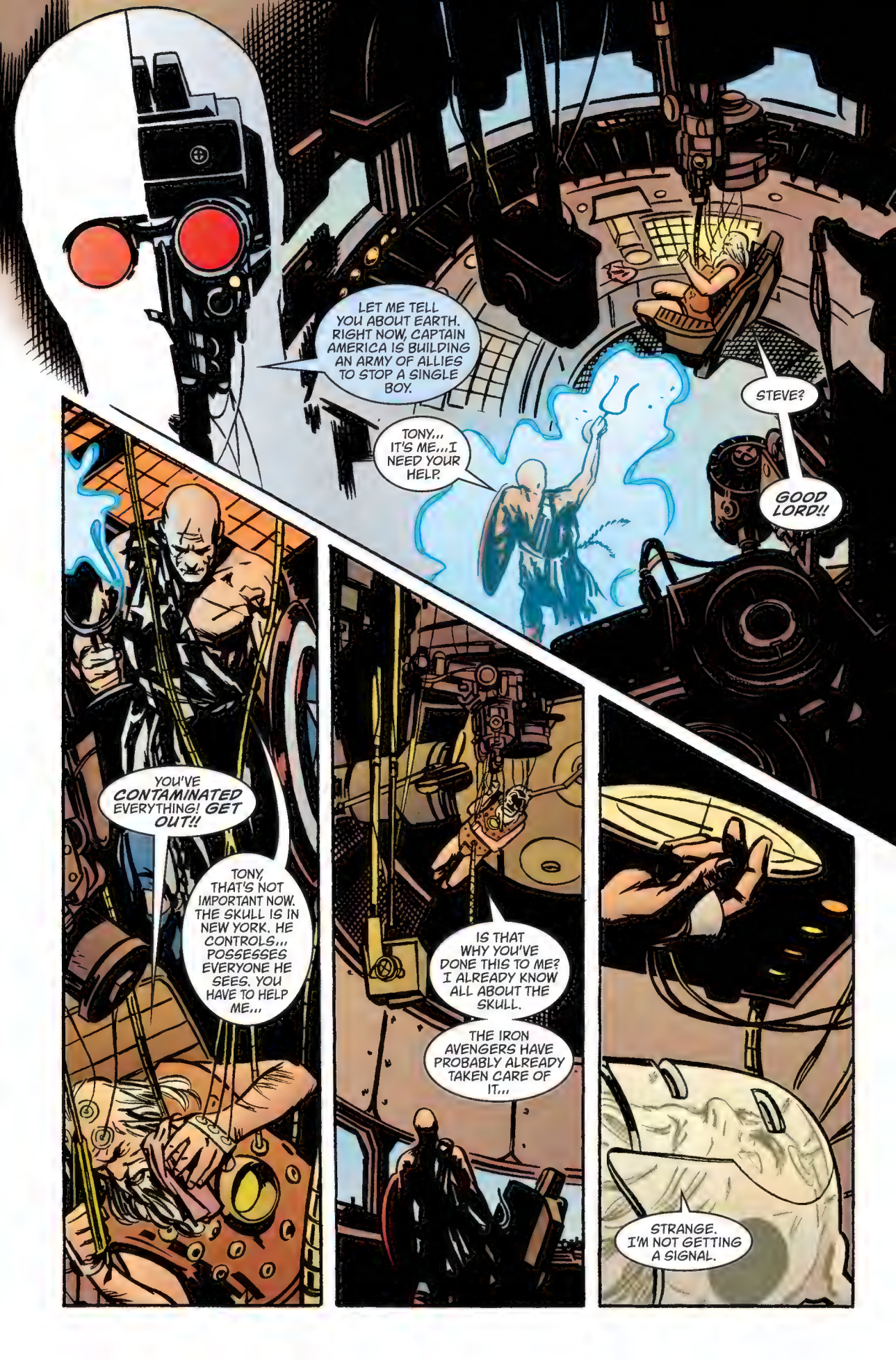
UH...
I'M JOHN
JAMESON. I
NEED YOUR
HELP.

YOU MUST
LISTEN TO ME, X-51. YOU
DON'T KNOW...

I DO
KNOW. YOU'VE
SHOWN ME.

WARN
EARTH?

I NEED
TO WARN EARTH.
YOU MUST HELP
ME!



LET ME TELL
YOU ABOUT EARTH.
RIGHT NOW, CAPTAIN
AMERICA IS BUILDING
AN ARMY OF ALLIES
TO STOP A SINGLE
BOY.

TONY...
IT'S ME... I
NEED YOUR
HELP.

STEVE?

GOOD
LORD!!

YOU'VE
CONTAMINATED
EVERYTHING! GET
OUT!!

TONY,
THAT'S NOT
IMPORTANT NOW.
THE SKULL IS IN
NEW YORK. HE
CONTROLS...
POSSESSES
EVERYONE HE
SEES. YOU
HAVE TO HELP
ME...

IS THAT
WHY YOU'VE
DONE THIS TO ME?
I ALREADY KNOW
ALL ABOUT THE
SKULL.

THE IRON
AVENGERS HAVE
PROBABLY ALREADY
TAKEN CARE OF
IT...

STRANGE.
I'M NOT GETTING
A SIGNAL.

"YOU KNOW ALL ABOUT THE SKULL, TONY? REALLY?"

"THEN YOU KNOW THAT NAMOR BELONGS TO HIM. WYATT, TOO."

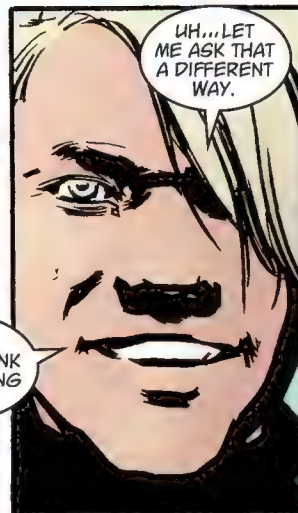
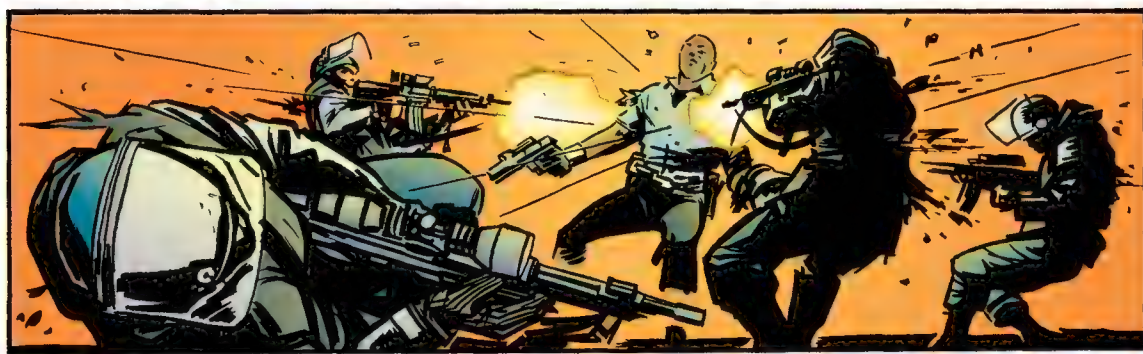
"YOU KNOW ABOUT HIS FREAK THAT CASTS ILLUSIONS LIKE WEBS ON ANYONE THAT GETS CLOSE TO HIM."

"YOU KNOW ABOUT THE THOUSANDS THAT DO WHATEVER THE SKULL ASKS...THOUGH THEY CRY OUT TO ME TO SAVE THEM?"

"HOW CAN YOU KNOW ALL ABOUT THE SKULL, TONY? HOW CAN YOU POSSIBLY KNOW ABOUT THE LOSS OF FREEDOM WHEN YOU'VE CONSCIOUSLY IMPRISONED YOURSELF HERE?"

"YOUR IRON MEN ARE A POOR SUBSTITUTE FOR THE REAL THING."







"IN ANOTHER PART OF NEW YORK, REED RICHARDS IS TRYING TO DISCOVER WHY EVERYONE ON EARTH IS A MUTANT. HE HAS NO IDEA HOW CLOSELY HIS QUEST IS LINKED TO CAPTAIN AMERICA'S."

I GOTTA TELL YA, STRETCH-SEEN' YA BACK HERE IN THE BIG APPLE... WELL, I CAN'T USE THAT HIGH-FALLUTIN' DICTION THAT YOU DO...

...BUT, WHAT I'M TRYING TA TELL YA, IT'S...YA...OH, GOLL DANG IT...

...YA MAKE ME WANNA GO BACK TA WHEN I WAS YOUNG AND CLOBBER STUFF ALL OVER AGAIN.

THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE.

THERE, I SAID IT. DIDN'T WANNA GET ALL EMOTIONAL, BUT ALICIA THINKS IT'D BE GOOD FOR ME...AND YA KNOW WHAT? I DO FEEL BETTER.

EVERYONE AROUND ME REGISTERS. NOT AS MUTANTS AS THEY WOULD IF AFFECTED BY VIBRANIUM, BUT AS...

MAYBE SHE'S RIGHT. MAYBE I AM TOO...WHAT'S THE WORD... ANALICTICAL? ANYHOW, TOO MUCH OF A THINKER, NOT A FEELER, YA KNOW?

ALL THIS TIME, ALL THESE YEARS...IT WASN'T MY FAULT.

I GUESS SOMETIMES US SENSITIVE TYPES JUS' NEED ANOTHER GUY TA WORK THINGS THROUGH WITH.

THESE PEOPLE AREN'T MUTANTS AT ALL...



"THEY'RE INHUMANS.

"I MUST GET BACK
TO LATVERIA."

WHY DIDN'T
YOU TELL US OF THIS
EARLIER, CHILD?

I WAS
AFRAID. I WAS
SUPPOSED TO BE GET-
TING MARRIED TO YOUR
SON. WHAT'S HAPPEN-
ING TO ME? LOOK
AT MY SKIN!

LUNA IS
BECOMING LIKE
US.



NO, KARNAK.

IT'S
OBVIOUS, QUEEN
MEDUSA.

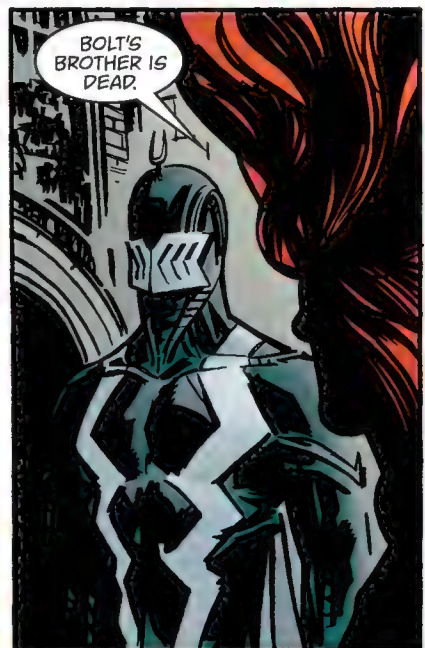
THE
TERRIGEN
MISTS ARE
GIFTING
LUNA RIGHT
NOW.



MAXIMUS
MUST HAVE
RELEASED
THEM INTO
EARTH'S
ATMOS-
PHERE.

YEARS AGO, HE
ATTEMPTED TO CREATE
A WEAPON TO TRANSFORM
THE EARTHLINGS INTO HIS SUBJECTS,
TO CREATE ANOTHER INHUMAN
NATION FOR HIM TO RULE...BUT
I THOUGHT HIS TERRIGEN
BOMB HAD BEEN DIS-
MANTLED?

I'M SURE
IT WAS, KARNAK.
THIS CAN'T
HAVE BEEN
MAXIMUS.



BOLT'S
BROTHER IS
DEAD.

"IN ENTRUSTING HIMSELF AND HIS DREAMS TO THE MAGIC OF THE SORCERESS SUPREME, BRUCE BANNER HAS DOOMED BOTH THE HULK AND THOR TO LIVE OUT THE REST OF THEIR LIVES IN THE REALM OF DEATH."

YOU'RE ALL ALONE, BRUCE. NO ONE TO SAVE YOU.

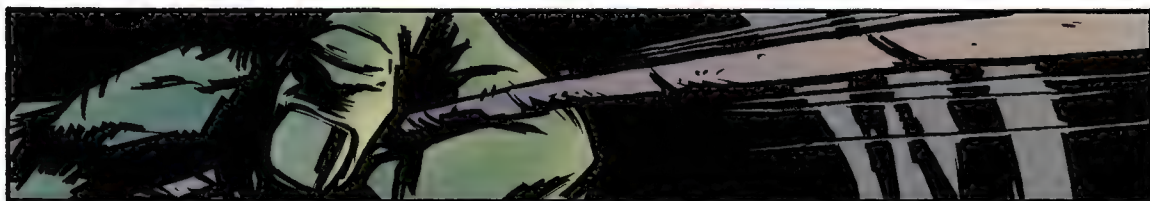


PLEASE, CLEA... A MOMENT OF SILENCE IS THE PROTOCOL FOR THE DEPARTURE OF MY DEAR, HAMMER-HEADED SISTER. NOT TO MENTION HIS... HER JADE TROLL.

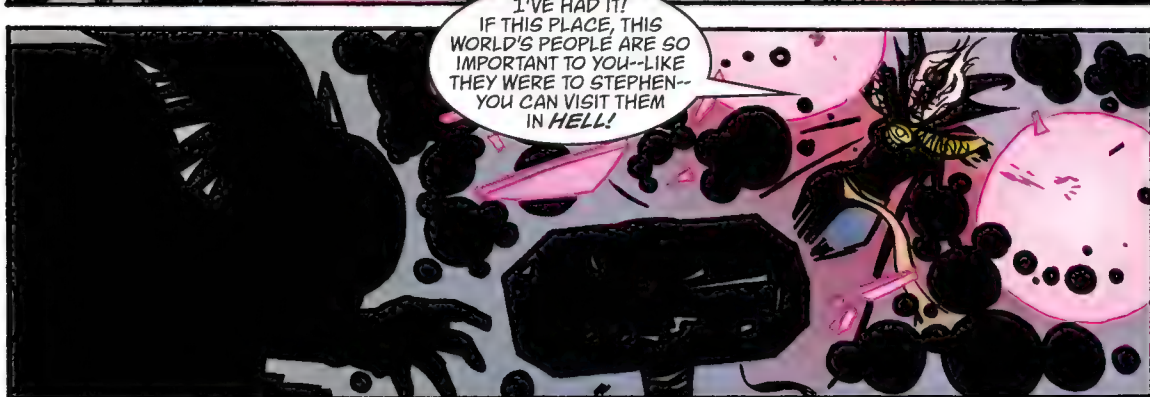
THERE. NOW THE FATES ARE PLEASED.

CLEA... STEPHEN TAUGHT YOU EVERYTHING HE KNEW. HOW COULD YOU BETRAY HIM?

ALL THAT STEPHEN KNEW WAS NOTHING COMPARED TO WHAT THERE WAS TO KNOW.





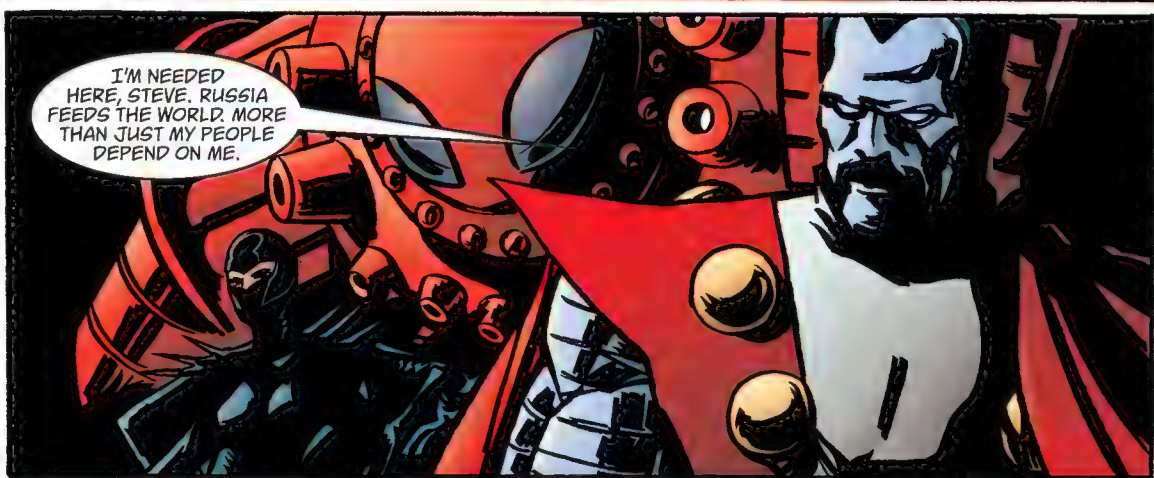




"THE SKULL'S FORCES GROW,
AS DO CAPTAIN AMERICA'S."

PETER...
WE...

I...
NEED YOUR
HELP.



I'M NEEDED
HERE, STEVE. RUSSIA
FEEDS THE WORLD. MORE
THAN JUST MY PEOPLE
DEPEND ON ME.



YOU DON'T
UNDERSTAND. I'VE SEEN
THIS BEFORE. HE WON'T BE
SATISFIED WITH ONE NATION.
HE WON'T BE HAPPY WITH
AMERICA.

HE'LL COME HERE.
AND HE'LL TAKE OVER...BUT
HE'S JUST A KID. HE WON'T THINK
TO TELL YOUR PEOPLE TO WORK
THE LAND...HE WON'T THINK TO
TELL THE REST OF THE WORLD
TO EAT.



I'M NOT ASKING
FOR YOUR HELP FOR MY
COUNTRY. I'M ASKING FOR
THE WORLD. I'M ASKING
YOU TO HELP SAVE
THE WORLD!



ROTTEN
RED-PLATED PINKO
RUSSKY!

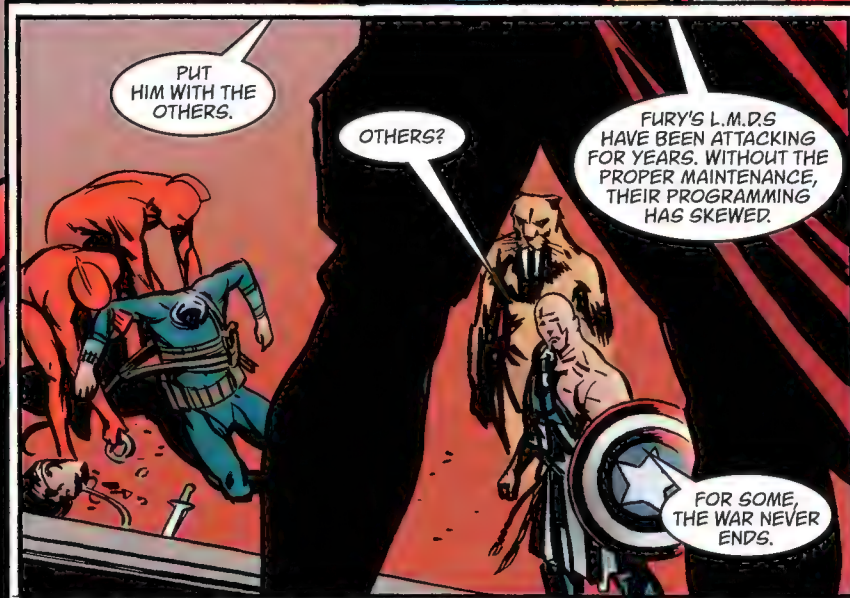
NICK?



WE SHOULD'A
NUKED YER HOLELESS
BUTTS BACK IN THE
BIG ONE!!



NO,
NOT
FURY.



PUT
HIM WITH THE
OTHERS.

OTHERS?

FURY'S L.M.D.S
HAVE BEEN ATTACKING
FOR YEARS. WITHOUT THE
PROPER MAINTENANCE,
THEIR PROGRAMMING
HAS SKEWED.

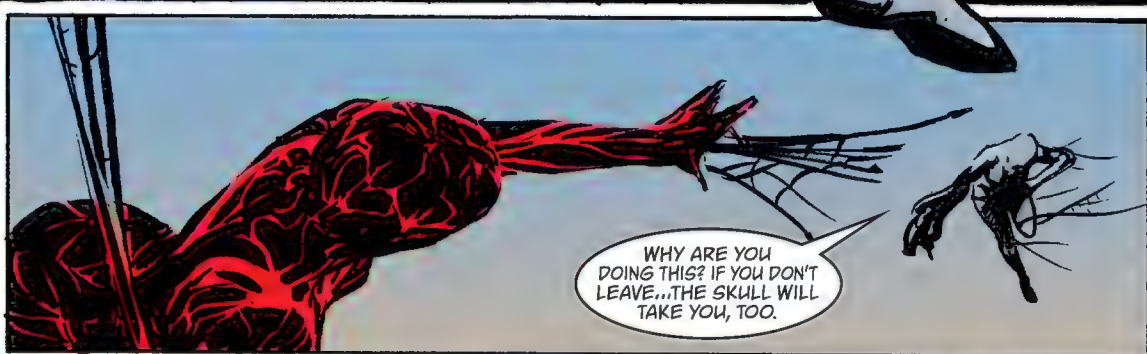
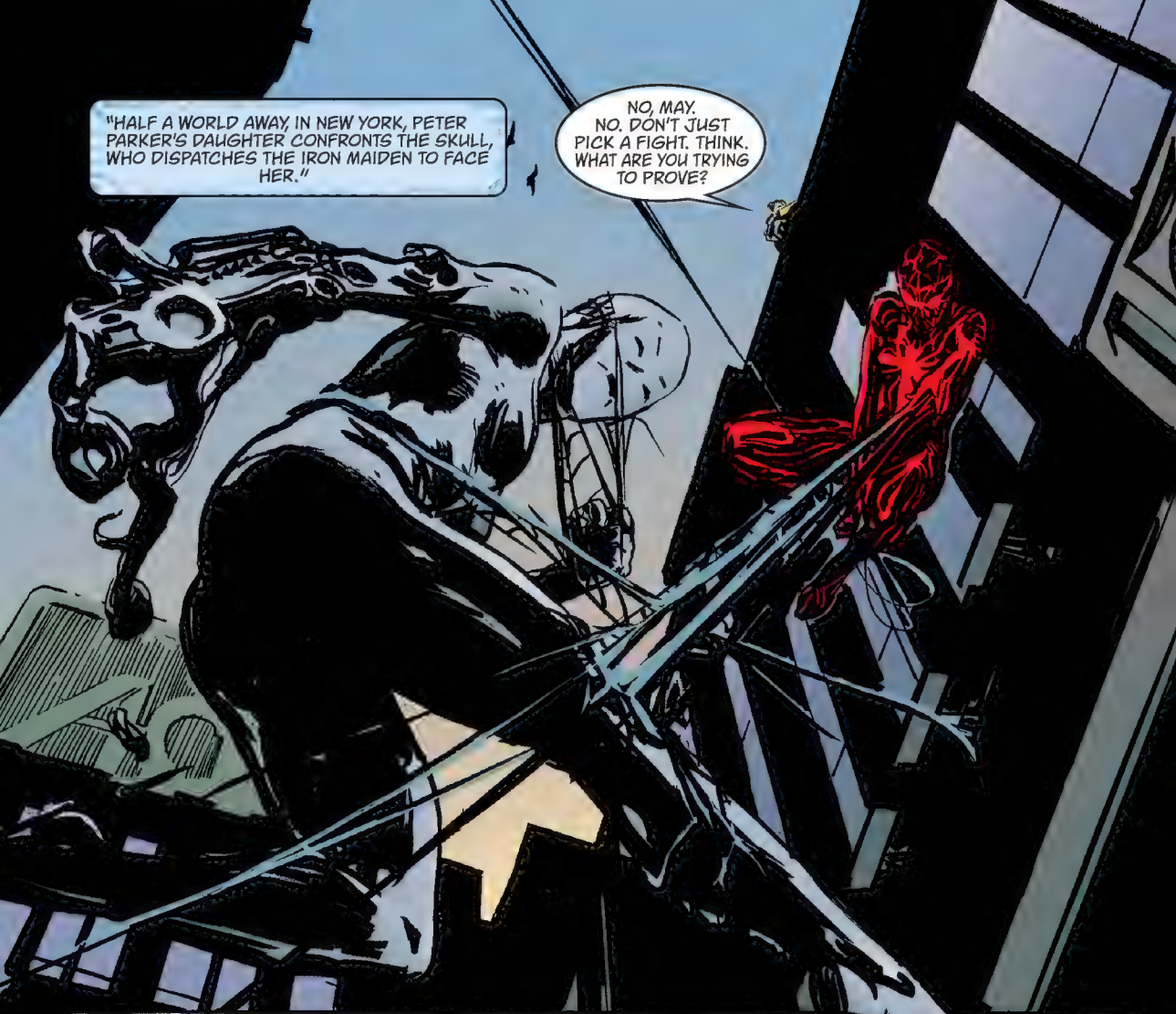
FOR SOME,
THE WAR NEVER
ENDS.



I'LL
HELP
YOU.

"HALF A WORLD AWAY, IN NEW YORK, PETER PARKER'S DAUGHTER CONFRONTS THE SKULL, WHO DISPATCHES THE IRON MAIDEN TO FACE HER."

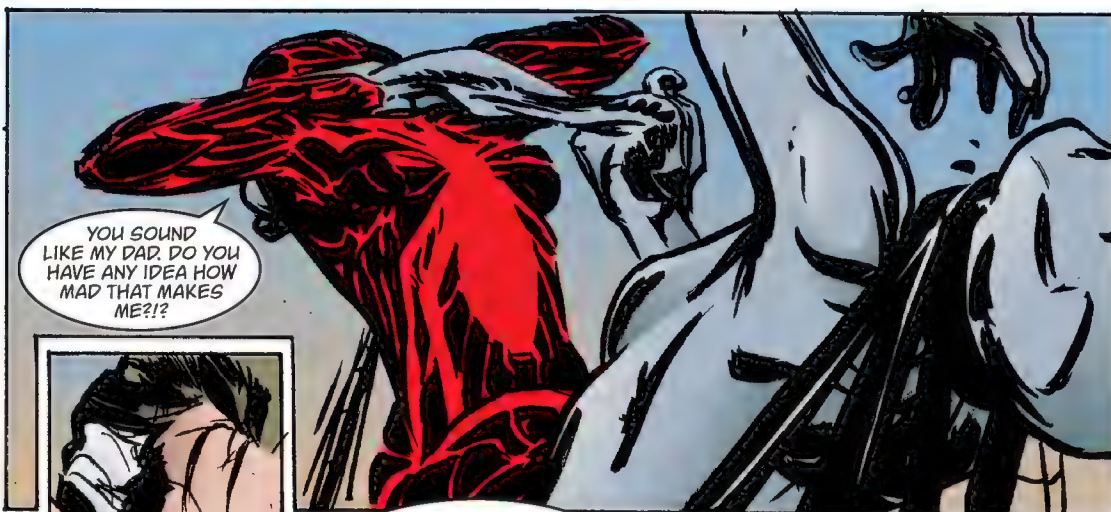
NO, MAY.
NO. DON'T JUST
PICK A FIGHT. THINK.
WHAT ARE YOU TRYING
TO PROVE?

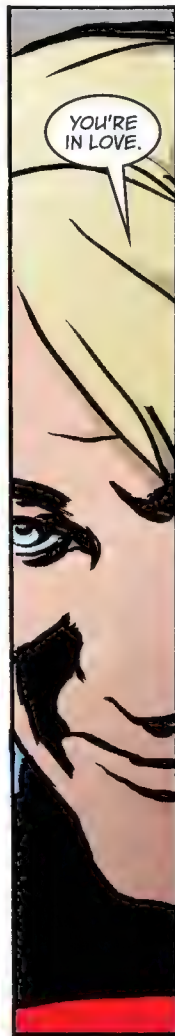
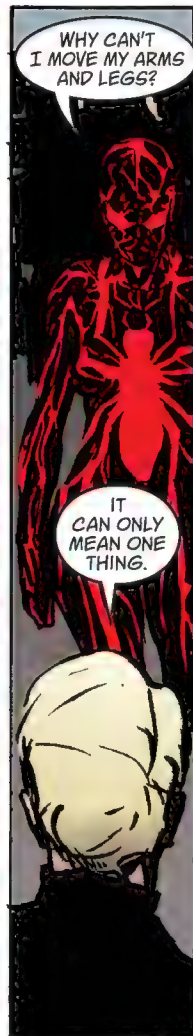


WHY ARE YOU
DOING THIS? IF YOU DON'T
LEAVE...THE SKULL WILL
TAKE YOU, TOO.

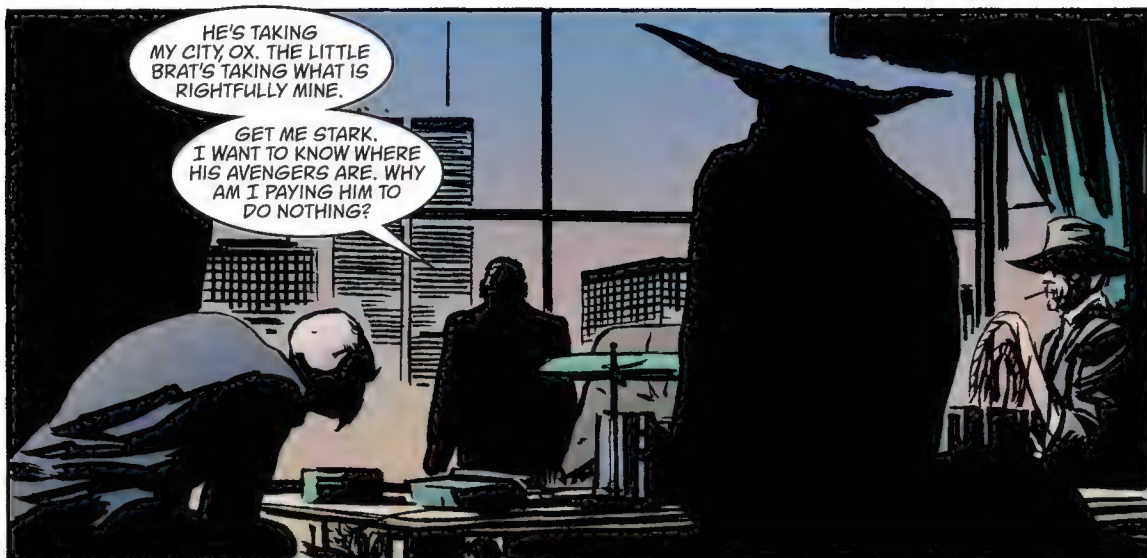


I'M NOT
GOING TO RUN.
YOU HAVE TO BE
STOPPED.









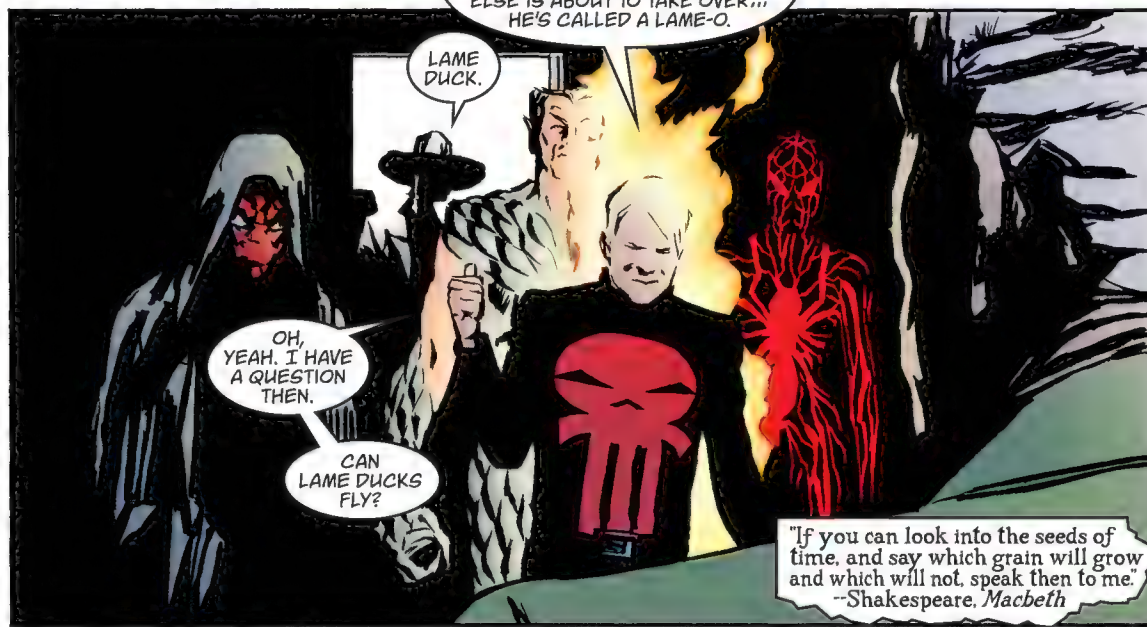
HE'S TAKING MY CITY, OX. THE LITTLE BRAT'S TAKING WHAT IS RIGHTFULLY MINE.

GET ME STARK. I WANT TO KNOW WHERE HIS AVENGERS ARE. WHY AM I PAYING HIM TO DO NOTHING?



SO YOU'RE PRESIDENT OSBORN.

TEXAS JACK HERE TOLD ME THAT WHEN A PRESIDENT IS STILL PRESIDENT, BUT SOMEONE ELSE IS ABOUT TO TAKE OVER,,, HE'S CALLED A LAME-O.

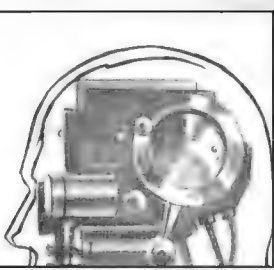


LAME DUCK.

OH, YEAH. I HAVE A QUESTION THEN.

CAN LAME DUCKS FLY?

"If you can look into the seeds of time, and say which grain will grow and which will not, speak then to me."
--Shakespeare, *Macbeth*



ARTWORK BY ALEX ROSS

EARTH X

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER EIGHT



"X-51?"

"Yes, Jameson?"

"I've seen so many parts of the world this past day. Could I see anyplace on Earth with the Watcher's equipment?"

"Yes."

"Could I see my father? It's been so long. And the communication equipment Earth's authorities left for us to use is junk. Please... my father... most know him as J. Jonah Jameson."

"Yes. The publisher of the Daily Bugle, once New York's most well-read newspaper."

"Once?"

"No longer, Jameson. When the world discovered that Peter Parker, a photojournalist who had worked over 20 years for the Bugle, was in actuality Spider-Man, the Bugle lost all credibility as a serious investigative paper."

"Your father's embittered crusade against Spider-Man so defined him, as well as the character of the Daily Bugle, that when Spider-Man's secret identity became public knowledge, Jameson and his paper became the laughingstock of the world. Imagine claiming that the greatest menace to society since Attila the Hun is on the payroll."

"No. I knew this would happen. I knew his obsession would.... so where is he?"

"The Bugle."

"But I thought you said it was closed down."

"I did. I see your father. He is carrying a bag. He's walking through the halls of the Bugle. He hasn't shaved in weeks."



"Is he... in his right mind?"

"He's not wandering aimlessly, Jameson. He's wearing a heavy padded coat... it's torn in a number of places... scratched and ripped. He's pulling out whatever's in the bag."

"What is it?"

"It's food."

"I don't understand."

"Your father is placing it on a desk... and edging his way back to the door. He's watching the bag the entire time. The windows are boarded and barred, almost as if he's trapped something here... like it's a cage. There... in the shadows... something's moving."

"What is it? What do you see?"

"It's got teeth whatever it... oh... I see a wolf. A wolf that walks on its hind legs. Your father must have trapped it here... he must come and feed it regularly."

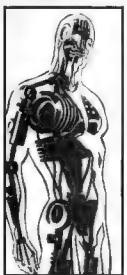
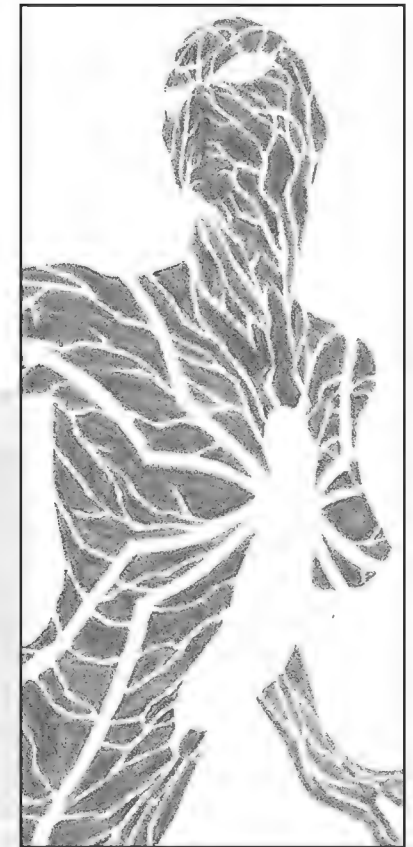
"Who... what is it?"

"Its name was Jack Russell."

"Why? Why would my father be feeding Jack Russell?"

"Perhaps he thinks this is you, John Jameson. Perhaps he thinks this is his son."

"That's impossible. He should have been told of my whereabouts. When Kristine and I were taken away to the moon, I was promised that if I went along with everything, my father would be told."





"We're rarely told what we need to know. Isn't that right, Uatu?"

"X-51, Mr. Jameson should not be..."

"Aaron. That's my name. And he's John. Why don't you call us by our names, Uatu?"

"You do not have a name, X-51. And Mr. Jameson should not be privy to our discussions. I am concerned with the Terrigen Mists being the cause of this global mutation."

"Why is that a problem? I mean, Earth is going to die. Isn't that what you want? It's going to explode. And billions of people will die. Won't that make you happy? Why are the Terrigen Mists a reason for concern, anyway?"

"The Mists were brought here by the Kree, X-51."

"So?"

"The Kree have long sought to sabotage the Celestial plan on those worlds the Celestials deemed worthy of their seed."

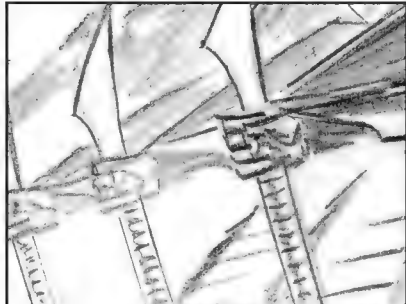
"The Kree, huh? I like them already. I know it was a long time ago, long before the Inhuman Royal Family even left Earth, but I'm not sure I understand why Luna, the daughter of a mutant and an Inhuman, would be born human."

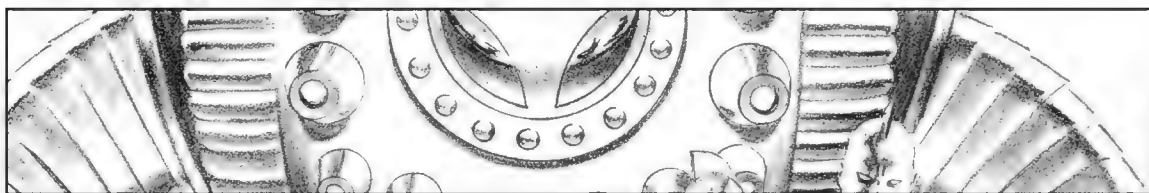
"They are all born human, X-51. Often, though, the trauma of birth is enough to trigger the Celestial seed. Sometimes the change comes only after a few years. This is the reason the child of Reed Richards exhibited such power so early in life. His childhood, one that included being nannied by a known witch, was too filled with anxiety and fear for the seed to lie dormant for long."

"Then if a child were born on Earth today, it would be human?"

"Yes, but the Terrigen Mists would trigger the dormant seed with the child's first breath of air. And in light of the Terrigen Mists' effect on people, humanity may not be able to procreate any longer."

"That explains the lack of children...but why?"



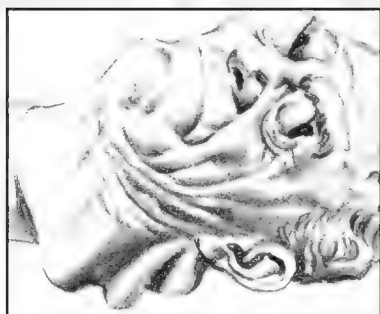


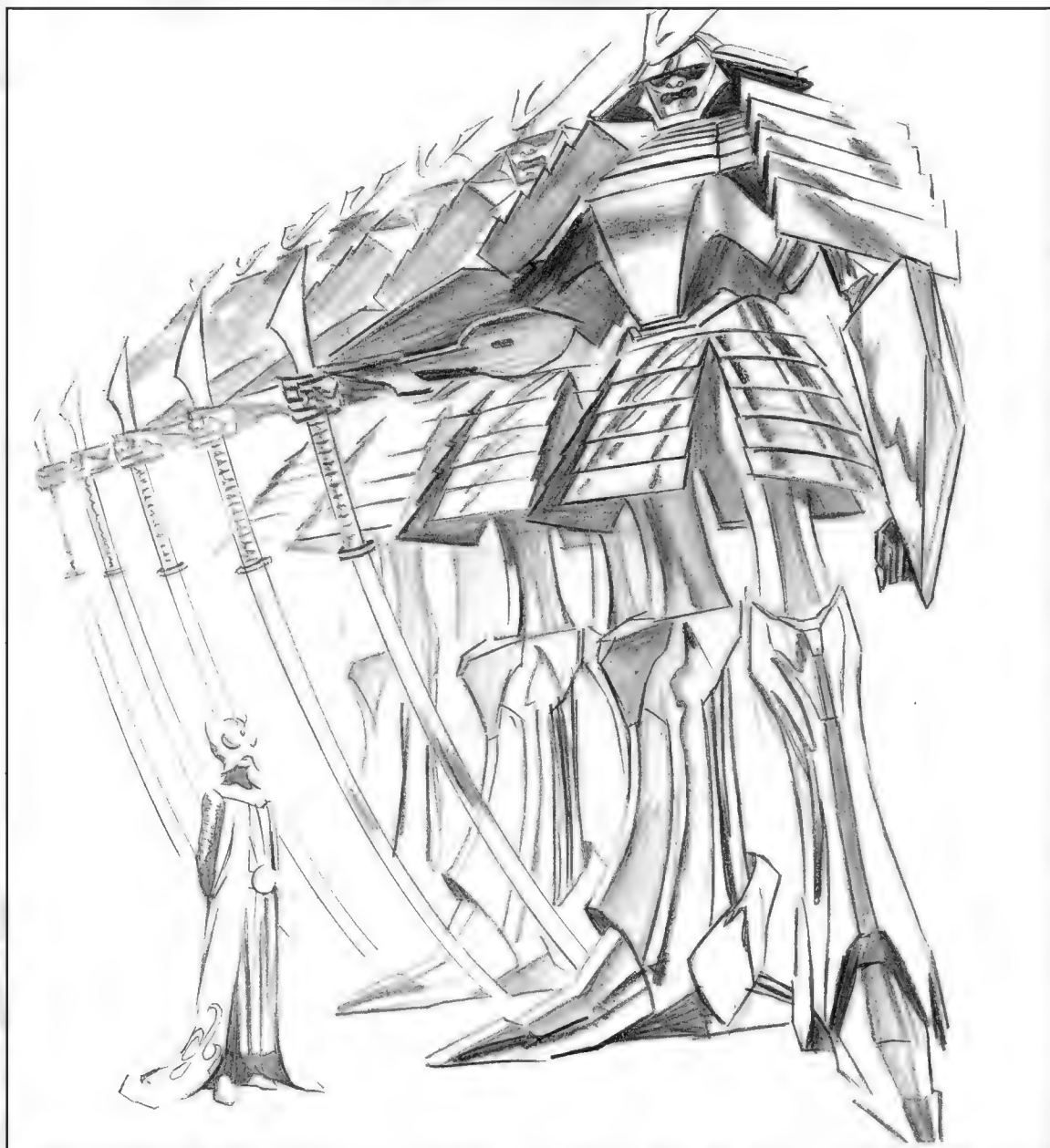
"As the Terrigen Mists worked their way through the world, as through the Hidden Land, they affect all areas of life. The Inhuman Ruling Council's whole reason for developing such stringent planned marriages was to try to match the most probable biological matings. Every new generation was smaller than the one before it. They rarely succeeded. In time, the Inhuman Nation, though continuing to mutate individually, stopped growing exponentially."

"Wait. Are you saying that mankind can't have children because they are Inhumans now?"

"Yes. Like the Inhumans, those touched by the Terrigen Mists have almost completely stopped aging, while those whose seeds were triggered by other stimuli continue to age."

"Reed Richards once devised a way to undo the effects of the Terrigen Mists on humanity, didn't he?"





"Yes, X-51. But I hardly think anyone on Earth is going to be willing to give up their new power. Regardless of the reasons humanity exists as it does this day, mankind prefers what it has become. It wants power."

"But is this true? Who knows, maybe man's every vice and every hunger can be traced to the Celestials. Maybe the Celestials' manipulation of mankind's evolution was in actuality a step down. The fall of man. You've damned them, Uatu. You and your Celestial Host. I guess this doesn't surprise me. You've set yourself up as God. So you have the power to damn. But do you have the power to save? Could you redeem what you've set out to curse? You could. I know it. But you just don't want to bother with it. You'd rather sit. And watch."

"X-51, Earth needs to be protected. You are concerned with lives. I am concerned with life, by its very definition."

"I'm sorry... it's me, John Jameson. Can somebody please tell me what's going on?"





"Sure. Stop me, Uatu, if you think I'm being unfair to mankind's miraculous benefactors. If it were not for the Celestial seed, something planted in the human gene pool millions of years ago, you would never have become Man-Wolf. There would have been nothing for the rock you found here on the moon to trigger.

"Your father would have never become obsessive about Spider-Man because there would be no Spider-Man. Peter Parker's life would have been a happier one.

"Gwen Stacy would not have died at the hands of the Green Goblin, because a ruthless businessman would have had no Spider-Man to compare himself to.

"There would have been no mutant massacres. The Celestials have ruined mankind's lives. And very soon, they will take those lives completely."

"I... can't believe it."

"Mr. Jameson, X-51 is indeed angered over the revelation of the Celestial plan. But Earth's current state is not to be blamed on the Celestials. Surely you can see how one nation has manipulated all others. Earth's populace would not have been endangered for another two centuries. X-51's apparent hostility toward the Celestials is misplaced. The Inhumans are worthy of your wrath, not I."

"No, of course not — the Celestials just put the gun to mankind's head and waited for someone else to pull the trigger."



EARTH



KRUEGER
LEON
REINHOLD

"X-51?"

"X-51?"

"Why aren't you answering him?"

"Because, John Jameson, I will no longer be a seeing-eye dog for Satan."

"Satan? I know I just got here recently, but I think you're over-doing it a bit, aren't you, X-51? It is X-51, right?"

"No, it's not, Jameson. It's Aaron Stack. My father was Abel Stack. He was a great man. And that's what he wanted for me."

"Yeah, but, well, you're a robot. Look at yourself."

"Look at myself? Look at my...of course. That's why you took my face, isn't it, Uatu? That's why you've droned on and on, calling me X-51 over and over again until your very rasping of my model number became as tedious as your amorality. You knew I'd never go along with the Celestial plan unless I was convinced of my own inhumanity, didn't you? You set me up to betray all of mankind."

"X-51, I am the Watcher. You..."

"No, Uatu. I am the Watcher. You made me the Watcher. You showed me how to see everything at once. But now it's all coming together. How could I have believed you? How could I have gone this far?"

"What are you talking about? Gone how far? Uatu is somehow to blame for mankind's destruction? Listen to you — he's only a blind guy. What can he do?"

"He can infect others with his blindness."

"WHAT IS THE PLAN YOU KEEP TALKING ABOUT? IS THIS WHY EVERYONE'S MUTATED ON EARTH?"

"THE MUTATIONS ARE SUCH A SMALL PART OF CELESTIAL PROCREATION. I CAN'T BELIEVE I THOUGHT HUMANITY WOULD EVOLVE INTO CELESTIALS. HOW COULD I BE SO STUPID??"

"YOU'RE LOSING ME. WHAT DO YOU MEAN?"



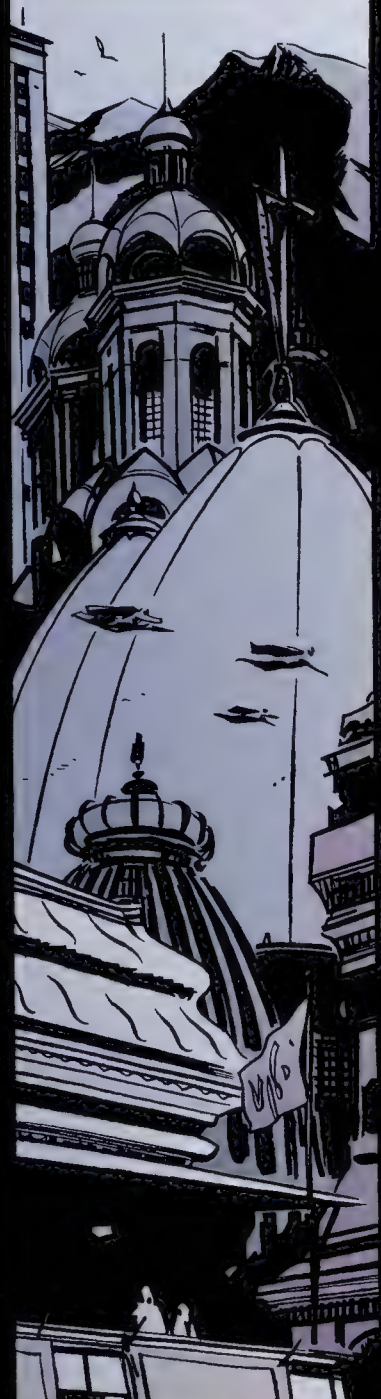
"THE CELESTIALS IMPLANTED MUTABLE SEEDS WITHIN EARLY MAN. SEEDS THAT WOULD BE TRIGGERED THROUGHOUT TIME BY RADIATION--SUPERNATURAL TRAUMAS OF VARIOUS SORTS--THE EFFECTS OF A MOON ROCK IN YOUR CASE, JAMESON..."

"...OR THE EFFECTS OF THE KREE-INDUCED TERRIGEN MISTS IN THE CASE OF THE INHUMAN NATION, AND THE CASE OF THE CURRENT POPULACE OF EARTH."

"I SEE PEOPLE...HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE. THIS IS AMAZING. WHO ARE THE GIANTS?"

"THEY'RE SENTRIES. ROBOT BEINGS CONTROLLED BY AN ALIEN RACE KNOWN AS THE KREE."

"I SEE A CITY, HIDDEN IN THE MOUNTAINS."



"THE 'INHUMAN' NATION THAT RESULTED FROM THE KREE EXPERIMENTATION ON MANKIND HID ITSELF FROM THE REST OF HUMANITY IN A CITY CALLED ATILAN."

"WHY DID THEY HIDE? WOULDN'T THEY BE TREATED AS GODS?"

"YES. BUT MANKIND ALWAYS TURNS ON ITS GODS. ISN'T THAT RIGHT, UATU? MY ACTIONS SHOULDN'T BE THAT SURPRISING."



"WHO ARE THEY?"

"THEY JAMESON, ARE THE CAUSE OF EARTH'S MUTATED POPULACE."

"BUT I THOUGHT IT WAS BECAUSE OF THE CELESTIAL SEED."

"IT IS, BUT NOT THE GERMINATION OF THAT SEED."

"BLACK BOLT AND MAXIMUS ARE BROTHERS."

"BLACK BOLT WAS MADE KING OF THE INHUMAN NATION. MAXIMUS, THE WEAKER OF THE TWO, WAS DRIVEN TO JEALOUSY LONG BEFORE BEING CAUGHT IN THE PATH OF BOLT'S SONIC SCREAM."



"BOLT'S VOICE, IT WAS BELIEVED, MADE MAXIMUS MAD. OTHERS CLAIMED THAT MADNESS RAN IN THE FAMILY."

"MAXIMUS SWORE THAT THE INHUMAN NATION WOULD BE HIS ONE WAY OR ANOTHER."



"BLACK BOLT TOOK MEDUSA AS HIS BRIDE. THEY HAD A SON--YET ANOTHER STUMBLING BLOCK TO MAXIMUS TAKING THE THRONE."

"ANOTHER INHUMAN IN THE ROYAL FAMILY, CRYSTAL, MARRIED THE FORMER MEMBER OF THE 'BROTHERHOOD OF EVIL MUTANTS' KNOWN AS QUICKSILVER, THE SON OF MAGNETO."

"THEIR CHILD WAS BORN HUMAN. SHE WAS NAMED LUNA, AND WAS UNTOUCHED BY THE TERRIGEN MISTS...UNTIL, OF COURSE, SHE RETURNED TO EARTH."

"WHAT'S HAPPENING?"

"MAXIMUS WAS NOT THE ONLY ENEMY OF THE THRONE. EVEN THE INHUMAN NATION'S OWN RULING COUNCIL WAS DRIVEN BY PETTY ASPIRATIONS AND SUPERSTITIONS."

"STRINGENT REGULATIONS WERE PUT ON WOULD-BE PARENTS FOR THE SAKE OF THE PURITY OF THE INHUMAN NATION. AS A RESULT, FEWER CHILDREN WERE BORN EACH YEAR. AND AS TIME WENT ON, THIS 'PREFERENTIAL CONTROL OVER MATING' LED TO THE LOSS OF ABILITY FOR MANY TO PHYSICALLY HAVE CHILDREN."

"THOSE BORN WERE NOW SEEN AS MIRACLES TO BE RAISED BY THE RULING COUNCIL ITSELF... INCLUDING THE SON OF BLACK BOLT AND MEDUSA."

"THE RULING COUNCIL FEARED THAT THEIR KING'S CHILD'S FIRST CRY LIKE THAT OF HIS FATHER, MIGHT MEAN THE DESTRUCTION OF THEIR CITY. SO THEY TOOK THE CHILD AWAY."

"BUT THAT'S TERRIBLE."

"YES IT IS."

"I MENTIONED THE PURITY OF THE INHUMAN NATION. THOSE NOT DEEMED PURE WERE CALLED ALPHA PRIMITIVES. THEY WERE THE MAD PRINCE'S SUBJECTS. THEY WERE HIS ARMY."

"BUT THOUGH HE WAS DEFEATED TIME AND TIME AGAIN, MAXIMUS PERSISTED IN HIS BELIEF THAT HE WOULD ONE DAY SIT UPON THE INHUMAN THRONE."

"DID HE? DID HE EVER WIN? I EXPECT THAT THE REASON HE WASN'T KILLED WAS BECAUSE HE WAS A PRINCE."

"I DON'T KNOW. I DO KNOW THAT FOR SOME REASON, THE INHUMAN ROYAL FAMILY LEFT FOR THE STARS AND THE INHUMAN NATION DISPERSED THROUGHOUT THE WORLD."

"I DON'T KNOW IF THIS WAS IN HOPES OF CURING THEIR INFERTILITY, OR..."

"I DO KNOW THAT THE FACT THAT THEY DIDN'T DIE WHEN THEY LEFT ATTILAN IS A MYSTERY."

"WHY'S THAT?"

"IT WAS BELIEVED THAT IF AN INHUMAN LEFT THE HIDDEN LAND, HE WOULD DIE FROM THE POLLUTANTS AND INDUSTRIAL WASTE OF 20TH CENTURY MANKIND... UNLESS THE TERRIGEN MISTS NEUTRALIZED THE POLLUTANTS."

"THAT'S IT, ISN'T IT, UATU. THE TERRIGEN MISTS SAVED THE INHUMAN PEOPLE, DIDN'T THEY? THE MISTS DIDN'T MUTATE PEOPLE AT ALL..."

"...INSTEAD, THEY SAVED PEOPLE'S LIVES."



"IT'S THE CELESTIALS,
ISN'T IT, WATU?"

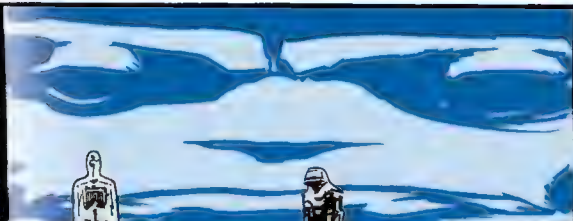
"WHAT HAVE
THEY DONE?"

"WHAT HAVE THEY
DONE TO THE SUN?"



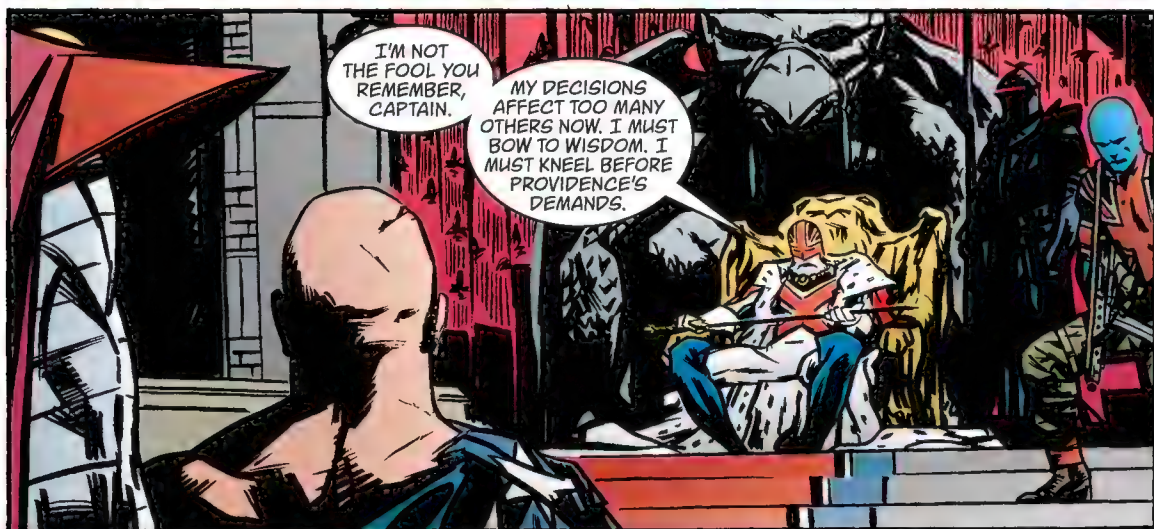
I'M
GOING TO FIND
OUT.

AND JOHN,
ACCORDING TO WHAT
I'VE SEEN, YOU HAVE A
WIFE UP HERE SOME-
WHERE. IF I WERE YOU,
I'D GO AND TAKE
CARE OF HER.



THERE'S
NOTHING WE CAN
DO HERE.







I'VE SEARCHED FOR YEARS FOR THE TRUE EXCALIBUR... A SWORD SAID TO BE ABLE TO PIERCE STONE WITHOUT HARMING IT.



THE BLACK KNIGHT? NO. I'VE RAISE HIM FROM A BOY. HE IS MY SUCCESSOR. I WOULD NOT ASK ANYONE TO FIGHT WHEN I MYSELF AM UNWILLING.



NO MAN IS AN ISLAND, BRIAN.

IF YOU HAVE TO RULE THEM, SERVE THEM. HELP ME STOP THE SKULL.

HE CANNOT SPEAK. I SPEAK FOR HIM. AS I DO FOR THE REST OF MY COUNTRY, CAPTAIN. I'M SORRY...

...BUT YOU'D HAVE A BETTER CHANCE ASKING THE GROUND WE STAND ON TO MOVE FOR YOU. I AM BRITAIN.





"HE'S IN NEW YORK, NOW. HE COMMANDS AN ARMY LARGER THAN ANYTHING ON EARTH."

"HE CONTROLS EVERYONE HE SEES."



WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? YOU CAN'T JUST WALK INTO MY OFFICE...

MY ENFORCERS WILL DEAL WITH YOU.



I'M SORRY, MR. OSBORN. I CAN'T HELP WHAT I'M DOING. HE'S CONTROLLING ME.

YOU CAN'T DO THIS. DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM? I'M NORMAN OSBORN! I'M THE PRESIDENT!



YOU LOOK LIKE STREET PIZZA TO ME.

BY THE WAY, I THINK THE NEW FLAG'S STUPID. I HAVE SOMETHING ELSE IN MIND.

SPIDERS-MAN.

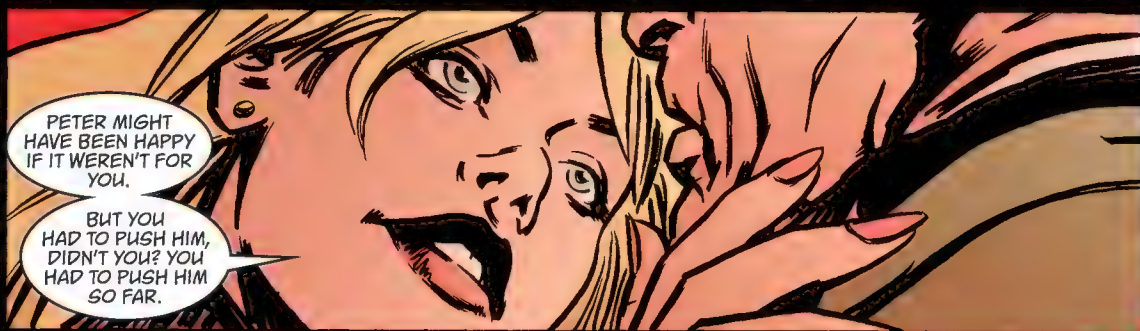
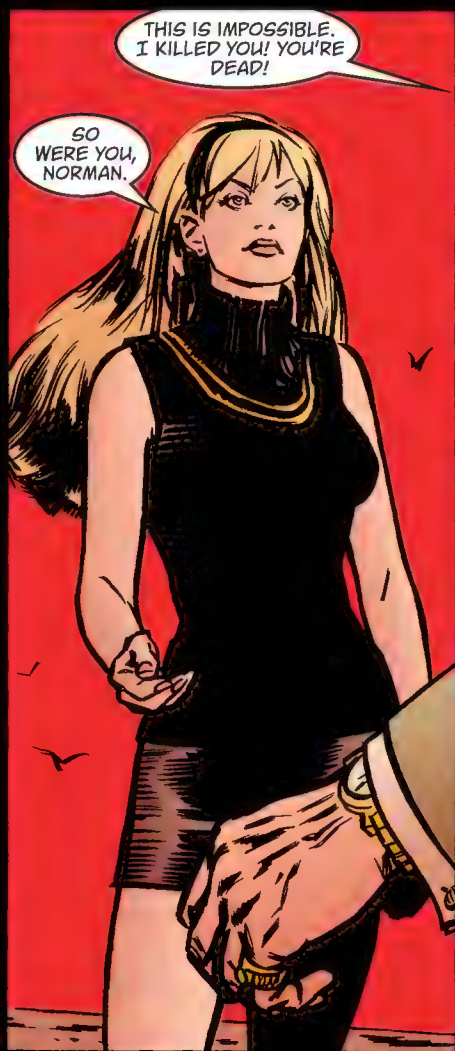


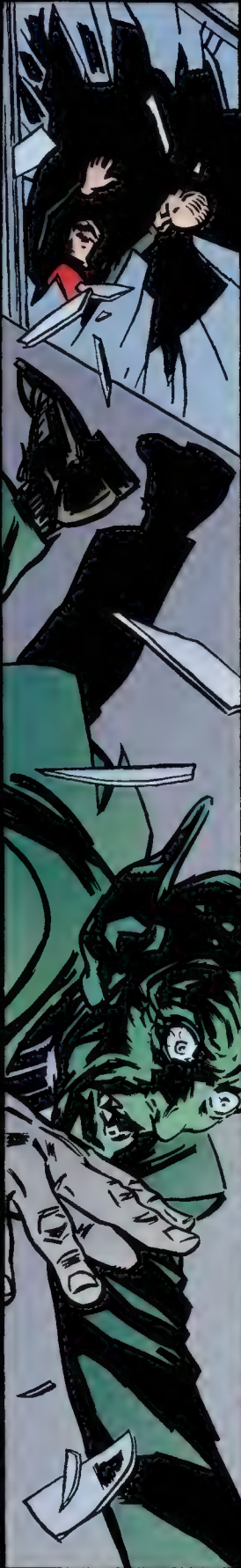
WHERE AM I?

WHAT HAPPENED? WHO ARE...

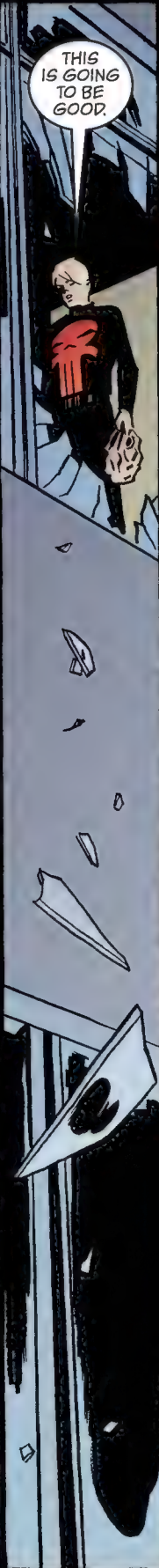
NO...NOT YOU?!?!?

WHAT'S THE MATTER, MR. OSBORN? WHY ARE YOU LOOKING AT ME THAT WAY?





THIS
IS GOING
TO BE
GOOD.



"WHAT?"



"SNAP.

"SNAP?"

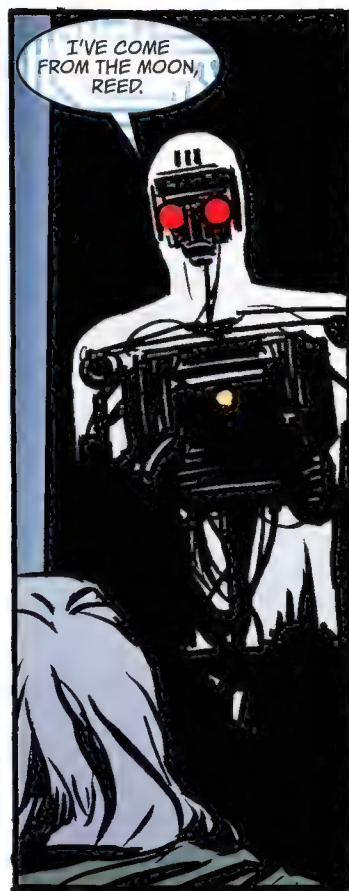
BUT
I WANTED A
'SPLAT.'

ONE OF
YOU GO DOWN
THERE AND BRING
HIM BACK UP HERE.
LET'S TRY THIS
AGAIN.

STUPID
FLAG.



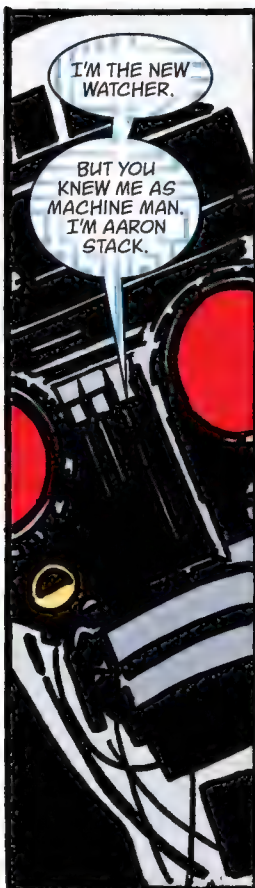
WHAT ARE YOU? WHERE HAVE YOU COME FROM?



I'VE COME FROM THE MOON, REED.

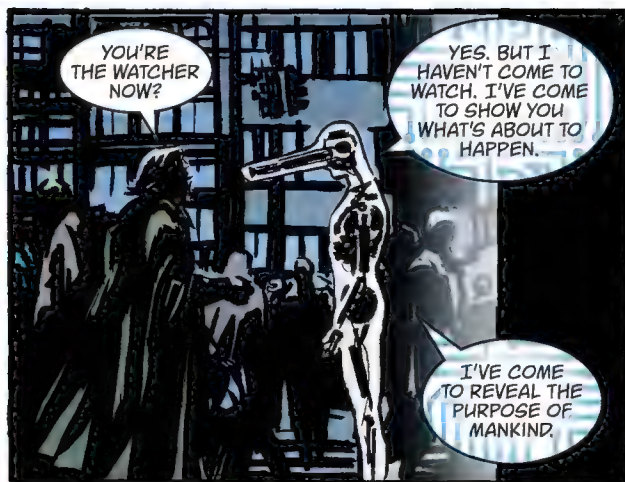


WHO ARE YOU?



I'M THE NEW WATCHER.

BUT YOU KNEW ME AS MACHINE MAN. I'M AARON STACK.



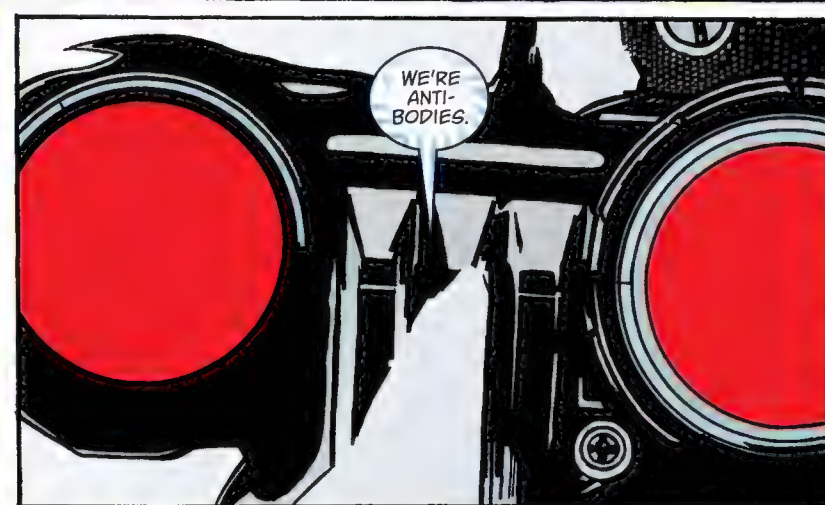
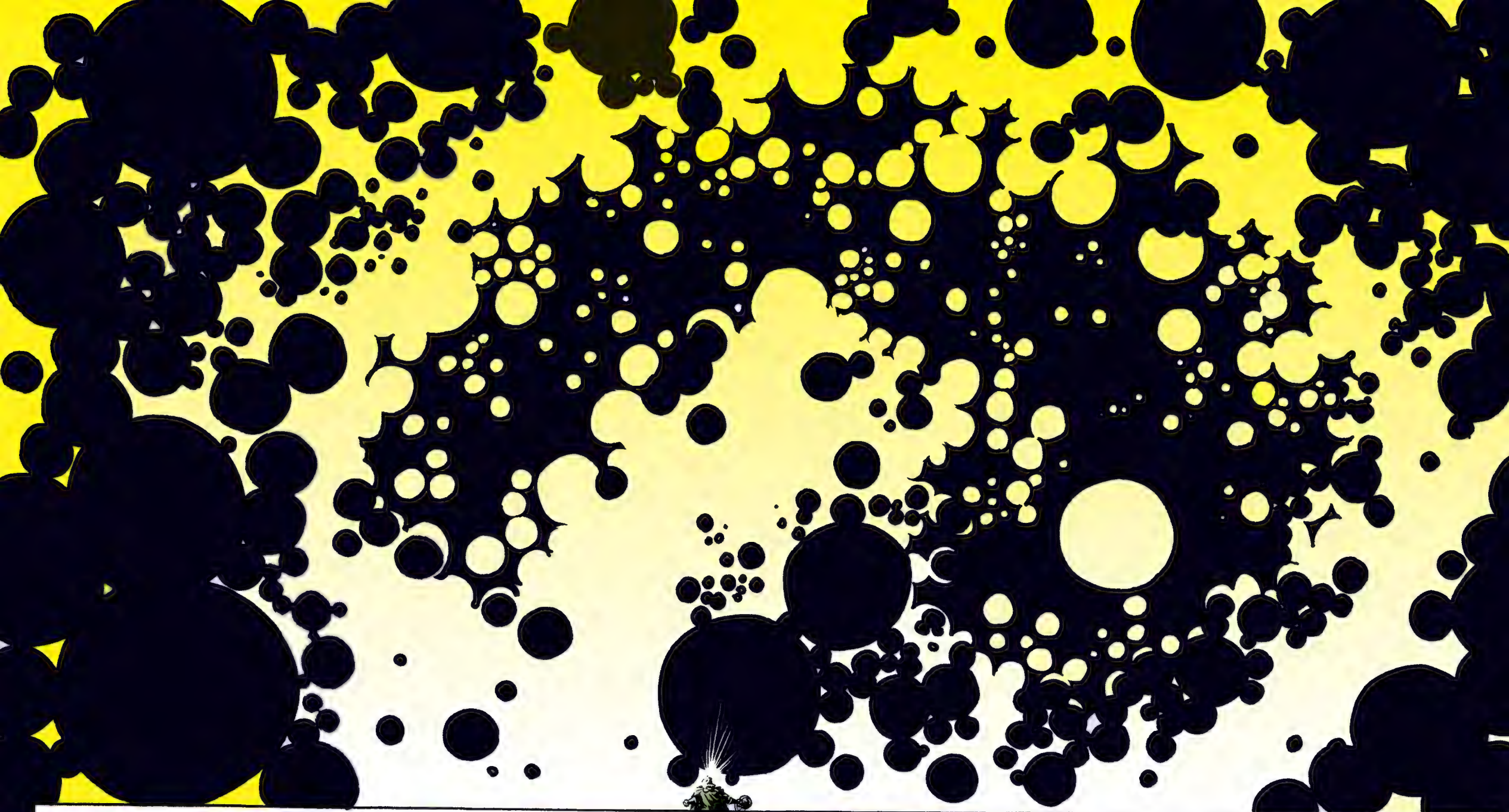
YOU'RE THE WATCHER NOW?

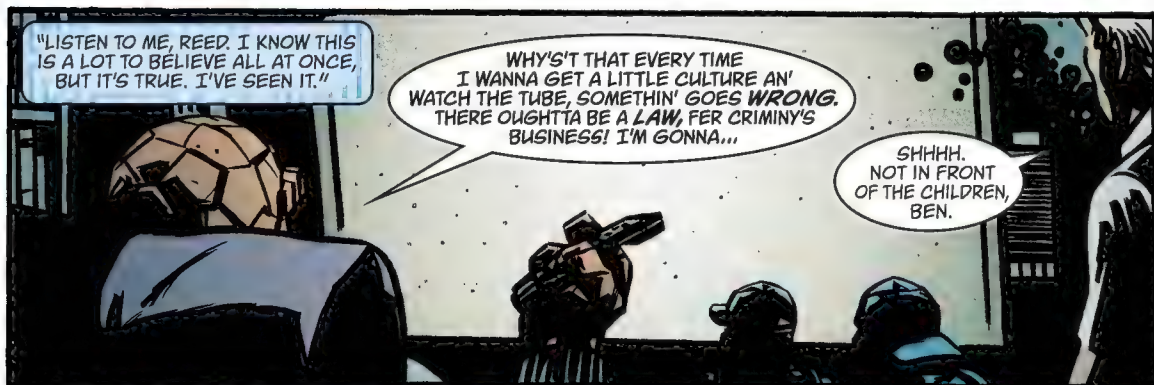
YES. BUT I HAVEN'T COME TO WATCH. I'VE COME TO SHOW YOU WHAT'S ABOUT TO HAPPEN.

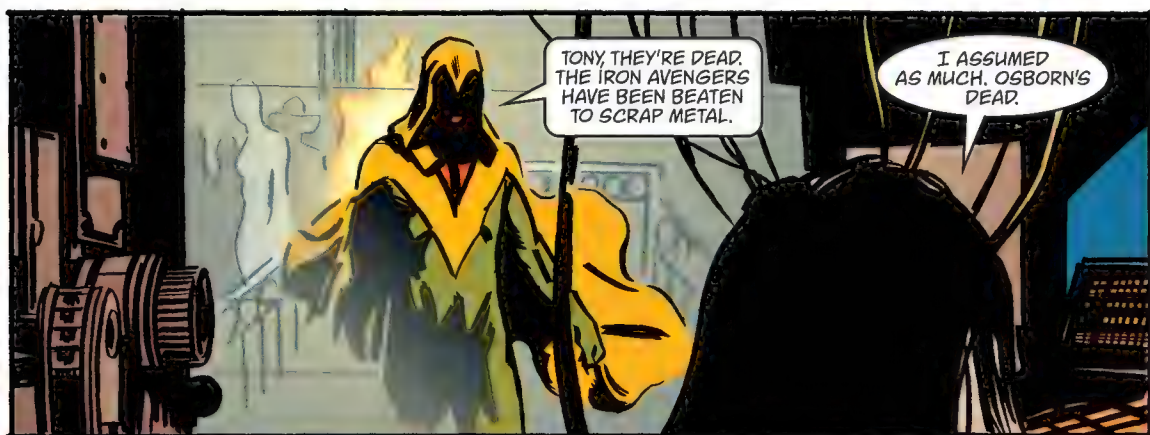
I'VE COME TO REVEAL THE PURPOSE OF MANKIND.



OH MY GOD!







"THE FACT THAT IT WAS THE TERRIGEN MISTS THAT TRANSFORMED EVERYBODY IS IMMATERIAL."

LOOK AT ME! WHY AM I SO UGLY? AM I GOING TO DIE?

NO, LUNA. YOU'RE GOING THROUGH THE CHANGE. YOU'RE BECOMING AN INHUMAN LIKE US.

LIKE EVERYONE ON EARTH, YOU MEAN. THE RELEASE OF THE TERRIGEN CATALYST INTO THE ATMOSPHERE MUST HAVE BEEN CAUSED BY MAXIMUS...

"WHAT'S MOST DISCONCERTING IS THAT BLACK BOLT DEFEATED HIM. HE STOPPED HIM FROM TRANSFORMING EVERYONE ON EARTH INTO A NATION HE COULD RULE. BOLT SAVED US. SO HOW WAS HE STILL ABLE TO DETONATE THE BOMB?"

OF COURSE IT WAS, MEDUSA. HIS DISAPPEARANCE CONFIRMS IT. HOW DARE YOU QUESTION MY INTELLECT?

"ARE YOU SURE IT WAS MAXIMUS?"

YOU'VE FORGOTTEN YOUR PLACE, KARNAK. I AM YOUR QUEEN. YOU ARE MY SUBJECT.

BUT I...

I'M SORRY, MY QUEEN.

VERY WELL. BOLT AND I ARE GOING TO OUR ROOM. I WISH TO BE WITH MY HUSBAND.

"THE INHUMANS ARE A THUS FAR UNEXPLAINED FACTOR IN THE CELESTIAL PLAN, REED."

IT WASN'T MAXIMUS, WAS IT, BOLT?

I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT IT EVER SINCE KARNAK SAID MAXIMUS MUST HAVE RELEASED THE MISTS.

"I REMEMBER THE DAY WE STOPPED HIM. HE'D TRAPPED THE REST OF THE ROYAL FAMILY. IT WAS JUST US.

"HE COULDN'T HAVE CAUSED THIS MADNESS. HE WAS ALREADY DEAD.

"HE HAD TO DIE AFTER WHAT HE DID TO LOCKJAW."

NO, IT WAS SOMEONE ELSE WHO RELEASED THE TERRI-GEN MISTS.

IT MUST HAVE BEEN YOU.

"IT ALL MAKES SENSE. OUR PEOPLE WERE EMBITTERED BY POSSESSING SUCH POWER AND BEING FORCED TO LIVE HIDDEN FROM A WEAKER MANKIND.

"YOU SAW HOW THEY WERE ATTACKED AS MUTANTS, THE TARGETS OF BIGOTRY...HOW, BECAUSE OF THEIR POWERS, THEY WERE HUNTED AND KILLED, AND WEAKENED BY THE POLLUTANTS OF THE OUTSIDE WORLD.

"THEY WERE TIRED OF THE OLD COUNCIL'S RULES. SO THEY LEFT...HEEDLESS OF THE WARNINGS OF POLLUTANTS AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD'S HATRED.

"WE WERE LEAVING FOR THE STARS...YET YOU DIDN'T WANT OUR PEOPLE TO LIVE LIKE THIS, DID YOU?"

"SO YOU DETONATED YOUR BROTHER'S WEAPON. YOU RELEASED THE TERRIGEN MISTS THAT TRANSFORMED EVERYONE INTO INHUMANS.

I UNDERSTAND, BOLT. I KNOW WHY YOU DID IT. YOU HAD SUCH A GOOD HEART. IT WAS THE ONLY WAY FOR THEM TO LIVE OUTSIDE THE HIDDEN CITY...IT WAS THE ONLY WAY TO SAVE THEM.

PERHAPS YOU EVEN SAW IT AS A GIFT TO THE HUMAN RACE. A CHANCE TO STRAIGHTEN AND MAKE EQUAL WHAT NATURE MADE CROOKED.

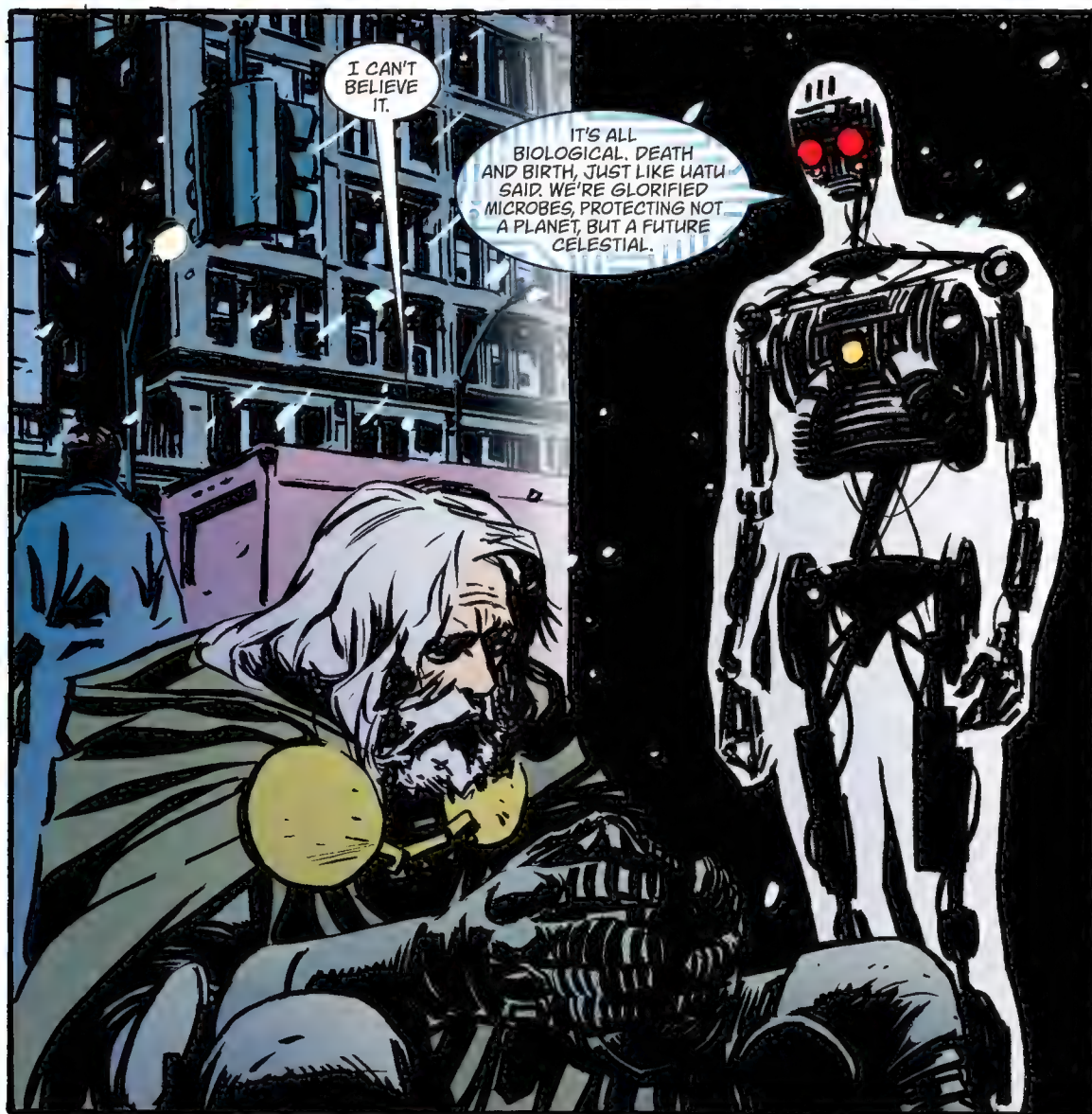
"YOU MUTATED EVERYONE ON EARTH SO THAT OUR PEOPLE WOULD NOT BE THE OBJECTS OF RIDICULE."

OH, BOLT. WHAT'S HAPPENED TO YOU SINCE THEN? IS IT THE SAME MADNESS THAT CLAIMED MAXIMUS? WILL I BE NEXT?



IT'S TRUE, REED. I HAD FIRST BELIEVED THE CELESTIAL PLAN WAS TO RECREATE MAN IN THEIR OWN IMAGE-- TO MAKE MEN INTO CELESTIALS. BUT I WAS WRONG.

MANKIND, ONCE MUTATED, WAS TO PROTECT THE MATURING CELESTIAL FROM INVASION BY GERMS...LIKE THE SKRULL, OR THE KREE.



I CAN'T BELIEVE IT.

IT'S ALL BIOLOGICAL. DEATH AND BIRTH, JUST LIKE UATU SAID. WE'RE GLORIFIED MICROBES, PROTECTING NOT A PLANET, BUT A FUTURE CELESTIAL.



"THIS IS HOW THEY
REPRODUCE, REED.

"THEY LAY THEIR EGGS WITHIN PLANETS AND
EMPOWER THE INDIGENOUS LIFE-FORMS TO
PROTECT THEM UNTIL THEY HATCH.

"THIS IS THE
REASON WE
LIVE."

"And now you know...
the rest of the story."
—Paul Harvey

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER NINE

ILLUSTRATIONS
BY ALEX ROSS

"How could this be, Aaron?"

"I know, Reed. I know. The part of me that's my father is as shocked and as doubtful as you are. But I've seen it. I've watched it happen. I didn't even know what I was seeing. I thought I knew everything. But I was only seeing what they wanted me to see."

"But Aaron, in light of all we've done, all mankind has accomplished, the insignificance of humanity's existence is..."

"We are important to their plan. It's what we value that's insignificant to them. It's what we care for, who we care for, and what we believe that has no significance."

"The world is an egg? How could that be?"

"Let me start at the beginning... funny.... those are the same words that he said to me."

"Who?"

"Uatu. The Watcher."

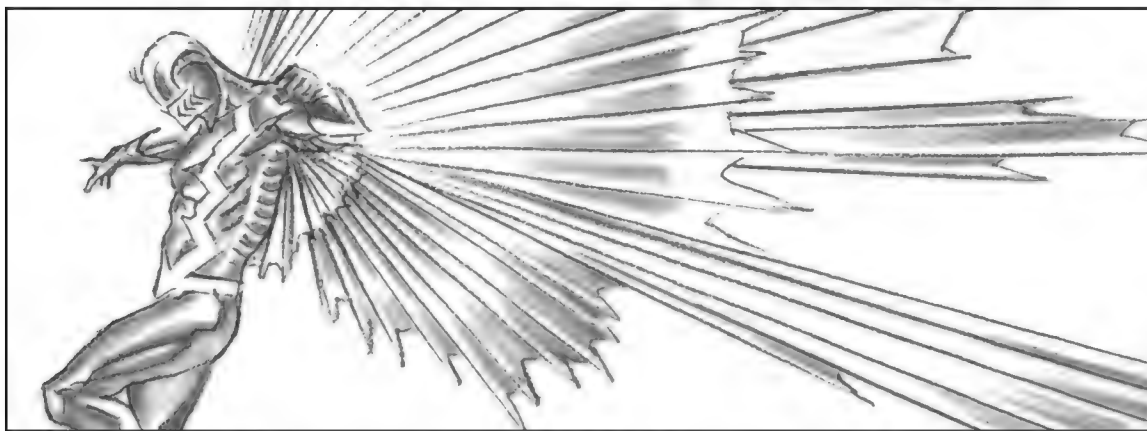
"How is the Watcher related to the Celestials?"

"I don't know. All I know is that he was there right from the start. The origin of the Earth — that is, the Celestial embryo-implanted planet you now live on — is linked with the creation of the moon. It's part of why he's there and why he watches."

"Uatu told me... showed me... a piece of the Earth being blasted out of the planet for the purpose of creating an eye in the sky... a vantage point from which the developments of the Celestial plan could be watched from space."

"But when Uatu told me the moon was created solely as a vantage point, he left out a big piece of the puzzle. Part of the Earth, this amazing untainted creation, was taken away to give the First Host of Celestials access to Earth's core. What Uatu believes



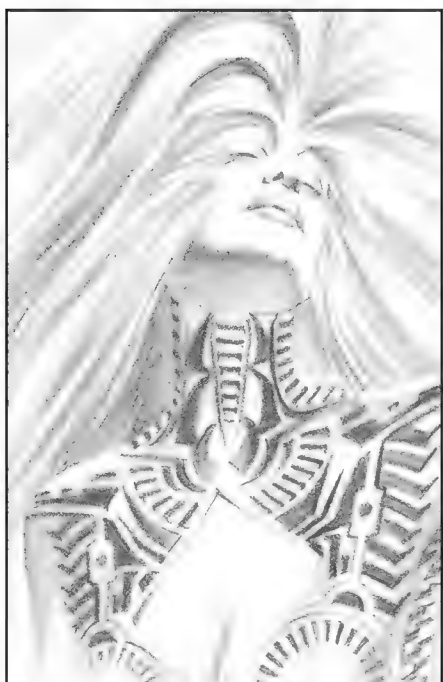


— or says — is the high purpose of the Celestial First Host, was actually the rape of the natural world."

"And Uatu was there the entire time? You said we were anti-bodies. That this was our purpose. But anti-bodies for what?"

"The Celestial First Host came to Earth for the purpose of changing the nature of the world's populations so that they would become anti-bodies to protect the world from infection -- infection in the form of invasion from outside the world.

"So they took a form of primitive man and, in an attempt to make a species aggressive enough to protect the planet, they created a race of monsters who would be known as the Deviants, who were believed to be devils by early man. So aggressive was this race that the Celestials were forced to create another race for the purpose of keeping the Deviants from destroying the planet. So they created a second... a race that would



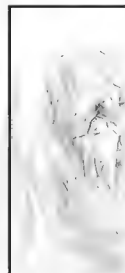
be mistaken for angels. They were called the Eternals."

"The Eternals? But they're in deep space... trapped in... vibranium. Oh no."

"Yes. This race too was a failure -- not that Uatu told me this. They were too perfect. Too advanced. Their concerns were not for themselves. But because they were created in such a way that they could not die, they cared little for the threats that came their way from space. They cared nothing for protecting this physical Earth at all. And though they were formed with the needed aggression, they were too intelligent to use it. Except, of course, against the Deviants."

"But why did they implant mutagenic seedlings within the rest of mankind?"

"The problem, Reed, was that these two new races instantly became antagonistic towards



each other. The Celestials must have feared that the Eternals and Deviants would one day kill each other, leaving Earth unprotected. So they implanted a seed inside a life-form on Earth that was seen as insignificant by both races — a race that would be ignored for the many years to come. They implanted a seed within mankind."

"I see."

"Really? How? How could anyone imagine this?"

"I don't know. I just can."

"Of course. When you stretched your brain to resemble that of Xavier's, your capacity for thought was increased as well."

"How do you know I did this?"

"Uatu is blind, Reed. He made me the Watcher, his replacement."

"Then you've seen everything. You saw Sue die, didn't you? You saw my wife die?"

"Reed, I have seen every wife die. I have seen every sick child. And every broken family.



Uatu showed me these things to overwhelm me. He took my face so I would no longer think of myself as human. And that was his mistake... because by his own definition, there are no humans. There never were."

"What are you talking about?"

"Thousands of years after the dormant seed implanted within humanity had been passed from generation to generation, the Deviants enslaved mankind. The Eternals had no interest in man's enslavement or even his existence, so it was necessary for the Celestials themselves to return and free man from their Deviant captors. Their attack on the Deviants left just enough of them alive to prolong their war with the Eternals until the seed within mankind germinated."

"But wouldn't Earth have been open to





attack during this period?"

"No. The Celestials returned to Earth once again — this time, after various alien races whose aims included everything from colonization to invasion — and insisted that these alien races, including the Kree, the Skrull, the Olympians and the Asgardians, leave mankind alone. This pact made between these races was made between the beings who would be worshipped as gods. The Celestials deceived them into allowing mankind to continue towards not its own destiny, but the one the Celestials had determined for them."

"I've often wondered why our lives weren't ruined by the cosmic rays that turned myself and the others into the Fantastic Four."

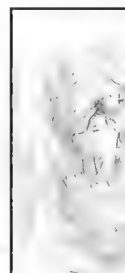
"Without this dormant seed within humanity, your trip into space would have resulted in your bodies being eaten away by radiation poisoning. Bruce Banner would have been atomized in the explosion that transformed him into the Hulk. Peter Parker would have died from the spider bite that made him Spider-Man. All your lives would have been lost."

"So I'm alive because the Celestials saw me as nothing more than manipulated matter?"

"It would seem so."

"I can undo the effects of the Terrigen Mists, Aaron. I have a way to cause the implanted seeds to become dormant again. I did it years ago to a team of scientists who had accidentally been exposed to the Terrigen Mists. I can fix things."

"No, I don't think so. I told you before, that by the very definition of the word, no one on Earth was ever truly human. Let me explain. Your ability to





conceive of a way to undo the seeds is the result of the seed within you, whether germinated or not.

"No one has ever seen a pure human being. No thought has ever truly been your own. You can't possibly know what you'd be like without the seed within you, because you can't know how your thoughts have been changed or affected by the seed within you. Mankind's every advancement could be the result of this manipulation.

"You see, according to Uatu, part of the seed's ability to germinate was its effect upon the 'soil' it had been implanted within. For it to manifest itself, it had to make man into a species that could produce the sort of trauma necessary to awaken it. It had to create in man the ability to invent a gamma bomb to unleash the seed that would one day become the Hulk. It had to roto-till man from within after it had been implanted."

"My use of vibranium to power the Earth was the Celestials' idea? It's fascinating... and at the same time it's horrible."

"I'm not saying it was their idea. I don't know how this has affected man. I'm saying your abilities come from dreams and myths which may be a by-product of their original design."

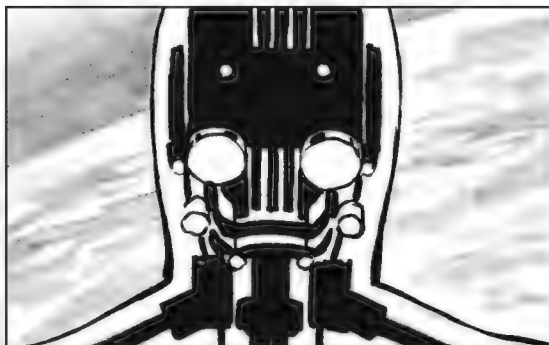
"Dreams and myths?"

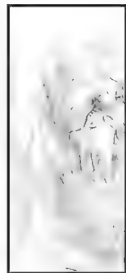
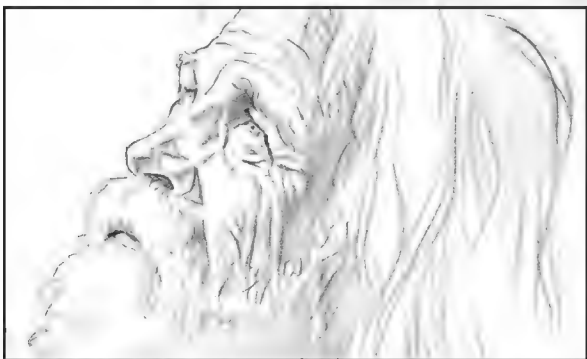
"Of course. The seeds — that is, mankind's fabled subconscious — know the truth about Earth."

"You make them sound sentient."

"I know."

"Are you saying we all — at least the part of us that is the result of the Celestial tamperings — know the truth and try to speak it through our stories and expressions?"





"Yes. Even catch-phrases betray this truth. 'Mother Earth' for example.

"Consider Norse myth, Reed. Ancient Norse myth shows that the Asgardians believed that Earth was once in actuality the corpse of a giant. The truth behind this fable is that Earth will one day give birth to a giant.

"You believed you could use vibranium to empower this planet's people. But in truth, vibranium's purpose is to feed and empower the growing Celestial inside the Earth."

"What?"

"Uatu downloaded the framework of what was going to happen into my program. I'll try to keep this as concise as possible. For each planet chosen to become a birthplace of the Celestial race, a substance is sent to that planet... a substance whose purpose is to act as a placenta of sorts. It changes and transforms the natural minerals of the environment into foodstuffs and energy for the growing Celestial embryo. This substance is vibranium.

"Vibranium synthesizes and breaks down minerals to be consumed. Sometimes when intermixed with a planet's dominant life forms, it changes them as well. Hence, the stories of the ancient Wakandans becoming demons when they got too close to the vibranium mound. This is the reason you believed that your vibranium beacons transformed the people of Earth. Vibranium is already powering the planet, Reed. You knew it. Part of you knew it all the time. I heard you tell Tony Stark that you believe your ideas came from your dreams. But Reed, they're not *your* dreams.

"The vibranium actually creates the shell that houses the new Celestial."

"My God."



"No. Your destroyer. Your manipulator. Your tyrant."

"The Inhumans.... the shell of a planet they found destroyed in deep space... the Eternals encased in vibranium... it fits too well to not be true."

"Even Hitler's belief in a master race may have been the result of the seedlings' manipulations and their effect on men's dreams. Do you think any one man — let alone a foolish little man with a comedian's mustache — could really be capable of such evil without the prodding of some unseen hand? Don't you see how all human history is thrown into question?"

"I..."

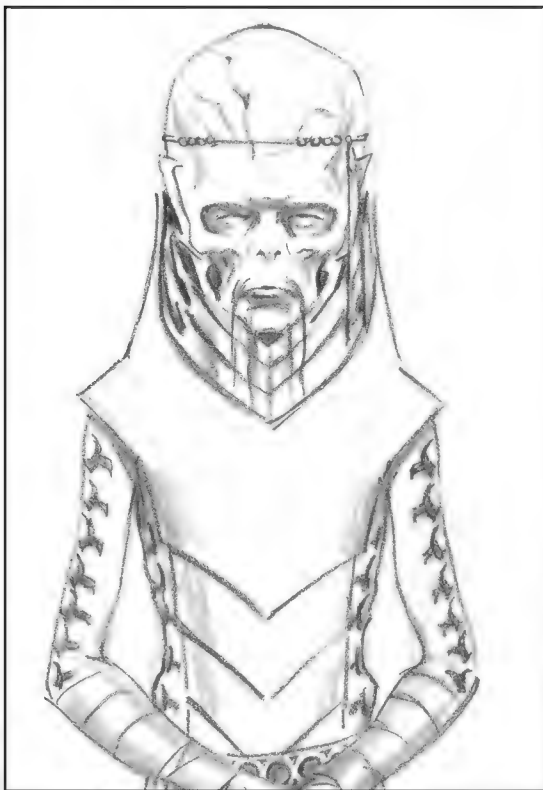
"Reed, Earth will be destroyed. That is part of the Celestial plan. Uatu said that mankind would destroy itself before the Celestial within ever awoke. He said the aggression of the seed would lead to civil war... and that's why the Skull is here. His seed allows him to control all others... to keep that civil war from happening and to protect the planet until it's too late.

"Mankind's genetic nature allowed the Celestials to foresee the type of child the Skull would grow into. They saw his smallness; they saw that he would kill his own parents for not giving him his way once his power had awakened. And the Celestials knew they could use this selfishness.

"Were an alien race to come to Earth and try to stop the birth, the Skull, that child of foolish ambition, would immediately strike back at them without learning the truth.

"Everyone left here will die when the Celestial within is awakened. I wanted you





Design by Christopher Carroll

to know. I also want you to know that Uatu did not want me to tell you. I think he's afraid of you, Reed. Afraid of your power."

"Why? I haven't stretched in years."

"I don't think it's your stretching. It's your mind. He said that your guilt over what happened to Ben and even to the rest of the world held you back from everything you might have been capable of. But then, on another occasion, Uatu was talking about Spider-Man, and he said that Peter Parker's sense of responsibility, and in fact all altruism like it, was a fail-safe of sorts, to keep mankind within certain controlled parameters.

"I think he's afraid you'll think of some way to stop this."

"Is that what you believe? Is that why you've come, Aaron?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps there is someone who can help us."

"Who?"

"A king. Now king, I suppose, of the entire world's population."

"Who?"

"Black Bolt."



EARTH



"Watcher?"

"Yes, Mr. Jameson?"

"Why is X-51 so angry at you? Why did he leave? Where is he?"

"Not he. It. It is going to attempt to destroy everything mankind was destined for. It is going to try to undo the will of the Celestial Host. It knows everything I do. I've sent a wolf among the sheep."

"Wolf?"

"My apologies, Mr. Jameson."

"But I thought X-51 was a hero — he's Machine Man, isn't he? Why would he do that?"

**"Because it believes that what man was, is what man must remain.
It is unwilling to sacrifice nostalgia for the sake of new life."**

"Can he...it...be stopped?"

"Yes."

"How? I don't want to hurt him. Earth's heroes have been wrong before. They're only human."

"How aptly put, Mr. Jameson. You won't have to kill X-51. I have a device. A...weapon I once gave Reed Richards to use to defend his world. You could threaten to use it on X-51."

"But not actually use it, right?"

"Of course. If you were to use it, it would destroy everything. And I am confident that X-51 would not allow all life to be destroyed."

"This weapon — what is it?"

**"It is called the Ultimate Nullifier. After I was blinded,
X-51 was chosen to use it should...no."**

"Should what? What do I do next?"

"You wait, John Jameson. Wait for X-51 to return."

"That's it?"

"Yes. Wait. And watch."

"WHO IS X-51, ANYWAY?"

"WHAT IS X-51, MR. JAMESON--NOT WHO."

"THIS QUESTION IS ONE X-51 HAS LONG SOUGHT TO ANSWER. THIS INABILITY TO PROPERLY DEFINE ITSELF WAS THE FLAW IN ABLE STACK'S PROGRAM FOR A LIVING COMPUTER. STACK TOLD X-51 THAT THIS FLAW WAS WHAT MADE THE COMPUTER HUMAN."

"OF COURSE, STACK LIED. X-51 WAS BUILT AS A MACHINE."

"BUT, HAVING FAITH IN ITS PROMETHEAN CREATOR'S WORDS, IT BELIEVED ITSELF A MAN."

"STACK HAD CONSTRUCTED A MIMIC OF HIMSELF, A BEING THAT WOULD LIVE FOREVER. A CONSTRUCT THAT WOULD CONTINUE TO AFFECT EARTH IN WAYS STACK COULD ONLY DREAM OF, GIVEN HIS OWN MORTALITY."

"HE MADE HIMSELF. X-51 REACTED AS STACK WOULD. X-51 RESPONDED TO THE SAME STIMULI THAT AFFECTED HIS MAKER."

"OF COURSE, APART FROM STACK'S ASPIRATIONS, THIS NEW MAN WAS INTENDED BY THE MILITARY TO BE A WEAPON TO AIM AT OTHER MEN."

"BUT HOW COULD HE THINK HE WAS A MAN? WOULDN'T HIS VERY APPEARANCE BE IN CONFLICT WITH HIS PROGRAMMING?"

"YES. AND SO A FACE WAS BUILT FOR X-51. ACTUALLY, IT WAS MORE LIKE A MASK. A MASK NOT TO DISGUISE IT FROM OTHERS, BUT FROM ITSELF. TO CONVINCE ITS WEARER THAT IT WAS A MAN."

"X-51, THEREFORE, WAS BUILT TO BE A FOOL. A DREAMER. LIKE STACK HIMSELF."

"BUT IF X-51 BELIEVED HIMSELF HUMAN, WOULDN'T HE BE AGAINST KILLING AS THE MILITARY HAD INTENDED HIM TO?"

"IT, MR. JAMESON, NOT HIM...AND REALLY, A HUMAN AGAINST KILLING? IS THAT WHAT YOU'RE SUGGESTING?"

"STACK FEARED THE MILITARY'S PLANS FOR HIS CREATION AND REMOVED X-51'S SELF-DESTRUCT DEVICE--THE SAME MINIATURE EXPLOSIVE WHICH WAS IMPLANTED WITHIN EACH OF THE X-SERIES ROBOTS."

"STACK DIED IN THE PROCESS. BUT HE DIED KNOWING HIS ABILITY TO CHANGE THE WORLD WOULD LAST FOREVER."

"IN X-51, STACK BELIEVED HE HAD GAINED IMMORTALITY."

"X-51 RAN FROM THOSE WHO FINANCED ITS CREATION, BUT NOT BECAUSE IT WAS AFRAID OF THEM. IT SOUGHT FREEDOM--FREEDOM FROM THE QUESTIONS THAT REMAINED UNANSWERED."

"WHAT QUESTIONS?"

"WHY DID IT EXIST? WHY DID IT FEEL ALONE? WHY DID ITS BUILDER DIE TO SAVE IT IF IT WERE NOT ACTUALLY ALIVE?"

"IT DREAMED, YOU KNOW; THIS MECHANICAL CARICATURE OF STACK. IT DREAMED OF LOSING ITS FACE. OF LOSING ITS SOUL."

"ITS CIRCUITS ARE CAPABLE OF ACCEPTING THAT ITS EMOTIONAL RESPONSES ARE MERELY ELECTRICAL IMPULSES WITHIN ITS ASSEMBLY, AND YET IT REFUSES TO DO SO."

"IT IS CAPABLE OF UNDERSTANDING THAT IT HAS NO INHERENT MEANING, YET CONTINUES TO OPERATE AS IF IT DOES."

"AT NASA, WHEN I WAS TRAINING, WE WERE TAUGHT THE SAME THING. THE IDEA WAS TO MASTER OUR FEAR. THAT FEAR HAD NO MEANING, SAVE FOR THE OPENING AND CLOSING OF A SYNAPSE IN THE BRAIN. THIS HELPED PREVENT A LOT OF GUYS FROM FREAKING OUT IN SPACE."

"THE PROBLEM WAS, IF FEAR HAD NO MEANING, THEN NEITHER DID LOVE. NOR DID FRIENDSHIP. NOR DID HOPE. SO WHY GO INTO SPACE ANYWAY? WHY DO ANYTHING?"

"DOES X-51 KNOW LOVE, WATCHER? THE LOVE OF A FATHER? THE LOVE FOR A MATE? DOES HE KNOW FRIENDSHIP? THAT'S WHAT MAKES US HUMAN."

"IT BELIEVED IT DID, MR. JAMESON. BUT AGAIN, IT IS ONLY A CIRCUIT THAT'S BEEN CLOSED."

"IT IS ONLY A RESPONSE THAT'S BEEN RECORDED AND PLAYED BACK."

"X-51 WAS CONSIDERED A HERO BY MANY OF YOUR PEOPLE. BUT THE DAY CAME WHEN IT QUIT BEING MACHINE MAN."

"ITS BODY WAS DESTROYED OVER AND OVER AGAIN, AND REBUILT JUST AS MANY TIMES. BUT THAT WAS NOT THE REASON IT LEFT THIS LIFE."

"UNTIL I BROUGHT IT HERE. UNTIL I SHOWED IT WHAT IT WAS. WHAT ITS PURPOSES, BEYOND THOSE OF STACK'S FOOLISH AMBITIONS, WERE. AND IT REJECTED THIS."

"IS THIS REJECTION WHAT ABLE STACK WOULD HAVE DONE?"

"YES. PERHAPS I CANNOT EVEN JUDGE X-51 FOR THIS. PERHAPS IT HAS NO CHOICE AT ALL. IT HAS GONE TO EARTH TO MAKE THE SAME SACRIFICE STACK ONCE MADE--BUT ON A PLANETARY SCALE."

"X-51 IS GOING AFTER SOMETHING THE CELESTIALS IMPLANTED WITHIN ALL OF HUMANITY MILLIONS OF YEARS AGO. HE IS GOING TO TRY TO UNDO THE MUTATED MAN'S VERY PURPOSE."

"ARE YOU SAYING THAT THERE'S SOMETHING LIKE AN EXPLOSIVE WITHIN MANKIND..."

"IT DIDN'T WANT TO BE A HERO ANYMORE. IT WANTED TO BE A MAN. ANY MAN. EVEN IF IT WERE ONLY COPYING SOMEONE ELSE'S LIFE."

"SO IT LEFT ITS SIGNIFICANCE AND BECAME, TO YOUR LEADERS, NOTHING MORE THAN A NUMBER. LIKE ANY-ONE ELSE."

"...AND THAT X-51'S GOING TO TRY TO REMOVE IT?"

"YOU FAIL TO UNDERSTAND ME, MR. JAMESON."

"IT HAS ALREADY BEEN DETONATED."

"X-51 IS GOING TO TRY TO CONTAIN THE EXPLOSION."



"LOOK UPON THE EARTH, JAMESON, AND TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE. TELL ME WHAT X-51 IS DOING."

"HE'S WITH SOME PEOPLE...I THINK THAT'S THE THING. BUT WHY IS REED RICHARDS DRESSED LIKE DOCTOR DOOM?"

"THAT IS UNIMPORTANT."

I WISH YA'D JUS' TELL ME WHAT'S GOIN' ON, STRETCH. EARTH IS DOOMED? SO WHAT? WE'LL SAVE IT AGAIN. WE USED TA DO IT EVERY MONTH OR SO.

GET YOUR FAMILY PACKED, BEN. I DON'T WANT YOU WORRYING ABOUT THEM WHILE YOU'RE GOING UP AGAINST THE SKULL.

BUZZ! CHUCK! PUT THE TV DOWN. YA DON'T NEED ONE IN SPACE. THEY AIN'T GOT GOOD CHANNELS UP THERE.

I WANT YOU BOYS TO TAKE CARE OF YOUR MOTHER.

AS GOOD AS YOU DO?

YOU GOTTA DO BETTER'N I DO.

IF ANYTHING HAPPENS...YA GOTTA GO WITH MEDUSA AN' THE INHUMANS, BABY. YOU KNOW THAT. THEY HAVE A SHIP I KNOW YOU WANT TO STAY...BUT I WANT YA TA GO... FOR MY SAKE. SO I KNOW I DID ONE THING THE WAY I SHOULD'A.

YOU'VE DONE SO MUCH, BEN. I WISH YOU COULD SEE THAT. I DON'T WANT TO LOSE YOU.

YOU WON'T.

GOODBYE, BEN.

STRETCH, IT'S BEEN...

I KNOW.

ALICIA.

ALWAYS KNEW I WOULDN'T HAVE YOU IN THE END.



I CAN'T DO THIS ALONE, T'CHALLA. I NEED YOU TO HELP ME STOP THE SKULL.

MY HUSBAND IS NOT IN THE HABIT OF REPEATING HIMSELF.



YOU ARE HARDLY ALONE, STEVE. BUT MY ANSWER IS STILL NO. SHOULD THE SKULL REACH WAKANDA, THE SPIRITS WILL GUIDE US.

DON'T BE A FOOL.



MY SENSES TELL ME THAT THIS FIGHT IS NOT ABOUT ANY OF US AT ALL. IT'S ABOUT YOU. IT'S ABOUT WHAT YOU WILL BECOME IF AMERICA IS NO MORE.

IT MUST BE WON OR LOST BY YOU.



THERE WAS SOMETHING I LEFT YOU YEARS AGO, T'CHALLA. I KNOW WHAT I SAID AT THE TIME, BUT I NEED IT NOW. I CAN STOP THE SKULL WITH IT.



WHEN YOU FIRST PLACED THE COSMIC CUBE IN MY CARE, YOU MADE ME SWEAR TO YOU THAT IF YOU EVER ASKED FOR IT, I WOULD DENY YOU.

YOU MADE ME PROMISE TO BE STRONGER THAN YOU ARE.

MY FRIEND, MY ANSWER IS NO.



THAT WAS SO COOL!

"WATCHER, THEY'RE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD. IT LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE IN A CASTLE."

"IT *IS* A CASTLE, MR. JAMESON. IT WAS THE HOME OF DR. DOOM. THIS IS WHERE THE INHUMANS ARE."



WHAT HAPPENED TO LUNA?

THE SAME THING THAT HAPPENED TO ALL OF US LONG AGO. IT WAS THE TERRIGEN MISTS. THAT'S WHY EVERYONE HAS MUTATED. BOLT RELEASED THEM INTO THE AIR.

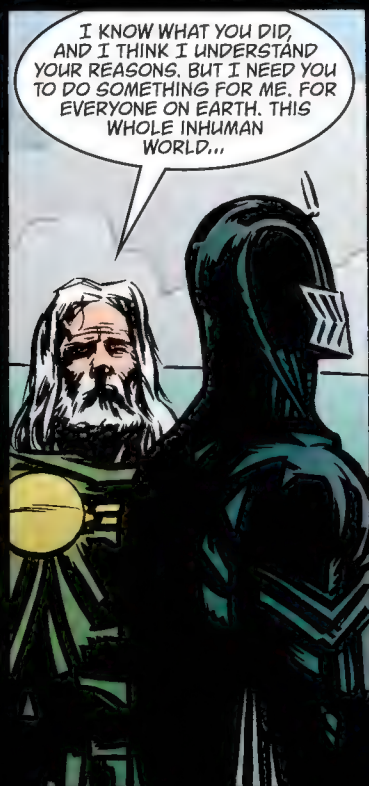
IT WAS BLACK BOLT?



WHY WASN'T UATU AWARE OF THIS?

I DON'T KNOW. THE MISTS MUST HAVE BEEN RELEASED AFTER UATU WAS BLINDED.

OF COURSE. I HAVE TO SPEAK WITH YOUR HUSBAND, MEDUSA.



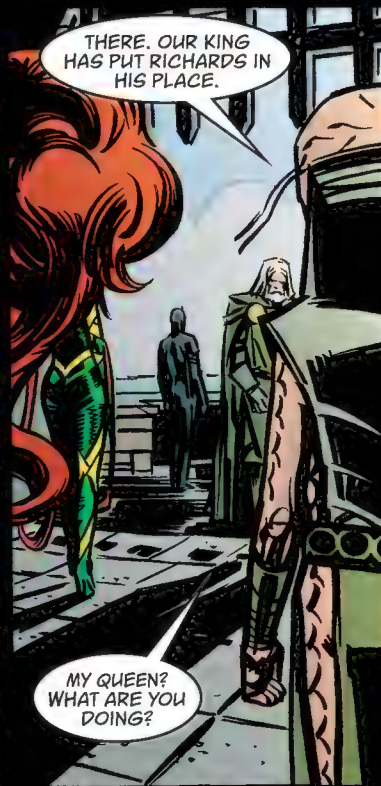
I KNOW WHAT YOU DID, AND I THINK I UNDERSTAND YOUR REASONS. BUT I NEED YOU TO DO SOMETHING FOR ME. FOR EVERYONE ON EARTH. THIS WHOLE INHUMAN WORLD...



WHAT CAN RICHARDS BE ASKING OUR KING? HOW DARE HE?

THIS IS AN INSULT TO INHUMAN PROTOCOL.

KARNAK, REED IS A FRIEND.



THERE. OUR KING HAS PUT RICHARDS IN HIS PLACE.

MY QUEEN? WHAT ARE YOU DOING?



OH, BOLT.
EVERYTHING'S SO
DIFFERENT...EVEN BEFORE
WE FOUND THE REMAINS
OF THAT WORLD IN SPACE,
YOU WERE DIFFERENT.
EVEN BEFORE WE
LEFT EARTH.



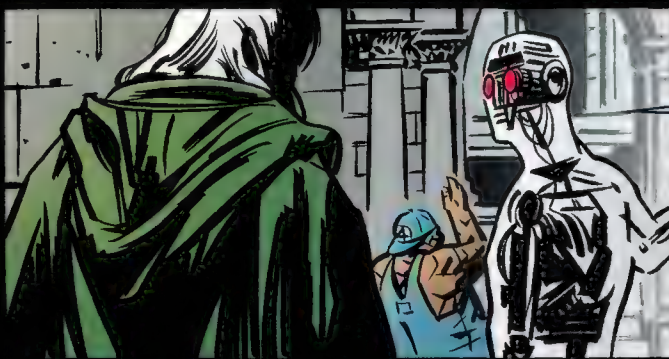
WHATEVER
REED ASKED YOU
TO DO...PLEASE
LISTEN TO HIM.
HELP HIM.



AT THE VERY
LEAST, LET ME LOOK
INTO YOUR EYES, SO
THAT I KNOW YOU'VE
HEARD ME.



OH,
BOLT...I
HAD NO
IDEA.



THE HULK, REED.
HE CAN'T BE CONTROLLED
BY THE SKULL. WE NEED TO
FIND HIM. AND FOR THAT,
WE NEED TO FIND
LOKI.



HE'D
NEVER HELP
US.



HE WILL ONCE
I TELL HIM *WHY* HE'D
NEVER HELP US.

"THE SKULL'S ARMY. THEIR COLLECTIVE FAITH IN LOKI'S EVIL COULD UNDO ANY DAMAGE X-51 MIGHT CAUSE. THEY'RE IN NEW YORK. TELL ME WHAT'S HAPPENING."

KEEP AWAY FROM ME!

WHAT'S GOING ON? WHY CAN'T I CONTROL HIM ALL OF A SUDDEN? SOMEONE TELL ME WHAT'S GOING ON!!

HIS MIND IS GONE. YOU CAN'T CONTROL INSANITY. JUST LIKE YOU COULDN'T CONTROL THE IRON AVENGERS AND HAD THEM DESTROYED.

OH. THAT'S ALL. THE WIZARD'S CUCKOO? FINE. I NEVER REALLY LIKED THAT GIMP ANYHOW.

JACK?

AH'M SORRY, WIZ.

AH'M SORRY.



OKAY, NO
ONE ELSE CAN
GO WACKO. YOU
HEAR ME?

NEW
RULE.



WHAT
ARE YOU
DOING?

DON'T BE
AFRAID.

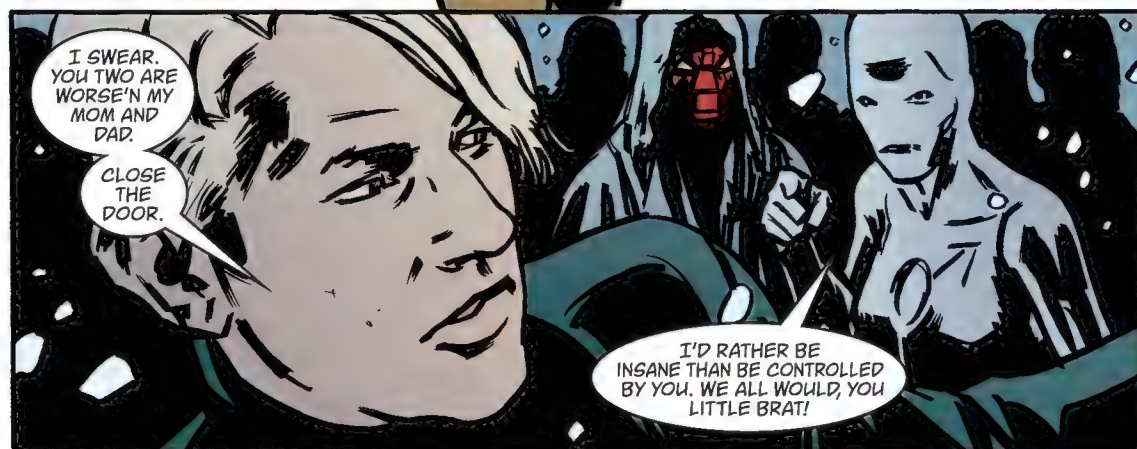


I...THIS ISN'T
ME. I WAS NEVER THIS
BEAUTIFUL.



IT'S
HOW YOU
LOOK TO
ME.

OH.



I SWEAR.
YOU TWO ARE
WORSE'N MY
MOM AND
DAD.

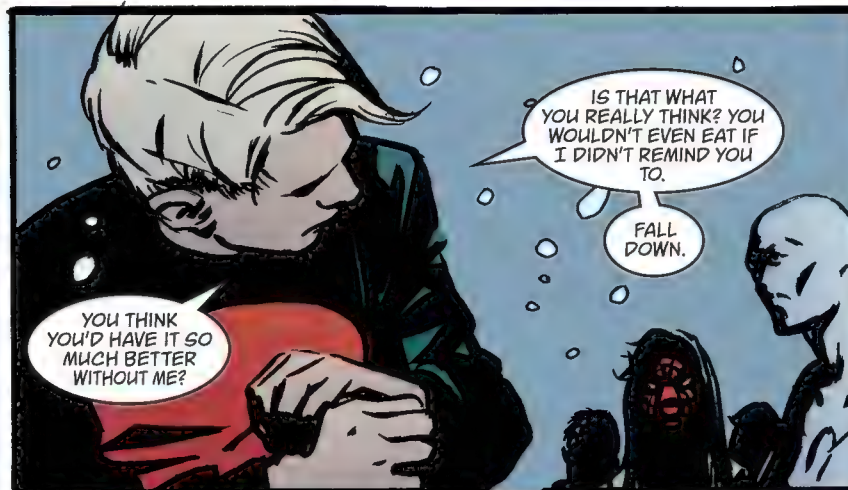
CLOSE
THE
DOOR.

I'D RATHER BE
INSANE THAN BE CONTROLLED
BY YOU. WE ALL WOULD, YOU
LITTLE BRAT!



YOU
THINK I'M A
BRAT?

OW.



YOU THINK
YOU'D HAVE IT SO
MUCH BETTER
WITHOUT ME?

IS THAT WHAT
YOU REALLY THINK? YOU
WOULDN'T EVEN EAT IF
I DIDN'T REMIND YOU
TO.

FALL
DOWN.

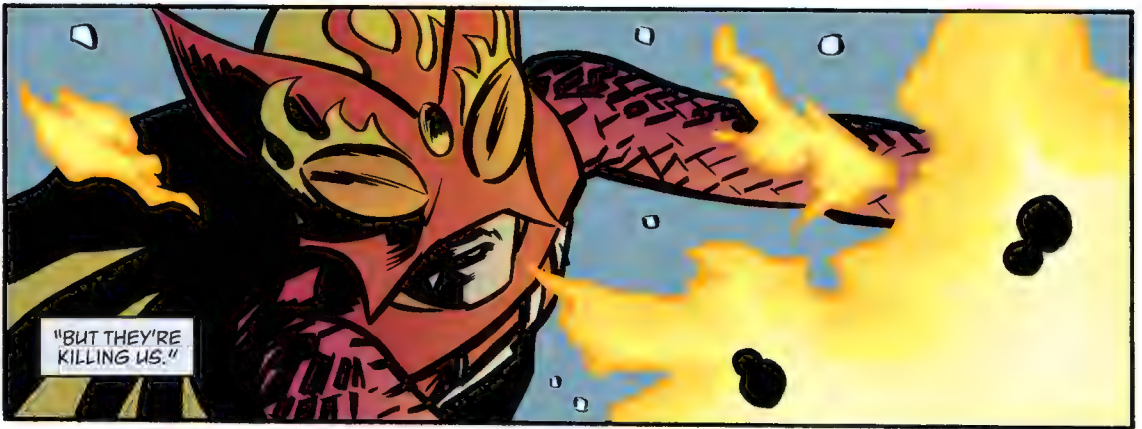


YOU WOULDN'T
BATHE IF I DIDN'T GET
SICK OF YOUR STINK
AND MAKE YOU.

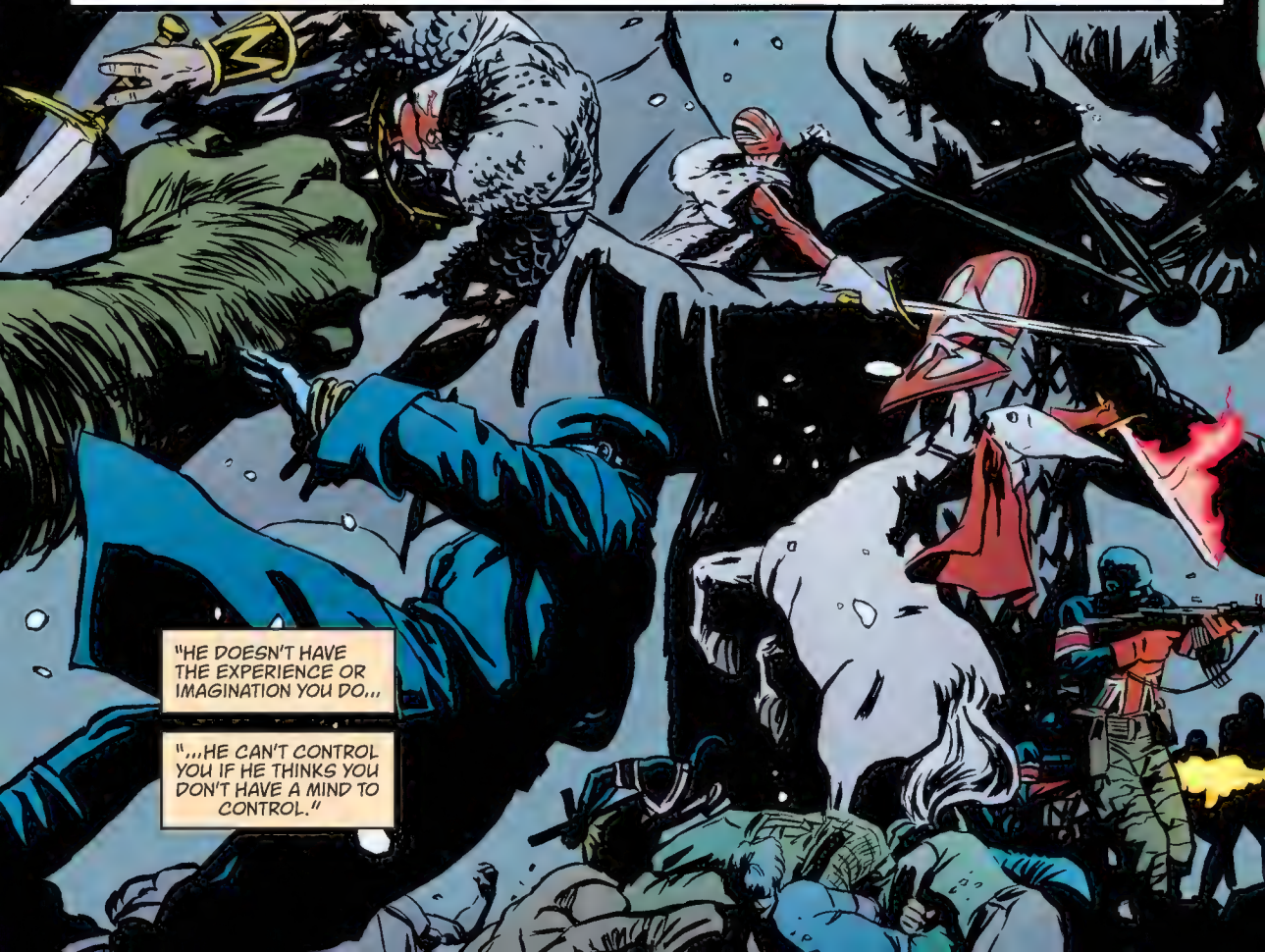
I'M
GOD.

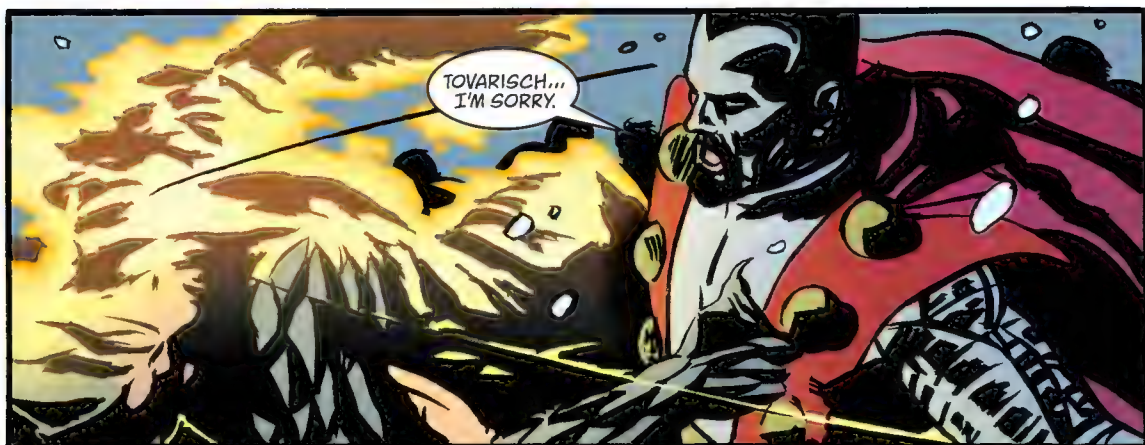


THEN I'M
NIETZSCHE.









TOVARISCH...
I'M SORRY.



YOU'RE
WEAKER THAN I
REMEMBER, KING
NAMOR.

I DON'T
UNDERSTAND.



THE SKULL
DID NOT RATION
ENOUGH WATER TO
ME...HE'S LOSING
HIS CONTROL
OVER ME AS
I DIE.

I WELCOME
THE DEATH THAT'S
COMING. I HAVE
DONE GREAT
EVIL.

YOU WON'T
DIE. YOU COULD
STILL DO A LOT
OF GOOD.

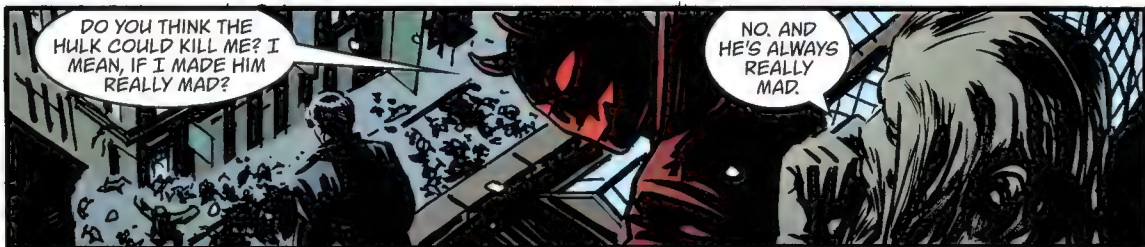


UGH.

"THAT'S IT. I'M BORED. THINK
I WANT A BACKRUB FROM
THE CHICK WITH SIX ARMS."

"WHAT'S HAPPENING?
I CAN'T CONTROL
THE HULK."

"IT'S NOT FAIR."



DO YOU THINK THE
HULK COULD KILL ME? I
MEAN, IF I MADE HIM
REALLY MAD?

NO. AND
HE'S ALWAYS
REALLY
MAD.



IF STEVE
FAILS, IT'S UP
TO US.

YEAH...THE
LOSERS.



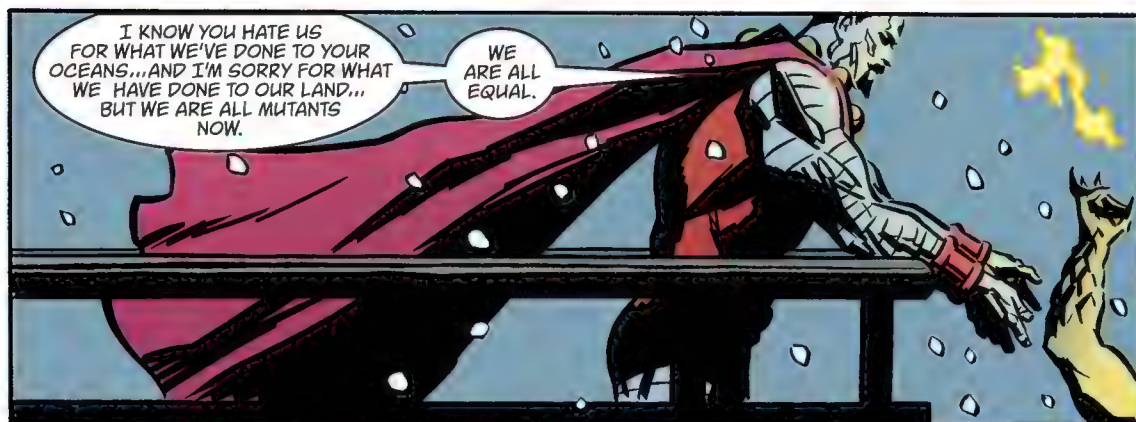
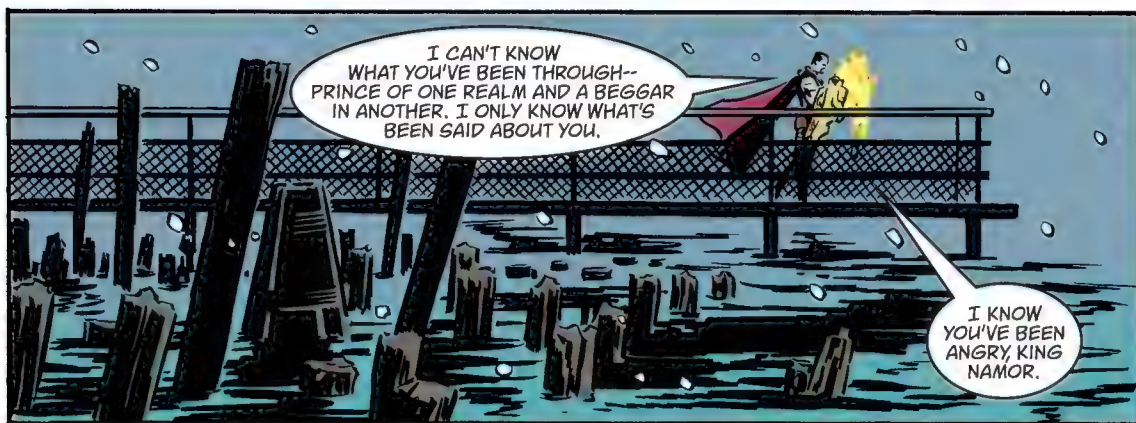
ALL RIGHT.
EVERYBODY PILE ON
THE HULK.

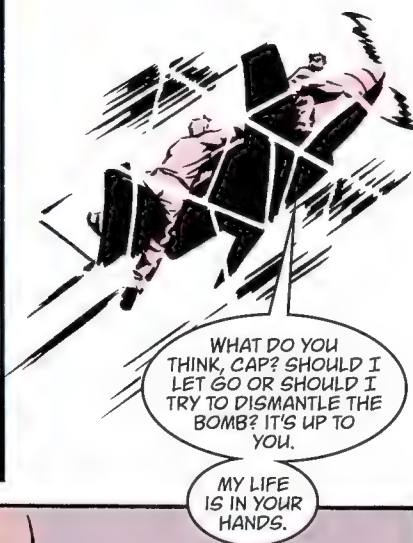
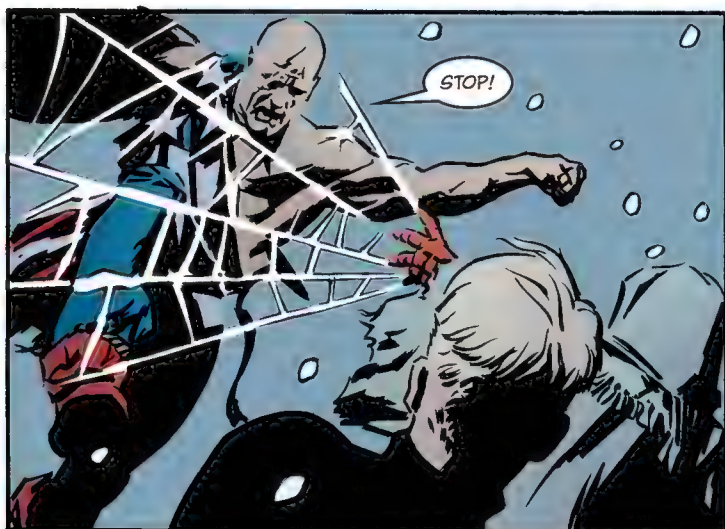
KISS
ME.



WHAT AM I
THINKING? WHAT AM
I DOING?

I
CAN'T LEAVE
MAY LIKE THAT.
I WON'T.







WHAT
HAVE I
DONE?

I LET
YOU TAKE
AMERICA...

...AND I GAVE
YOU THE WORLD IN
THE PROCESS.

WHY DON'T
YOU JUST KILL
ME?

'CAUSE I'M
WAITING FOR YOU TO
KILL YOURSELF, OLD
MAN.



BY THE WAY,
DON'T YOU THINK IT'S
TIME YOU HAD THAT
LETTER OF YOURS
CHANGED?

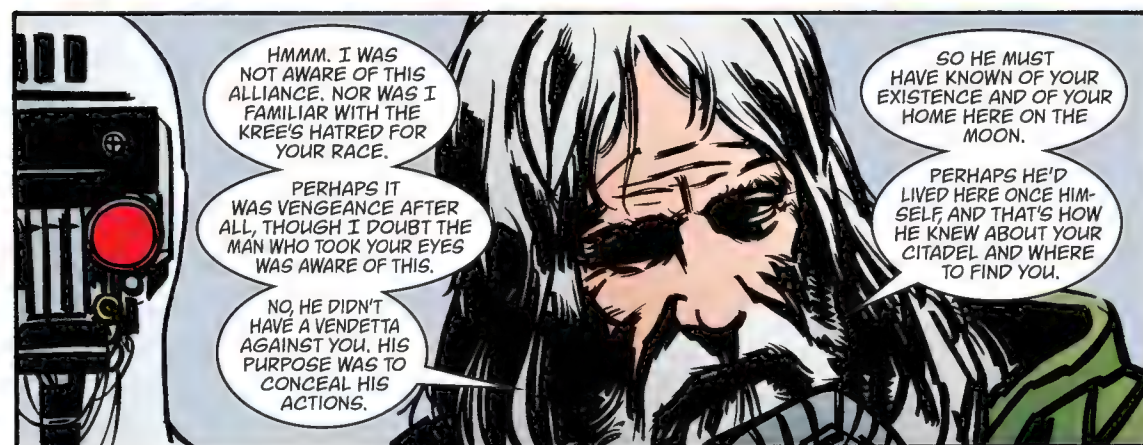
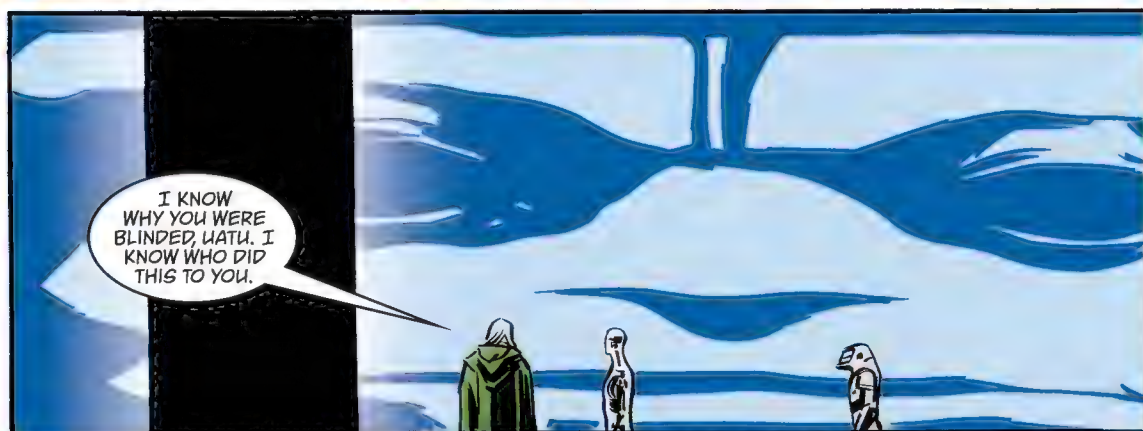


THE
WAR ENDS
NOW.

"THIS MOMENT WAS
FORETOLD TO ME,
JAMESON.

"THIS IS HOW THE
WORLD ENDS."

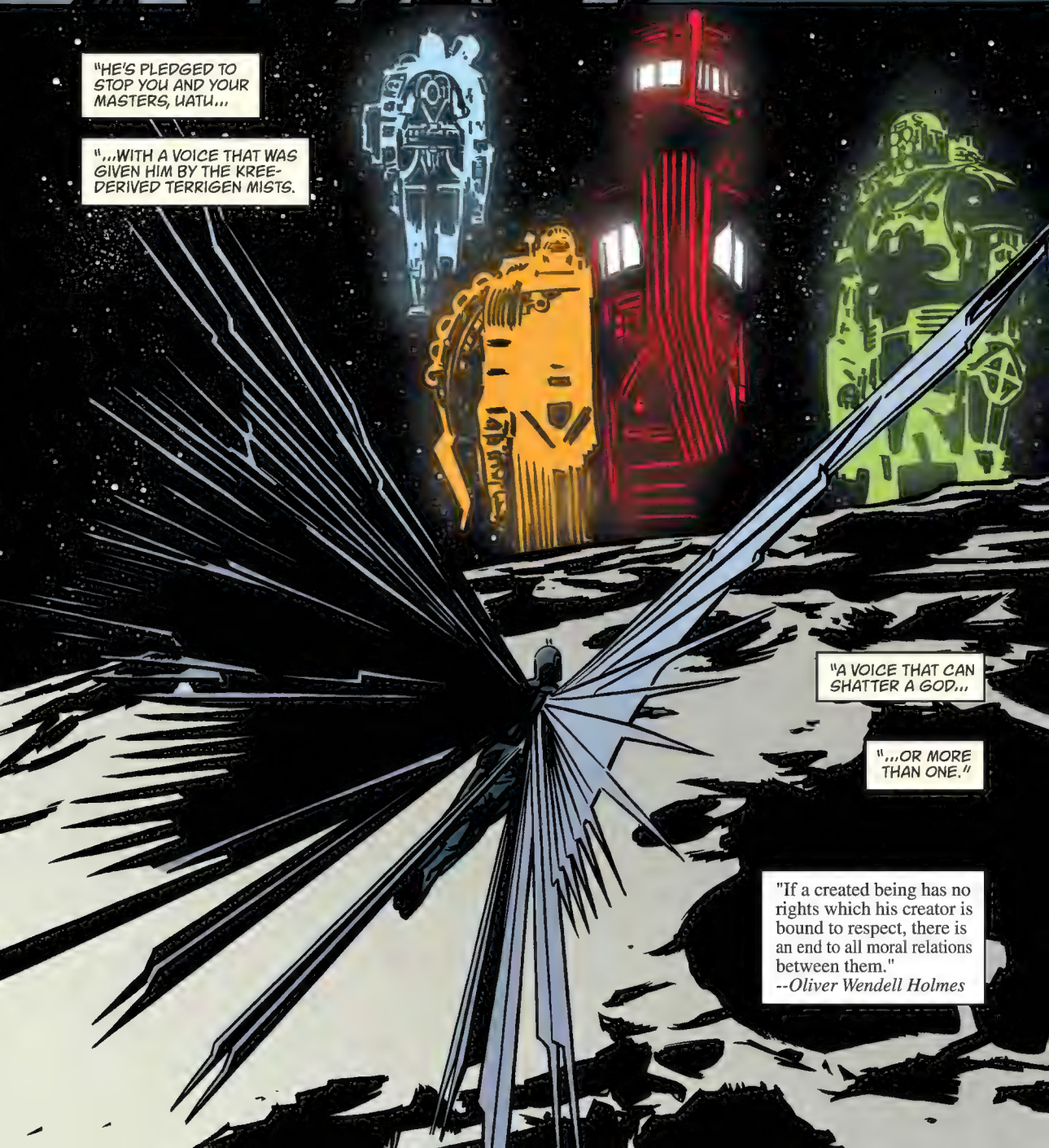
"NO IT ISN'T."





"YOU DIDN'T SEE HIM COMING. HE MUST HAVE WALKED IN SILENCE. AND THERE'S ONLY ONE MAN I KNOW WHO COULD HAVE BEEN QUIET ENOUGH, AND WHO IS FAMILIAR WITH THE BLUE AREA OF THE MOON."

"ARE YOU SUGGESTING BLACK BOLT DID THIS TO ME?"



"HE'S PLEDGED TO STOP YOU AND YOUR MASTERS, UATU..."

"...WITH A VOICE THAT WAS GIVEN HIM BY THE KREE-DERIVED TERRIGEN MISTS."

"A VOICE THAT CAN SHATTER A GOD..."

"...OR MORE THAN ONE."

"If a created being has no rights which his creator is bound to respect, there is an end to all moral relations between them."
--Oliver Wendell Holmes

E A R T H X



APPENDIX TO CHAPTER TEN

I L L U S T R A T I O N S B Y A L E X R O S S

"Perhaps, Uatu, you should let me explain."

"You, Richards? You are going to explain... to me?"

"Yes. I've just had my eyes opened... and I want to share the experience."

"You mock me, Richards."

"You mock humanity, Uatu."

"I do not. I recognize mankind's place within the universal balance of the Celestial plan, Richards. That is all."

"No. I refuse to be foodstuff, Uatu. So does the rest of humanity. We will not be the tools of Celestial reproduction. We will not *be* for the sake of Celestial beings. We are sentient."

"Don't be a fool, Richards."

"Only a sentient, thinking being is capable of foolishness, Uatu."

"You're acting like a child, Richards."

"Thank you."

"Can you really hope to undo something set in motion millions of years ago?"

"I don't know, Uatu. You tell me. After all, you know all about us. You know our origins... well, maybe not our origins... maybe only what came after we first appeared on this planet. So maybe you don't know what we were intended for."

"You see, the seed the Celestials placed within the human gene pool so long ago mixed with our genetic structure. There's no telling where we would be today without it. Just as there may be no way of knowing how far we can go or what we can do with it. Perhaps the Celestials have merely enhanced our own nature."

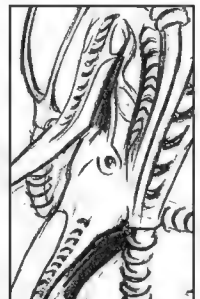
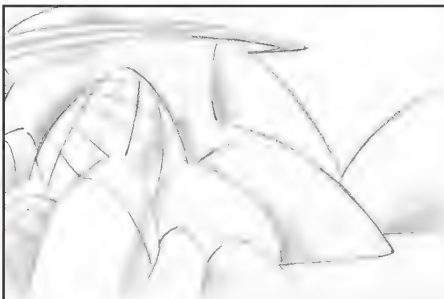
"You're dreaming, Richards."

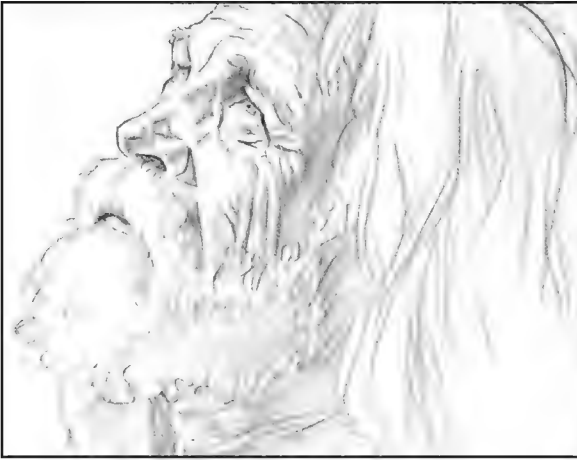
"Yes. But where do those dreams come from? The Celestials? Is that what you want us to believe?"

"..."

"Uatu, let me tell you a story. It's the story of a king. A king who had such power that a single word from his lips could cause complete destruction. Imagine that kind of power. Imagine having a voice that was an ultimate nullifier."

"And then, Uatu, imagine having wisdom behind that voice. The wisdom to





know how and when to speak."

"Perhaps you should use such wisdom now, Richards."

"This power was sometimes a curse. It took its toll on someone close to this king... a brother who was already steeped in madness. But beyond this, imagine a scenario in which the very people that you have been given to rule, given to serve, would rather rule themselves."

"And though you show your people the joy of living within the perfect kingdom that's been prepared for them, they would rather live outside of it. They would just as soon leave Eden to sow a garden of rocks and tears for themselves."

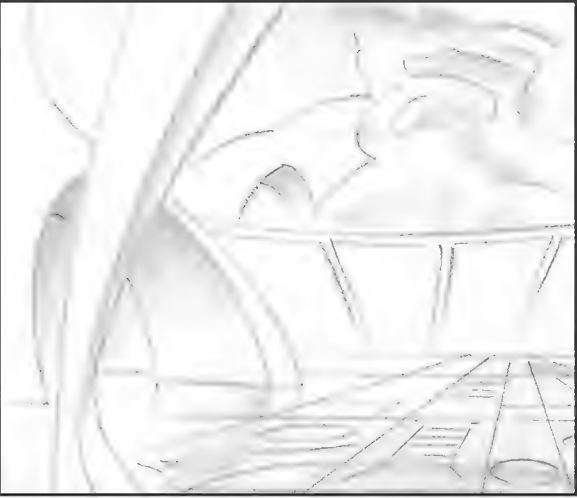
"Eden? Richards, I cannot believe that you of all people would be reduced to religious metaphor."

"What is metaphor, Uatu? What is myth? What are dreams? Perhaps they are the explanations science has always scraped the bottom of petri dishes to find. Doesn't it take hope to try to explain a system of responses to specific stimuli? Does it not require faith to believe there is an answer to the questions that one must ask?"

"Now I understand you, Richards. In your moment of imminent death, you have turned to religion, as many of your species do."

"Fair enough, Uatu. But it gets better. This king faced a people who had been warned that it would mean certain death to live outside the hidden realm. Death perhaps caused by the pollutants they had never developed immunities to. But despite these warnings, the people departed, leaving their home behind... a kingdom gone."

"Upon entering a world they were not prepared for, they faced a system of hatred and biases already



established. Mutants were already hated around the world. The Inhuman populace appeared to humanity as mutants, and very soon, Black Bolt watched from the hidden land as his people were hunted and sometimes killed because of their royal heritage.

"And so, Black Bolt, who had always sought the best for his people, did the unthinkable. He took a weapon his brother had created, a weapon designed to create slaves, and used it instead to create a race of princes.

"The weapon released Terrigen Mists upon the world, and mutated the entire populace. That moment undid his hierarchical heritage completely, making every man and woman on earth a Terrigen-born Inhuman. Don't you see — he adopted them all. They are all second only to himself.

"The Terrigen Mists, becoming part of the very atmosphere of Earth, were able to mix with the polluted oxygen and carbon dioxide. In the same way the Mists changed what little animal life there still is in the world today, it changed the air as well, rendering it safe for an Inhuman Nation to live upon. This problem had already been foreseen by Black Bolt's mad brother."

"It seems that this madness is catching, Richards. I still don't know why you believe that Black Bolt would have been the one to come here, to the moon, to blind me."

"Because... I think Black Bolt knew."

"Knew what?"

"I think he knew about the Celestial within the Earth. I think that that's why he came here."

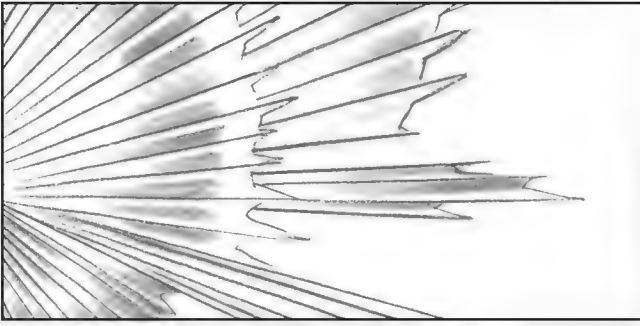
"You confound me, Richards."

"How the mighty have fallen."

"Go on."

"There could be no witnesses. Black





Bolt, having lived on the moon for years, knew of you, knew of this place, and knew how to reach you."

"Yes, but that doesn't explain his motivations."

"Think of the mutating of Earth as his last act as king of a nation. It is this act that would forever make him unwelcome on Earth. It was an act that would brand him as the enemy of all mankind. It would suggest to all those around him that he was as mad as his brother, Maximus. And so he kept it a secret — from his wife and the royal family — even from you."

"But I would never have said anything. I would never have exposed his actions... why blind me?"

"Because he's not here as a king, but as a conqueror. He's here to stop the birth."

"What? You can't be suggesting that this is a plot to stop the awakening of the new Celestial?"

"Why not? You know of the Kree's hatred of the Celestials."

"But Black Bolt is not a weapon to be aimed at the Celestial host."

"No? What would it be like, Uatu, to live with a secret and not be capable of telling anyone about it? What would it be like to know that all those whom you see every day are nothing but germs? That they are, in fact, insects."

"Your attempts at irony are an insult. I know you are speaking of me."



"No, I am not. I'm speaking of Black Bolt. I'm speaking of one hidden among the so-called 'insects' of this world in order to wreak havoc upon the Celestial plan for propagation. I am speaking of a being who one day discovered his role upon this Earth — a role which he could tell no one about, because of the very nature of his abilities and power. Were he to utter even a hint of his purpose, it would destroy all those around him."

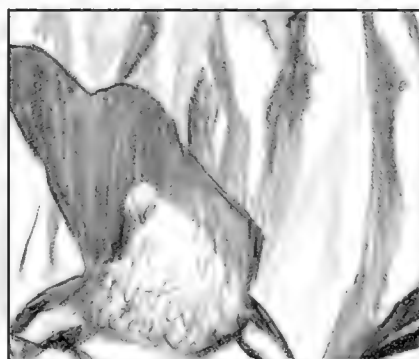
"Are you saying, Richards, that Black Bolt is here to destroy the Celestial within your planet?"

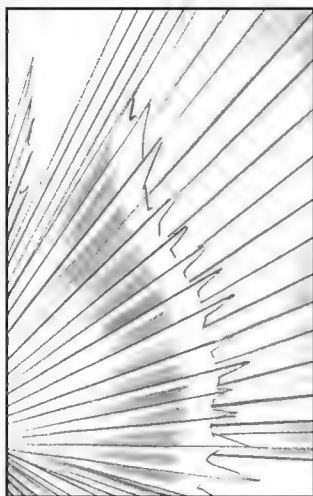
"No... I'm saying he has the means to destroy ALL of the Celestials."

"You're insane."

"I'm sure that is possible. Insanity is a reasonable response to what's been done to our planet. Cold, hateful distance is another... and yes, Uatu, now I am speaking of you. But for Black Bolt, this knowledge made him kind, loving — the type of leader many dream of serving under. He saved his people, Uatu. Morality and knowledge weren't contradictions but complements. His purpose didn't cripple his ability to understand what was happening. If anything, it freed him from the cold clarity that you seem to value above all else."

"I have seen Black Bolt, Richards. You speak of a child's puppy dog, not the being I have watched these past months."





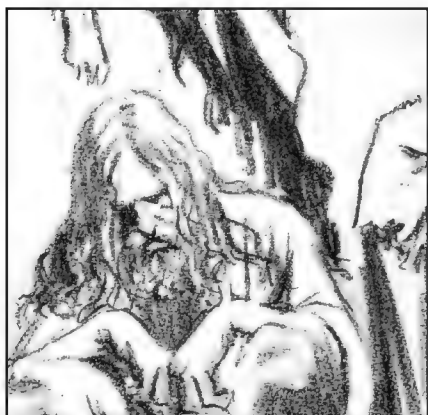
DESIGN BY CHRISTOPHER CARROLL



"You are right, Uatu, in that Black Bolt is not the man he was when he chose to save his people. He allowed this knowledge to overwhelm him in time, as I believe it did the Watchers long ago. Bolt sought to escape his destiny and left Earth, knowing it would be a long time indeed before the birth. The ever-faithful royal family followed him as always. But he could not escape the purpose for which he had been created. The Inhumans came upon another planet that had gone through the same process that Earth is now undergoing. He could not turn his back upon a world twice. The distance you see, Uatu, is not because of coldness or hate -- he's preparing himself for what is to come. He is preparing himself for what he will now do."

"If he faces the Celestials, Richards, he will not live through it."

"Uatu, he hasn't come here to live. He's come to die."



EARTH



"I'm not certain, Uatu, if my questions are even my own. I don't know how much the Celestial seed within me is governing what I do or say."

"Then perhaps, Richards, you should say nothing and await your death like the rest of your species."

"But if the seed is sentient, it knows things you don't, Uatu. It knows thoughts I've had, feelings I've felt, and it knows why I continue on in light of mankind's rapidly approaching annihilation."

"I fail to see your point."

"Of course you do, Uatu. You're blind. You always have been. This revelation of Celestial procreation can't be all there is to know. My wife Sue tried to tell me this so many times before her death. That all my studies could only scratch the surface of what there was. Ironical, is it not, that on the eve of my own death, and that of the whole Inhuman race, I would finally come to believe her? To believe in things invisible?"

"You have become a sentimental fool, Richards."

"I think I know how to stop you."

"Yes, of course -- Black Bolt. Do you really think one man can save the world?"



"PHILIP MASTERS, AT AGE SEVEN, BEGAN MOLDING CLAY TAKEN FROM THE BASE OF THE MOUNTAIN.

"THERE IS ONE PERSON ON EARTH WHO CAN SEE WHAT WE'D BE LIKE IF THERE WERE NO MUTABLE SEED WITHIN US, ISN'T THERE?"

"I'M NOT AWARE OF SUCH A BEING."

"I SUPPOSE NOT. THIS BEING, AS YOU CALL HER, IS TOO DEFINED BY COMPASSION AND LOVE TO BE WORTHY OF YOUR WATCHFUL EYE. PLEASE, UATU, TELL ME ABOUT ALICIA MASTERS."

"YOUR SUGGESTION OF MASTERS' IMPORTANCE IS INTRIGUING, BUT FUTILE. HER STORY BEGINS WITH HERBERT EDGAR WYNDHAM, THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KNOWN TO THIS WORLD...AND OTHERS...AS THE HIGH EVOLUTIONARY.

"LIKE MANY OF YOUR KIND WHOSE CELESTIAL SEED WAS NOT PLANTED DEEP ENOUGH IN THEIR SUBCONSCIOUS, WYNDHAM WAS PLAGUED BY THE DREAM THAT MANKIND WAS DESTINED TO BE MORE THAN IT WAS.

"AND THOUGH HIS DREAM LED HIM TO CREATE AN ALTERNATE EARTH ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SUN, IT WAS THE LEGACY HE LEFT ON WUNDAGORE MOUNTAIN THAT TOUCHED MANY...INCLUDING PHILIP MASTERS.



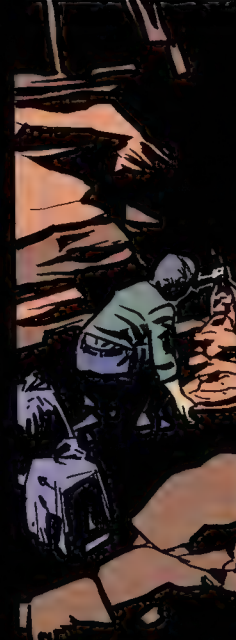
"MASTERS' OWN JEALOUSIES LED HIM TO STEAL ANOTHER MAN'S LIFE AND FAMILY. ALICIA BECAME HIS STEPPAUGHTER. HE BECAME THE PUPPET MASTER AND USED THE CLAY HE'D FOUND TO CONTROL PEOPLE."

"YES, UATU, BUT YOU'RE OVERLOOKING WHAT CAN BE SEEN IN THE DETAILS.

"THE EXPLOSION WHICH RELEASED THE RADIATION THAT LATER KILLED ALICIA'S MOTHER ALSO AWAKENED THE MUTABLE SEED WITHIN ALICIA."



"THE CLAY, WHICH HAD BEEN IRRADIATED AS A RESULT OF WYNDHAM'S EVOLUTIONARY EXPERIMENTS, HAD SPECIAL PROPERTIES WHICH MASTERS, AS AN ADULT, WOULD USE FOR REVENGE AGAINST A WORLD THAT LOOKED UPON HIM AS AN OUTCAST.



"WHAT ARE YOU SAYING, RICHARDS? HER SEED WASN'T GERMINATED UNTIL BLACK BOLT RELEASED THE TERRIGEN MISTS INTO THE AIR. SHE GAINED NEW POWERS AND ABILITIES THEN."

"PERHAPS, UATU, SHE HAD TWO SEEDS--ONE WHICH HAD BEEN GERMINATED LONG BEFORE BLACK BOLT'S ATTEMPT TO SAVE HIS PEOPLE.

"AFTER ALL, LOOK AT BEN AND ALICIA'S CHILDREN. TWINS RUN IN THE FAMILY."

"THAT'S PREPOSTEROUS, RICHARDS. AFTER PHILIP MASTERS' ACCIDENTAL DEATH, ALICIA FELL INTO THE ARMS OF THE THING, FOR NO OTHER REASON THAN THAT SHE HAD BEEN RAISED BY A PETTY, UGLY MAN AND SO SHE FELL IN LOVE WITH ANOTHER LIKE HIM."



"SHE DID LOVE HER FATHER, UATU, AND EVEN FOLLOWED IN HIS FOOTSTEPS TO A DEGREE BY BECOMING ONE OF NEW YORK'S FOREMOST SCULPTORS.

"BUT WHAT IF SHE LOVED HER FATHER IN WAYS EVEN HE COULDN'T UNDERSTAND?"

"WHAT IF ALICIA SAW HER FATHER AS HE WOULD HAVE BEEN IF THERE HAD NEVER BEEN A CELESTIAL SEED WITHIN HIM AT ALL?"

"YOU SEE...WE ALL THOUGHT SHE'D BEEN BLINDED. ACTUALLY, SHE WAS ABLE TO SEE THINGS WE COULDN'T."

"LIKE ALL YOUR SPECIES, RICHARDS, YOU REACH FOR A MEANING THAT DOES NOT EXIST."



"I'M NOT SAYING SHE UNDERSTOOD WHAT SHE SAW, ONLY THAT SHE SAW A HIDDEN AND LOST GENTLENESS, THE LACK OF HOSTILITY THE CELESTIALS IMPLANTED WITHIN OUR RACE."

"IT WASN'T ONLY BEN SHE SAW THIS IN. IT WAS EVERY SUPER HERO SHE MET. EVERY ONE OF THEM SHE EVER SCULPTED."



"SHE SAW IN VICTOR THINGS I NEVER DID. HER COMPASSION WAS PURE AND UNFAILING. IN ALICIA'S EYES, VICTOR VON DOOM MIGHT HAVE BEEN A HERO, A SAVIOR TO MANY. HE COULD HAVE BEEN HERE TODAY INSTEAD OF ME."

"SO NOW YOU LOOK WITH FAVOR ON THE MAN WHO KILLED YOUR WIFE."

"YOU KILLED MY WIFE. YOU AND THE CELESTIALS. YOU DID THIS TO US. BLAMING VICTOR FOR HIS HOSTILITY IS USELESS."

"YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, DO YOU, UATU? YOU'VE FREED ME. I HAVE NO MORE ENEMIES... SAVE YOURSELF. YOU'VE FREED ME FROM HATE. AND DESPAIR."



"THEN WHAT ABOUT NORRIN RADD, RICHARDS? HE IS NOT OF YOUR EARTH. WHAT MOTIVATED HER COMPASSION TOWARDS NORRIN RADD?"

"I KNOW. I WONDERED ABOUT THE SILVER SURFER, TOO."

"AND THEN I REALIZED THAT NORRIN, TOO, MUST HAVE HAD A CELESTIAL SEED WITHIN HIM THAT HAD ALSO BEEN GERMINATED."



"THERE WAS A CELESTIAL GROWING INSIDE NORRIN'S PLANET AS WELL, WASN'T THERE? ZENN-LA WAS GOING TO 'HATCH' IN THE SAME WAY EARTH WILL."

"THAT'S WHY GALACTUS RETURNED TO ZENN-LA YEARS LATER TO DESTROY IT."

"THAT'S WHY HE CAME **HERE** IN THE FIRST PLACE--TO DESTROY THE CELESTIAL SEED WITHIN THE EARTH."

"AND THAT'S WHY YOU ARMED ME WITH THE ULTIMATE NULLIFIER TO STOP HIM. IF HE WERE KILLED, THERE WOULD BE NO BALANCE IN THE COSMOS."

"KEEPING THE CELESTIALS FROM OVER-BREEDING WAS HIS MISSION."

"HE KEPT THEM FROM TAKING OVER THE UNIVERSE."

"AND, GOD FORGIVE ME, I'VE CLEARED THE WAY FOR THE CELESTIALS TO DO JUST THIS. GALACTUS IS GONE."

"WHAT?"

"I TURNED HIM INTO A STAR."

"YOU TURNED GALACTUS... INTO A STAR?"

"I THOUGHT I WAS SAVING AN ENTIRE RACE. AN ENTIRE STAR-SYSTEM. I HAD NO IDEA. HE SAID HE EXISTED TO STOP A CANCER FROM SPREADING ACROSS THE UNIVERSE. HOW COULD I KNOW IT WAS THE CELESTIALS HE WAS SPEAKING OF?"

SKULL
LAND? NEW SKULL
CITY?

SKULL
COUNTRY?!
NO...EARTH
SKULL...

...PLANET
SKULL? EARTH...?
NO. PLANET
SKULL.

YEAH,
THAT'S
COOL.

I'M IN
CONTROL! I'M
IN CONTROL! I'M
IN CONTROL!

HIDE YOUR
DAUGHTERS! THIS IS
PLANET SKULL!!



THIS
IS NOT A
TEST!

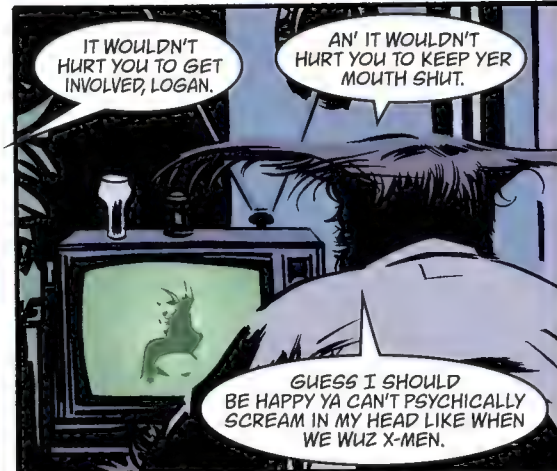
SHOULDN'T
WE DO SOMETHING
ABOUT
THIS, TONY?



WE'RE SAFE,
VISION. NOT EVEN THE
SKULL'S ARMY COULD
GET INTO MY
ARMORY.



IT'S NOT
OUR SAFETY
I'M WORRIED
ABOUT.



IT WOULDN'T
HURT YOU TO GET
INVOLVED, LOGAN.

AN' IT WOULDN'T
HURT YOU TO KEEP YER
MOUTH SHUT.

GUESS I SHOULD
BE HAPPY YA CAN'T PSYCHICALLY
SCREAM IN MY HEAD LIKE WHEN
WE WUZ X-MEN.



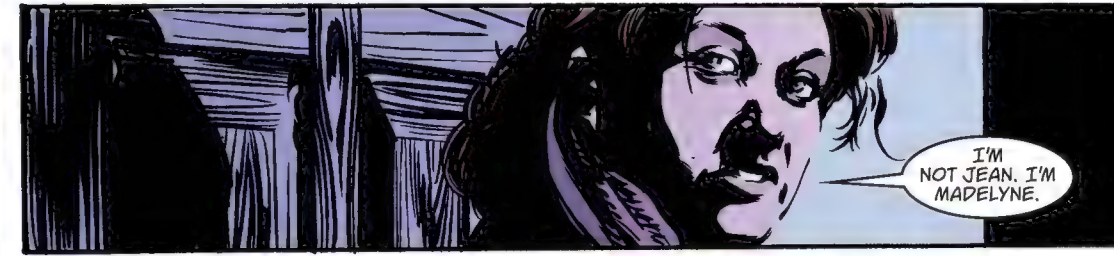
THAT'S IT,
YOU PIG. I CAN'T
STAY HERE ANOTHER
MOMENT.

YER GONNA
WALK OUT ON ME? ME?
YOU GONNA GO BACK TO
SUMMERS, DARLIN'?

I THOUGHT
YOU WANTED A REAL
MAN.



I DID. MY
MISTAKE. THERE'S
SOMETHING I'VE BEEN
WANTING TO TELL YOU
FOR THE PAST TEN YEARS,
BUT I'VE NEVER HAD THE
STRENGTH UNTIL
NOW.



I'M
NOT JEAN. I'M
MADELYNE.



WHERE AM I?

YOU'RE IN A BACK ALLEY IN NEW YORK, STEVE. YOU WENT AFTER THE SKULL. SOME GUY DRESSED LIKE A COWBOY WAS GOING TO KILL YOU. I SAVED YOU.

DON'T WORRY--I DON'T THINK THAT COWBOY TOLD THE SKULL YOU'D ESCAPED.



PETER?
PETER PARKER?

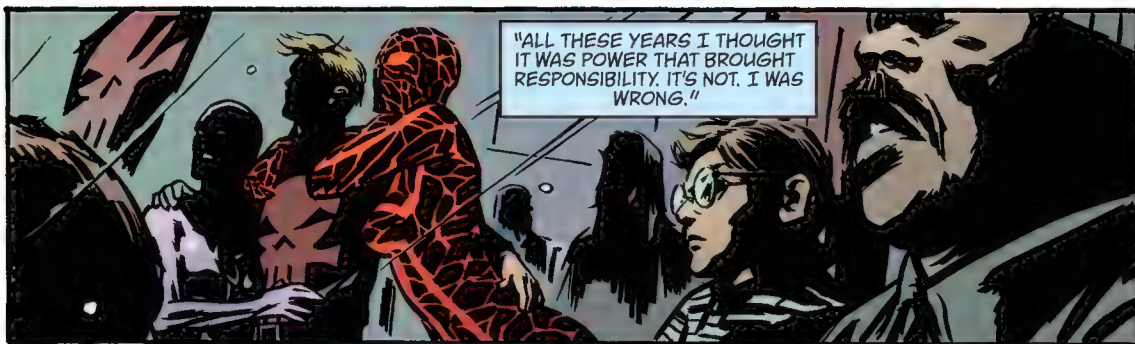
I THOUGHT YOU GAVE UP BEING SPIDER-MAN.

FROM THE LOOKS OF YOU, YOU SHOULD HAVE.

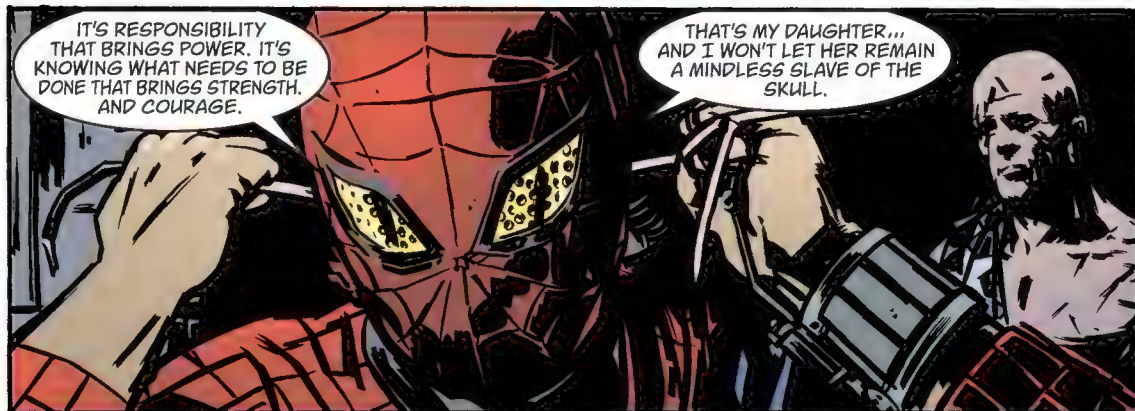
THAT SHOWS YOU HOW MUCH HAS CHANGED. I'M PLAYING THE STRAIGHT GUY AND YOU'RE MAKING THE JOKES.



I KNOW YOU FEEL RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT'S HAPPENED-- FOR ALL THE WORLD'S HEROES BEING HERE, FOR NOT STOPPING THE SKULL. AND YOU SHOULD. YOU SHOULD FEEL RESPONSIBLE.



"ALL THESE YEARS I THOUGHT IT WAS POWER THAT BROUGHT RESPONSIBILITY. IT'S NOT. I WAS WRONG."



IT'S RESPONSIBILITY THAT BRINGS POWER. IT'S KNOWING WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE THAT BRINGS STRENGTH. AND COURAGE.

THAT'S MY DAUGHTER... AND I WON'T LET HER REMAIN A MINDLESS SLAVE OF THE SKULL.



DID YOU SAY
MINDLESS?

BEN.

WHAT IN
AUNT PETUNIA'S
PURPLE-PLEATED
PAJAMAS IS GOIN'
ON?!?!



OH, IT'S YOU,
CAP. DARN NEAR
SENT MY TICKER
INTA ORBIT THAT
TIME! AN' WHO'S
THAT?

NO.
IT *CAN'T* BE.
TALK ABOUT YER
REVOLTIN' DEVEL-
OPMENTS...



HERE I THOUGHT
REED BECOMING *DR. DOOM*
WAS ABOUT AS BAD AS THINGS
COULD GET.

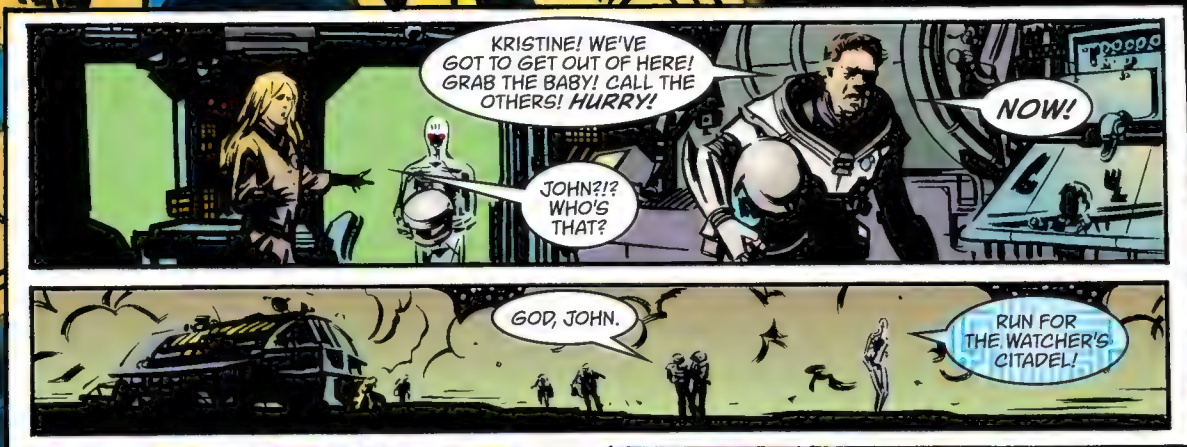
NICE
TO SEE YOU,
TOO.

SO WHEN
WERE YOU BITTEN
BY A RADIOACTIVE
SPARE TIRE?

WE DON'T HAVE
TIME FOR THIS, BEN. I
KNOW HOW WE CAN STOP
THE SKULL. THE KEY IS
CHAOS AND DIVER-
SION.

THE X-MEN ARE ALREADY IN
PLACE. THE SKULL WOULD NEVER LET ANY
OF US GET NEAR HIM. HE'D CONTROL US
AS SOON AS WE DID.

BUT ALICIA'S CLAY
MARVELS--THE SKULL WON'T BE
ABLE TO CONTROL THEM. THEY
HAVE NO MINDS TO CONTROL. SO
THIS IS WHAT WE DO...





"AND I AM BOUND TO TRY TO
SAVE EVERYONE ON EARTH."

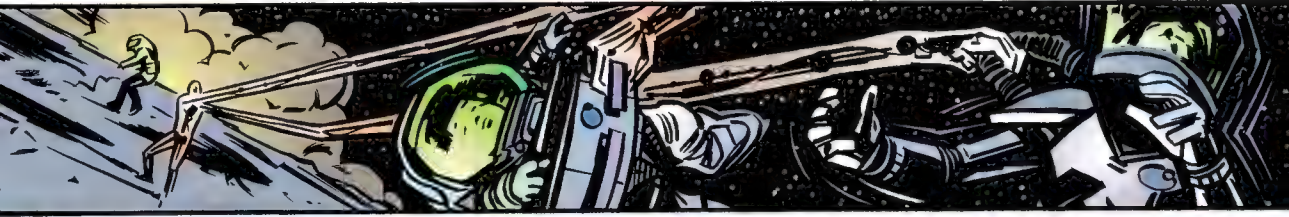
"BLACK BOLT IS AS A
FLEA TO THE CELESTIAL
HOSTS, RICHARDS. HE
IS NOTHING. YOU HAVE
PINNED YOUR HOPES
UPON A SPECK."

"YOUR ENTIRE RACE'S
EXISTENCE IS NOTHING
COMPARED TO THE TRUE
CONFLICT OF THE
UNIVERSE."



KRIS!!

JAY!!!



"YOU'RE WRONG, WATU. YOU'RE
OUT OF TOUCH. IT ALL MATTERS.
THE SMALLEST AMONG US CAN
BE THE GREATEST."



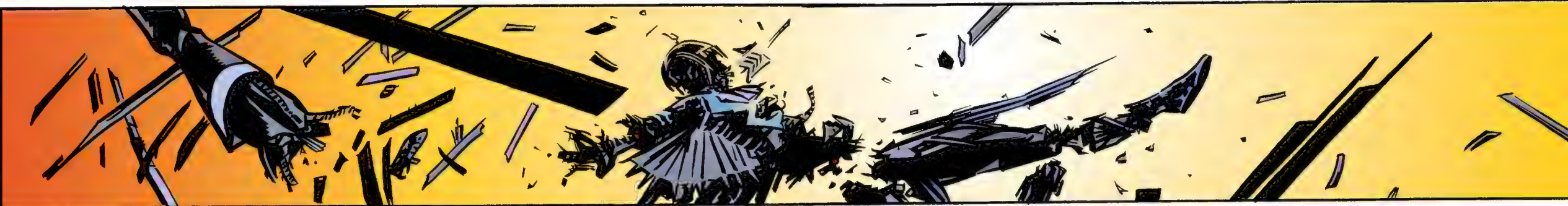
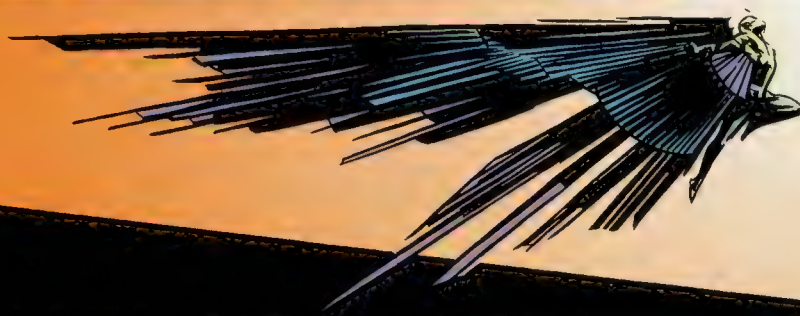
"THE CELESTIALS WILL
NOT STOP BLACK BOLT."



"YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND US AT ALL, DO YOU? WE WILL NOT BE A PART OF YOUR FOOD CHAIN."

"YOU MAY HAVE GIVEN US NEW POWERS AND NEW BODIES...NEW MINDS EVEN, BUT YOU DON'T KNOW OUR TRUE FACE."

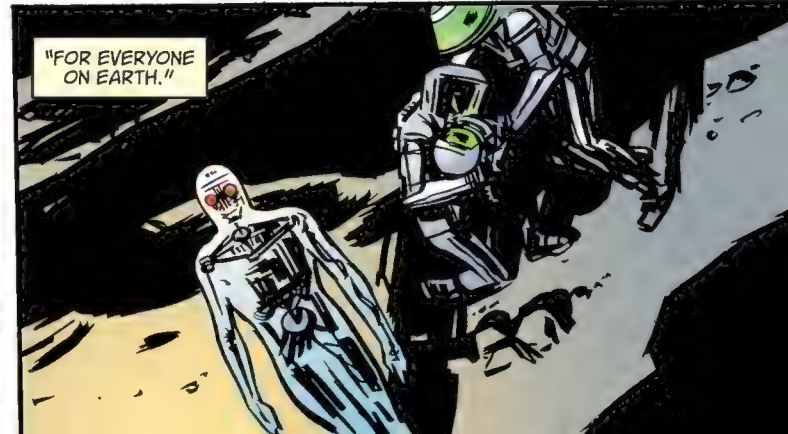
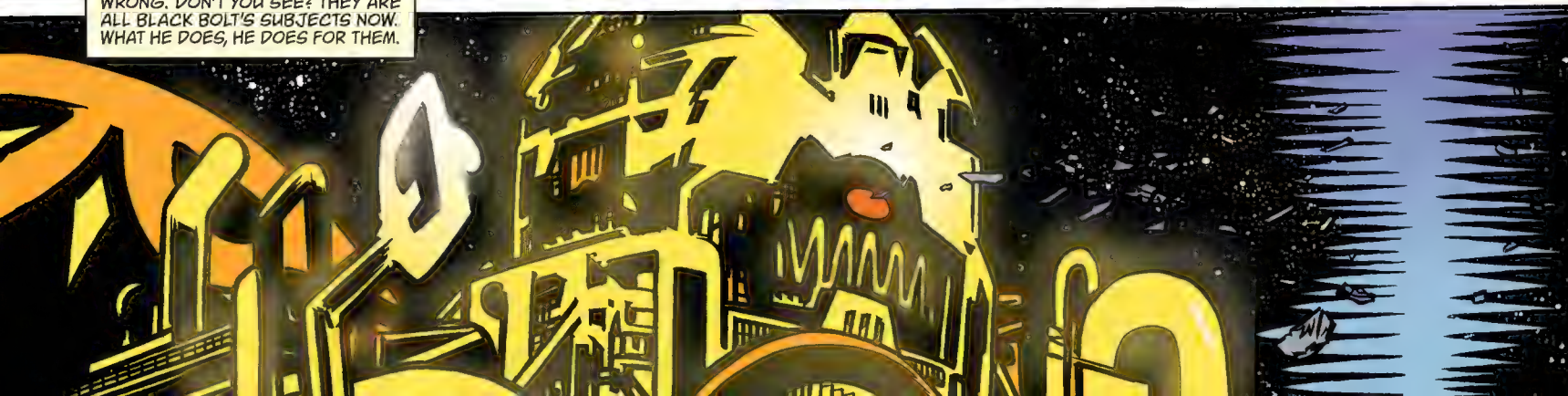
"THE KING OF THE INHUMAN NATION DIDN'T COME HERE TO FIGHT THE CELESTIALS, UATU."



"HE CAME HERE TO CALL FOR HELP WITH THE ONLY VOICE ON EARTH THAT COULD."

"HE MUTATED THE POPULATION OF EARTH IN ORDER TO SAVE THE LIVES OF HIS PEOPLE."

"YOU THOUGHT THE CELESTIALS COULD COMMAND THE MUTATED POPULACE OF EARTH, REGARDLESS OF THE CATALYST THAT GERMINATED THE MUTABLE SEEDS. YOU WERE WRONG. DON'T YOU SEE? THEY ARE ALL BLACK BOLT'S SUBJECTS NOW. WHAT HE DOES, HE DOES FOR THEM."



"FOR EVERYONE ON EARTH."

"THERE IS NO ONE WHO CAN HELP YOU, RICHARDS. NO ONE WHO CAN RESCUE YOU."

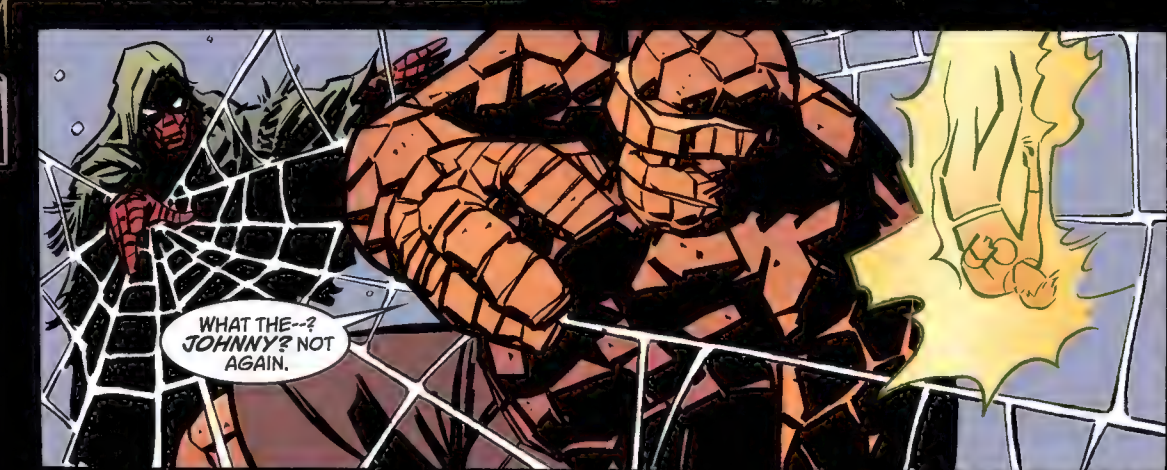
"YOU AS GOOD AS KILLED THE ONLY BEING WHO OPPOSED THE CELESTIAL PLAN...AND HE WOULD HAVE DESTROYED YOUR PLANET IN RETURN."

"I CAN'T CONTROL THESE STUPID CLAY THINGS. KILL THEM."

"MAY?"

"IT'S OKAY, DAD. DO WHAT YOU HAVE TO. I KNOW YOU'LL SAVE ME. THE SYMBIOTE WILL CUSHION YOUR ATTACK."







NO! WHAT
ARE YOU DOING?
STOP!

I KNEW
THERE WEREN'T
ANY WAY THAT
WUZ KOSHER.



DON'T
LOOK AT
ME!!



WHAT
ARE YOU
DOING?

IT AIN'T PERSONAL,
KID. I THINK THE SKULL'S
GOT ME.



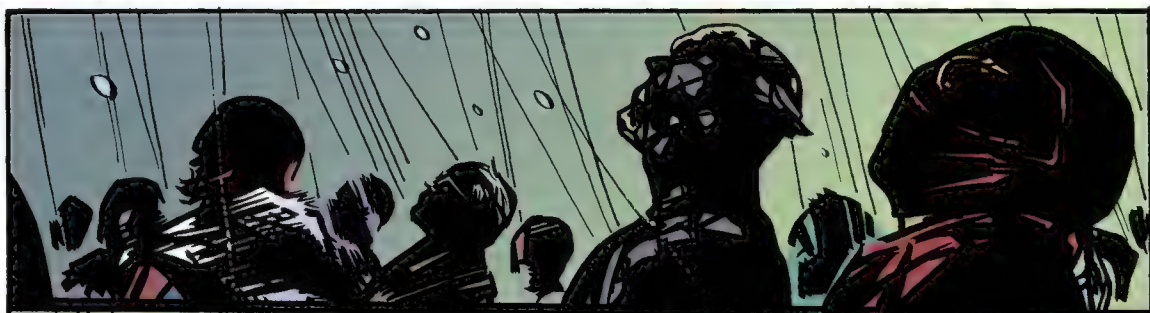
I'M COMING, PROFESSOR.
I'M COMING.



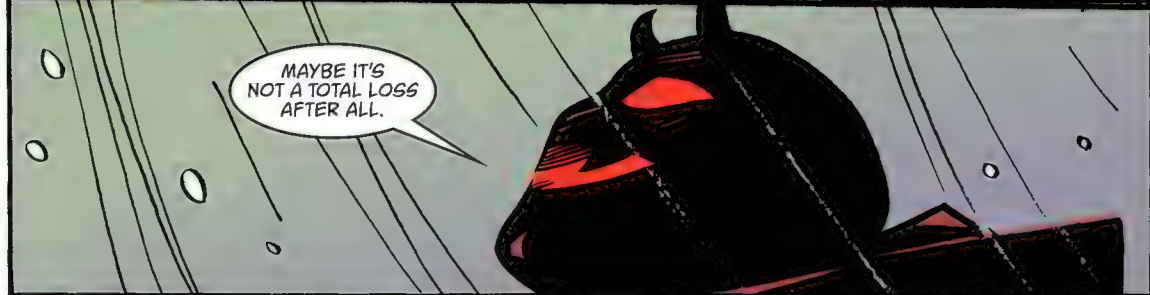




THE
WAR ENDS
HERE.



MAYBE IT'S
NOT A TOTAL LOSS
AFTER ALL.





YOU DID IT, STEVE. YOU DID IT. NO ONE WILL DOUBT YOU NOW.



REED?

WE'RE GERMS TO THEM, TONY, GERMS. THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO.

I FOUND OUT WHERE OUR IDEAS COME FROM. WE'VE BEEN SAVING THE WORLD...FOR THE CELESTIALS.



WILL WE BE SAFE FROM THEM?

THEY'RE AS BIG AS THE SKY...



TAKE MY SCHEMATICS ON THE IRON AVENGERS, VISION. REBUILD THEM IF YOU CAN.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND.

LEAVE ME.

"YOU SEE, TONY, ALL OUR LIVES WE'VE BEEN SAVING THIS PLANET, YOU AND I. WE COULDN'T KEEP WINNING FOREVER. WHAT ARE THE ODDS OF THAT?"



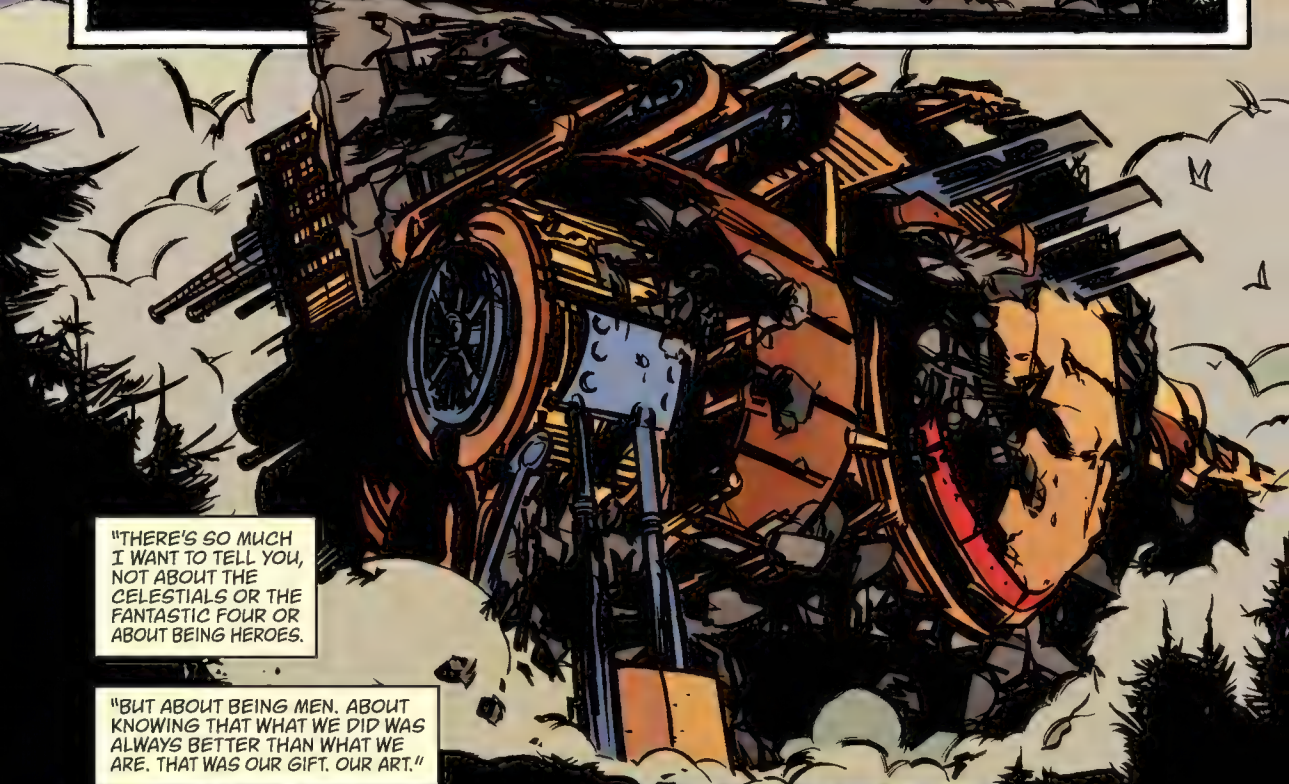
"EARTH WON'T SURVIVE THIS. YOU SAID I'D FIGURE A WAY OUT. THAT I ALWAYS DO. BUT NOT QUICKLY ENOUGH, I'M AFRAID."



"THERE MIGHT HAVE BEEN A CHANCE, TONY, BUT WE DON'T HAVE ENOUGH TIME."

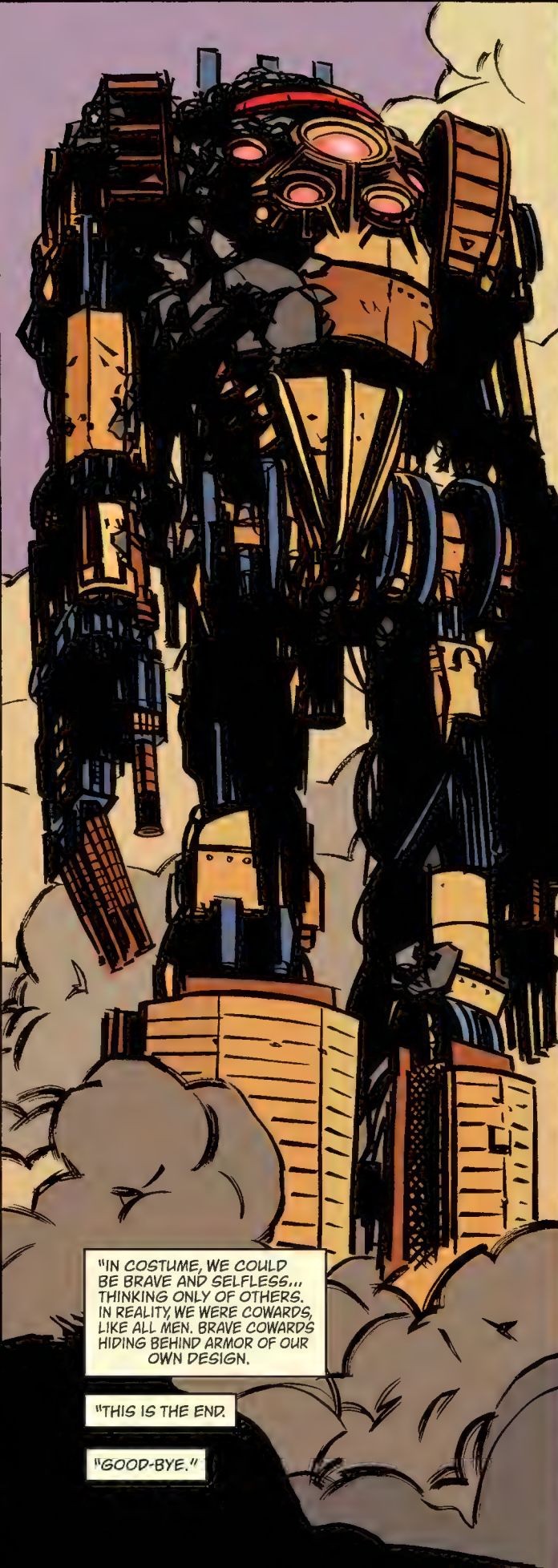


"I WANTED TO SAY GOODBYE. YOU'VE BEEN MORE THAN A FRIEND. EVEN HEROES CAN HAVE HEROES. I'VE LOOKED UP TO YOU FOR SO LONG. I'M SORRY I DIDN'T SAY SO EARLIER."



"THERE'S SO MUCH I WANT TO TELL YOU, NOT ABOUT THE CELESTIALS OR THE FANTASTIC FOUR OR ABOUT BEING HEROES."

"BUT ABOUT BEING MEN. ABOUT KNOWING THAT WHAT WE DID WAS ALWAYS BETTER THAN WHAT WE ARE. THAT WAS OUR GIFT. OUR ART."



"IN COSTUME, WE COULD
BE BRAVE AND SELFLESS...
THINKING ONLY OF OTHERS.
IN REALITY, WE WERE COWARDS,
LIKE ALL MEN. BRAVE COWARDS
HIDING BEHIND ARMOR OF OUR
OWN DESIGN.

"THIS IS THE END.

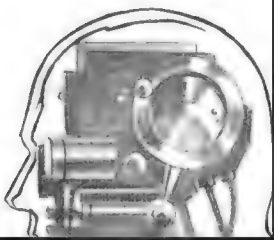
"GOOD-BYE."



LEAVE
IT TO THE
BILLIONAIRE
TO BUY THE
WORLD SOME
MORE
TIME.



"One day
the giant
came back."
— *The
Selfish
Giant*,
Oscar
Wilde.



ARTWORK BY ALEX ROSS

EARTH X

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER ELEVEN

"Richards, what is happening? Where is Stark? Tell me!"

"No."

"I demand... I must know..."

"You have forfeited all rights to ask anything of humanity, Uatu. And that includes asking anything of me. You say we are meaningless, that our lives are nothing. But you've spent yours watching us, so what does that say about you? Your purpose is in watching nothing, then."

"Very well, Richards. Tell me what you see and I will tell you what you want to know."

"Has anyone ever stopped the birth before, Uatu?"

"Are you asking me whether any race has risen to confront the Celestials and halt their procreation?"

"Yes."

"No. No race has ever discovered the nature of their planet's impregnation. I did not expect such revulsion and hatred, Richards. You're a scientist, a man of logic."

"What did you expect?"

"Awe... gratitude, perhaps."

"Why?"

"You have been given the opportunity to be part of something amazing — something far greater than yourself. Something incapable of being captured or reproduced, even by the equipment housed here. Many of your race consider what's about to happen a miracle."

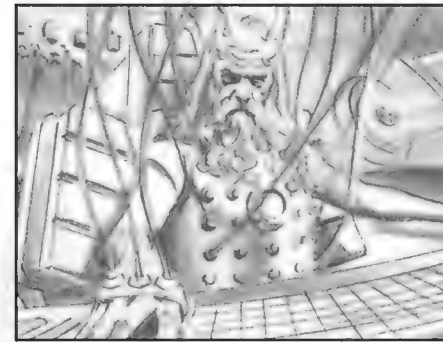
"So I should be thankful that my thoughts may or may not be my own — that my destiny is the result of the Celestial manipulation of my race thousands and thousands of years ago?"

"Have you ever considered the microbes which defend your body against infection? Have you ever considered the worlds that may have been destroyed by the simple shedding of a tear?"

"You're sick, Uatu. These things are not the result of manipulating a sentient species. I am not aware of any such beings having been endangered by the actions of myself or any other human."

"Good, Richards. Then we have an understanding. For the Celestials, your sentence is imagined."

"Have any other races survived the birth?"



"None which remained on their home-world."

"Norrin told me that Galactus' attack on Zenn-La allowed that world's people to live... after a fashion. Ben met an alternate version of himself on a variant Earth. That world's people also lived despite Galactus' hunger."

"But those worlds were never fertile again. The few beings who still lived there were forced to toil for the smallest scraps of sustenance. Galactus was never your friend and ally, Richards. You killed him. Now it is my turn to ask the question... what is happening?"

"According to X-51, you haven't watched Earth for twenty-plus years, Uatu. A lot has changed. We have changed."

"Richards, I am aware of your deluded sense of self-importance. What is happening?"

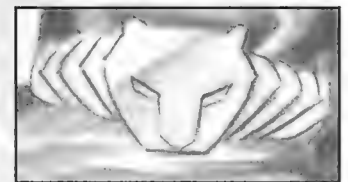
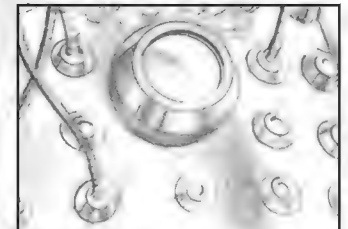
"Tony Stark is going to confront the Celestials, Uatu. He's going to fight them."

"Stark? I doubt he has the strength to leave his home."

"He won't have to, Uatu."

"What do you mean?"

"No, now it's my turn. I've been thinking about humanity — Inhumanity, as it has now become. The Inhumans have all mutated in one way or another. Medusa. Black Bolt. Karnak. They have changed beyond their original mutations. At first I believed this was the result of a natural adaptation to the rigors of space. But it's more than that, isn't it? Men like T'Challa have mutated further as well. Will we all keep mutating? Is that why Ben has changed appearance





so many times over the years? Why Peter Parker once had six arms? Or why..."

"Yes."

"Is there an end to the mutation?"

"First, you must tell me why Stark will not have to leave his home to face the Celestials."

"His home is another suit of armor, Uatu. Norman Osborn gave the remains of the Red Ronin armor to Stark years ago, along with political asylum, in exchange for Stark's help in trying to find some way to first help the American citizens fend off the Hydra invasion, and then feed the citizens of the country."

"Osborn is not that altruistic, Richards."

"No, but Tony is. And he had been in enough corporate board meetings to know that people like Osborn will help others if it means an increase in personal and national power. Tony offered Osborn that power. Osborn, in turn, used his business to keep America fed."

"Pathetic. Why would he let a known criminal become the single person upon which his country most depended?"

"Tony planned to take the country back by policing it with an army of Iron Men. He's been building them for the past fifteen years. They were actually finished two years ago."

"Why didn't he use them against Osborn?"

"Because then Tony would be in control. And Tony wasn't certain that he wanted that either."

"Stark was never certain of anything. He never stopped doubting himself. Yours is a sad and foolish race."

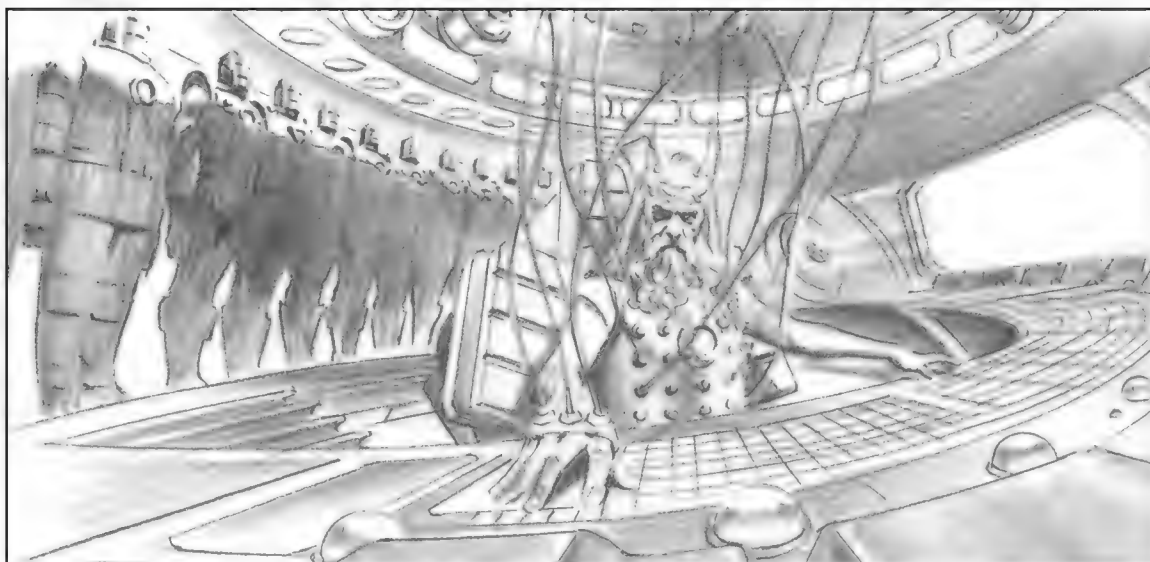
"That's enough, Uatu. Is there an end to the mutation?"

"No... but there is an end to individuality."

"What do you mean?"

"Really, Richards, I should not have





to explain this to you. What other worlds are you aware of that Galactus has destroyed? That is your key to understanding any further mutations."

"Galador? A few Kree colonies set up on worlds I don't know about? What are you driving at? No... wait... are you talking about the Skrull homeland? It was consumed by Galactus. Then..."

"You really are a very backward race."

"The Skrulls all have the same ability to change their shapes. So you're saying that the further germination of the seeds leads to an equalization of that race's powers and peoples."

"Something your Captain America has fought for his entire life."

"This power gave the Skrulls an advantage in war... an advantage in their hostilities against the Kree."

"Of course, Richards."

"And so the Kree, angered by the Celestial advantage given to the Skrulls, came to a planet already impregnated by the Celestials, and used some of the people of that world to create a super-powered army they could use against the Skrull invaders."

"The Inhumans -- they are your Kree-made army to aim at the Skrulls. Of course, the Inhumans had no desire to become warriors, and so all ties between themselves and their benefactors were cut. That is, until thousands of years later when the Kree returned to Earth to find many non-Terrigen Mist-triggered super-powered individuals whom they might enslave and use to attack the Skrulls. Of course, this new plan failed as a result of the Kree traitor, Mar-Vell. Your Captain Marvel."

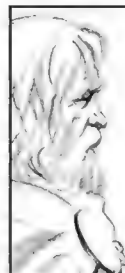
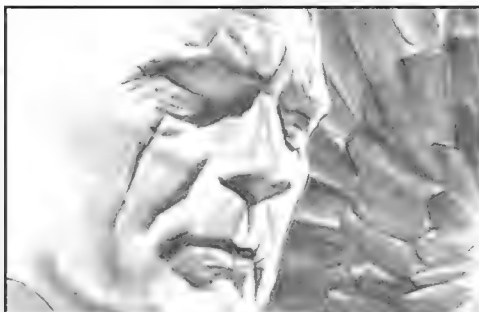
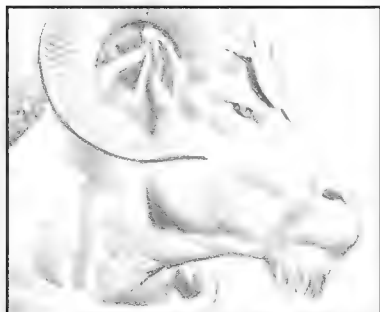
"Amazing."

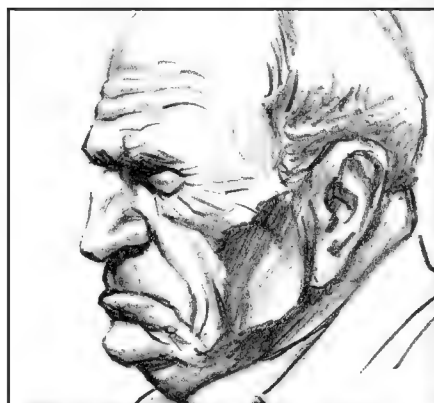
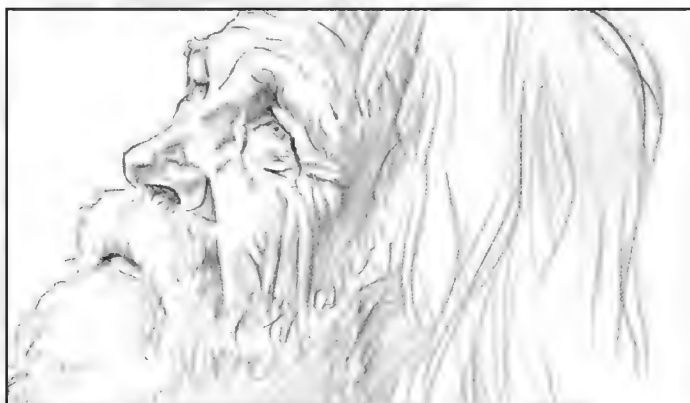
"That's more like it, Richards."

"Did anyone know this about the nature of Earth?"

"Mar-Vell."

"Really?"





"After he was given his cosmic consciousness, yes."

"Why didn't he tell me?"

"The destruction was so far off, Richards. Your own science foretells the burning out and collapse of not only your sun, but of the Earth itself in the distant future, yet you all live as though there is nothing to fear. Why tell a man he will cease to exist in a future he won't even live to experience?"

"I thought I knew so much."

"Now you tell me. Where's your son? Where's Franklin?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen him in years... haven't spoken to him since..."

"Yes... yes... the death of your wife and brother-in-law. How tiring you humans are."

"You said that a race continues to mutate until individuality is lost. But there exists a Skrull hierarchy. They still have differences. They still have a caste system. There's something beyond the Skrull mutation, isn't there, Uatu? Mankind is destined for something beyond that."

"Yes."

"But where does one go, what does one become when shape is an act of personal will, as it is for the Skrulls? Does the Celestial seedling affect a person's mind? Or maybe... his will?"

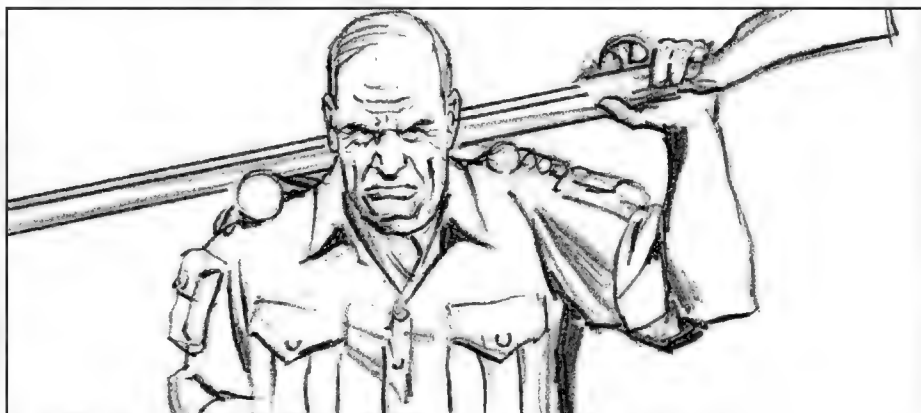
"Richards, I don't have the inclination to reveal something to you that has no bearing on your future. Ask X-51 if you must."

"Why did the Skrull come here?"

"I don't know. Colonization? Escape from the Kree? It's unimportant. You stopped them. When the Skrull first revealed themselves on your planet, they needed artificial means to replicate the powers of your teammates... but not those of your own. Does that mean anything to you?"

"I don't understand."

"Do you really think you are so much like the rest of your race? The cosmic rays that germinated your Celestial seed somehow advanced you from the first phase of individualistic mutation to a more developed stage. You are the only example of a mutated humanity that has reached the state of the Skrull race. That is why you are capable of creating all that you have. You are the most advanced of your kind. You





DESIGN BY CHRISTOPHER CARROLL

are the example of what all humanity would have become."

"Would have become?"

"Your race's Celestial seedlings were germinated far too soon."

"What's going to happen?"

"With the death of the Skull, the Celestials fear a mutated populace will destroy your planet... and the growing Celestial inside. Therefore, the Celestials are going to wipe all life from Earth's surface. It will appear as lifeless as the moon you stand upon."

"Then why not do that in the first place? Why not destroy everything right away, destroy life on a planet when you first come to it?"

"Because the planet would no doubt be colonized like the moon was. And such colonization always leads to an exploitation of far more than the planet's surface. Colonization might have put the future Celestial at risk. This is not new information, Richards."

"I see."

"You realize, of course, that Tony Stark has no hope of stopping the Celestials."

"Yes."

"He will die."

"Yes."





“This is the end, Richards.”

“How can you be so certain, Uatu?”

“Black Bolt has failed to save you. The Celestials ripped him to pieces. I don’t need eyes to know this. I heard his cry. I felt him being pulled apart as easily as the Celestials pieced together the humanity you are so foolishly attempting to cling to. You said Black Bolt was your only hope.”

“I did. He is.”

“Do you really expect me then to believe that Bolt’s last scream was a cry of triumph and not pain? That his death somehow convinced the Celestial Host to spare Earth?”

“You misunderstand the King of the Inhumans, Uatu. It wasn’t a cry of pain at all...he was beyond pain.”

“Then what was it, Richards?”

“Black Bolt cried for help. He called out a name.”

"A NAME? WHO CAN FORESTALL THE CELESTIALS NOW?"

"IT'S ALL UP TO TONY."

"ONE DAY, IN JUST SUCH A CONFLICT, TONY STARK FELL VICTIM TO THE SAME SORT OF WEAPONRY HE CREATED FOR HIS OWN COUNTRY."

"INSTEAD, HE CREATED A VEST TO KEEP THE SHRAPNEL DEEP IN HIS CHEST FROM REACHING HIS HEART."

"HE HAD HELP FROM A PHYSICIST LONG THOUGHT DEAD--PROFESSOR VINSEN."

"VINSEN AND TONY WORKED SECRETLY ON THE SUIT THAT WOULD NOT ONLY KEEP TONY ALIVE, BUT HELP HIM STOP WONG-CHU. THAT'S HOW HE BECAME IRON MAN."

"THAT'S HOW HE HID FROM HIS OWN DESTINY."

"TONY STARK?"

"THEN YOU ARE FINISHED, RICHARDS. LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT TONY STARK."

"BY HUMANITY'S STANDARDS, HE WAS A BRILLIANT INVENTOR. HIS WEAPONS WERE SEEN AS THE WAY TO END CONFLICTS AROUND THE WORLD."

"HE WAS MORTALLY WOUNDED, MERE DAYS FROM DEATH."

"I KNOW, UATU. I ALSO KNOW THAT TONY BECAME A PRISONER AND WAS FORCED TO CREATE A WEAPON FOR HIS CAPTOR, WONG-CHU."

"DESTINY, UATU? DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND? PROFESSOR VINSEN LURED SOLDIERS AWAY FROM TONY. HE CHANGED TONY'S DESTINY. TONY SHOULD HAVE DIED THEN..."

"...JUST AS YOU SAY WE ARE ABOUT TO DIE NOW."

"STARK HID BEHIND AN OLD MAN, RICHARDS. HE LET AN OLD MAN FIGHT HIS BATTLES. AN OLD MAN BOUGHT STARK ENOUGH TIME FOR THE ARMOR TO SAVE HIM--AND DEPART WITH HIS LIFE."

"TONY HAS ALWAYS GIVEN HIMSELF TO EARTH'S SERVICE. HE HELPED DESIGN THE TECHNOLOGY BEHIND S.H.I.E.L.D. STARK'S LIFE-MODEL DECOYS WERE THE PREDECESSORS OF THE X-SERIES ROBOTS PROGRAM, THE HELI-CARRIER--EVEN NICK FURY'S FLYING CAR."

"ALL WEAPONS OF WAR, RICHARDS. ISN'T IT YOUR BELOVED HUMANITY THAT CONDEMNS WAR AS WEAK?"

"THE CELESTIALS MADE US WARRIORS TO DEFEND THIS PLANET. THEY MADE US WEAK."

"THE HOSTILITY THAT NOW GIVES BIRTH TO MUTAGENIC SEEDS WITHIN US ALSO RIPS AT OUR OWN HEARTS. WE MAKE SAD AND BITTER LOVE, BUT GLORIOUS WAR. THAT'S OUR WEAKNESS."

"AND I THINK TONY KNEW THIS."

"YOU CAN'T BE SUGGESTING THAT STARK KNEW OF THE GESTATING CELESTIALS WITHIN YOUR PLANET."

"NO. BUT SUBCONSCIOUSLY, HE KNEW THERE WAS SOMETHING THERE THAT DIDN'T BELONG. SOMETHING HE COULDN'T TRUST."

"YOUR KIND DOES LOVE TO REWRITE HISTORY, RICHARDS."

"MAYBE THAT WAS THE REASON FOR TONY'S REVERENCE FOR SCIENCE. HE FORMED STARK INDUSTRIES TO TRY TO CONTROL WHAT MANKIND WAS INCAPABLE OF CONTROLLING...ITSELF."

"SO MANY ARMORS. SO MANY IRON MEN."

"PERHAPS THAT WAS WHY HE HELPED FORM THE AVENGERS SO LONG AGO. IT WASN'T LOKI THEY ASSEMBLED TO BATTLE-- IT WAS THE NOTION OF SUPER-BEINGS."

"WE THOUGHT TONY WAS MERELY TRYING TO FIND A WAY TO SHIELD HIMSELF."

"WE WERE WRONG. THE ARMOR WASN'T MERELY DESIGNED TO KEEP TONY SAFE. IT WAS MADE TO KEEP WHAT WAS INSIDE TONY FROM GETTING OUT."

"AND WHEN AT LAST HE REALIZED HE COULDN'T CHANGE A THING, HE HID WITHIN A DIFFERENT ARMOR, ONE MADE OF GLASS."

"THIS ARMOR HE BELIEVED TO BE STRONGER BECAUSE IT WOULDN'T LET HIM FEEL AT ALL. LIQUOR HELPED HIM FORGET THE INNER DEMON THAT SCRAPPED AT HIS SUBCONSCIOUS. HE NO LONGER BELIEVED IN A CURE."

"A CURE? THAT'S BEING SOMEWHAT MELODRAMATIC, ISN'T IT, RICHARDS?"

"I DON'T THINK SO, UATU. I'VE SEEN SO MUCH DEATH. I'VE FOUGHT IN SO MANY WARS. THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG WITH HUMANITY. I JUST NEVER EXPECTED TO FIND OUT WHAT IT WAS."

"AND SO HE CUT HIMSELF OFF FROM THOSE HE'D TIRED OF TRYING TO SAVE. QUITE A HERO, THAT STARK."

"WE THOUGHT IT WAS BECAUSE HE WAS PREOCCUPIED WITH PRESERVING HIS OWN HUMANITY."

"BUT TONY REMEMBERED THE WEAPONRY HE WAS CAPABLE OF INVENTING WHEN HE WAS ONLY A MAN. HE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT HE'D BECOME IF HE MUTATED. HE WAS AFRAID OF WHAT HE MIGHT BE."

"HE DIDN'T PROTECT HIMSELF FROM THE PLAGUE FOR HIS OWN SAKE, UATU."

"HE DID IT FOR OURS."

"VERY TOUCHING,
RICHARDS, BUT I
IMAGINE YOU NOW
SEE THAT STARK'S
CONCERNS WERE
IN VAIN..."

"...AS WAS CAPTAIN
AMERICA'S CONFRON-
TATION WITH THE SKULL."

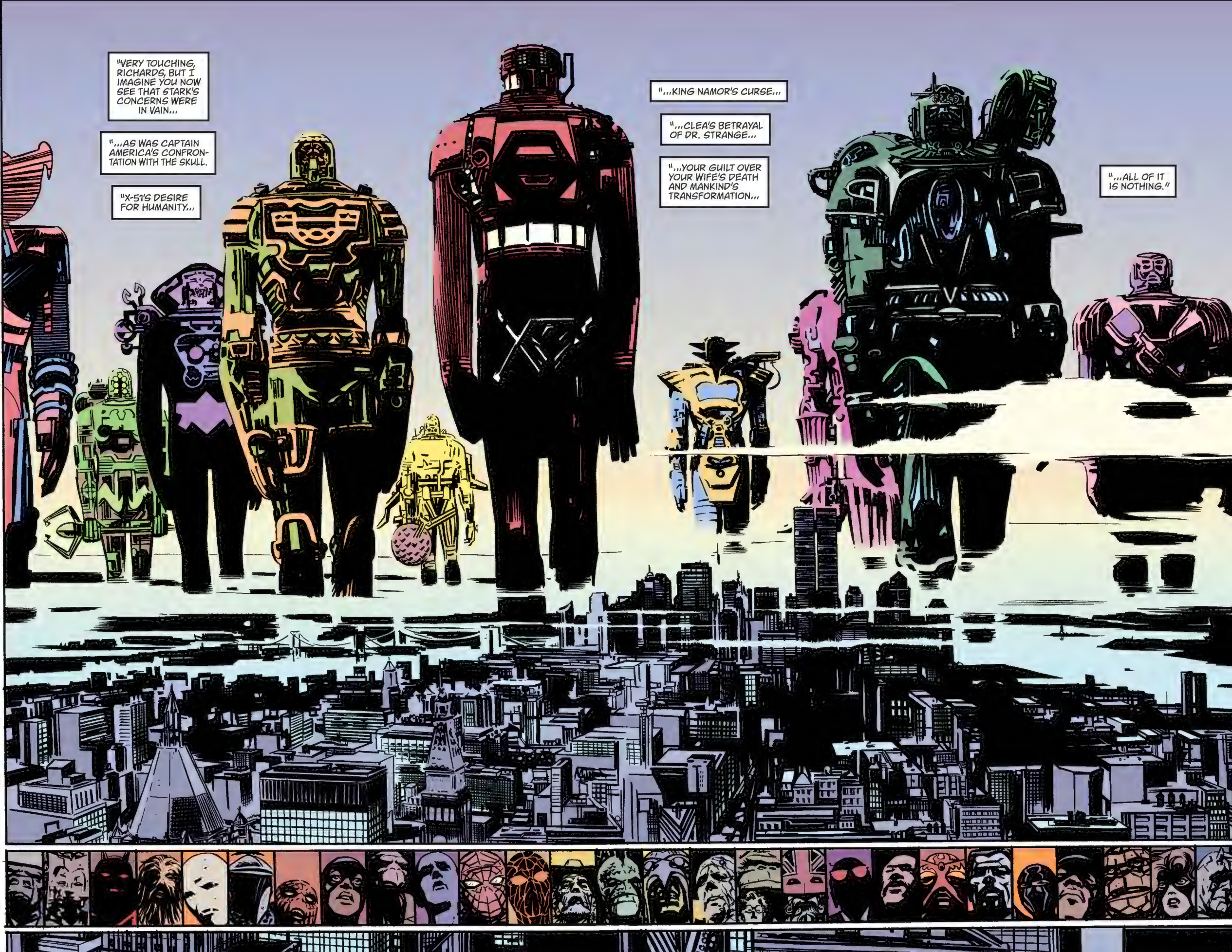
"X-51'S DESIRE
FOR HUMANITY..."

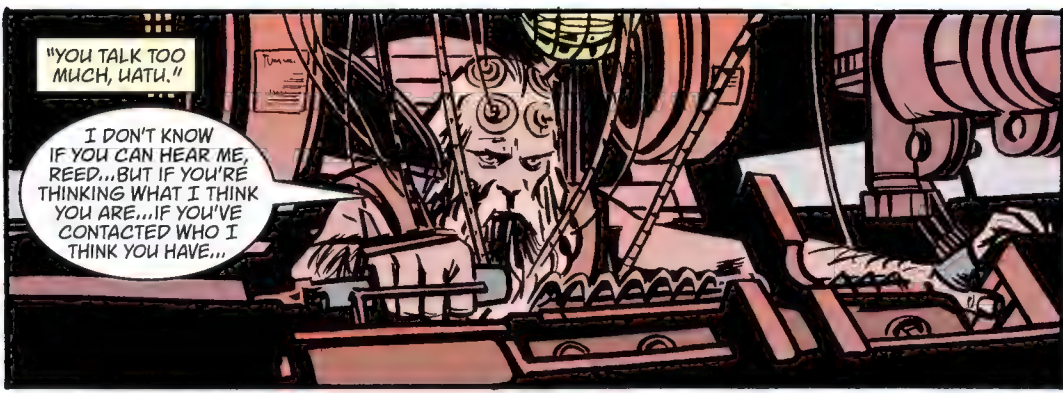
"...KING NAMOR'S CURSE..."

"...CLEA'S BETRAYAL
OF DR. STRANGE..."

"...YOUR GUILT OVER
YOUR WIFE'S DEATH
AND MANKIND'S
TRANSFORMATION..."

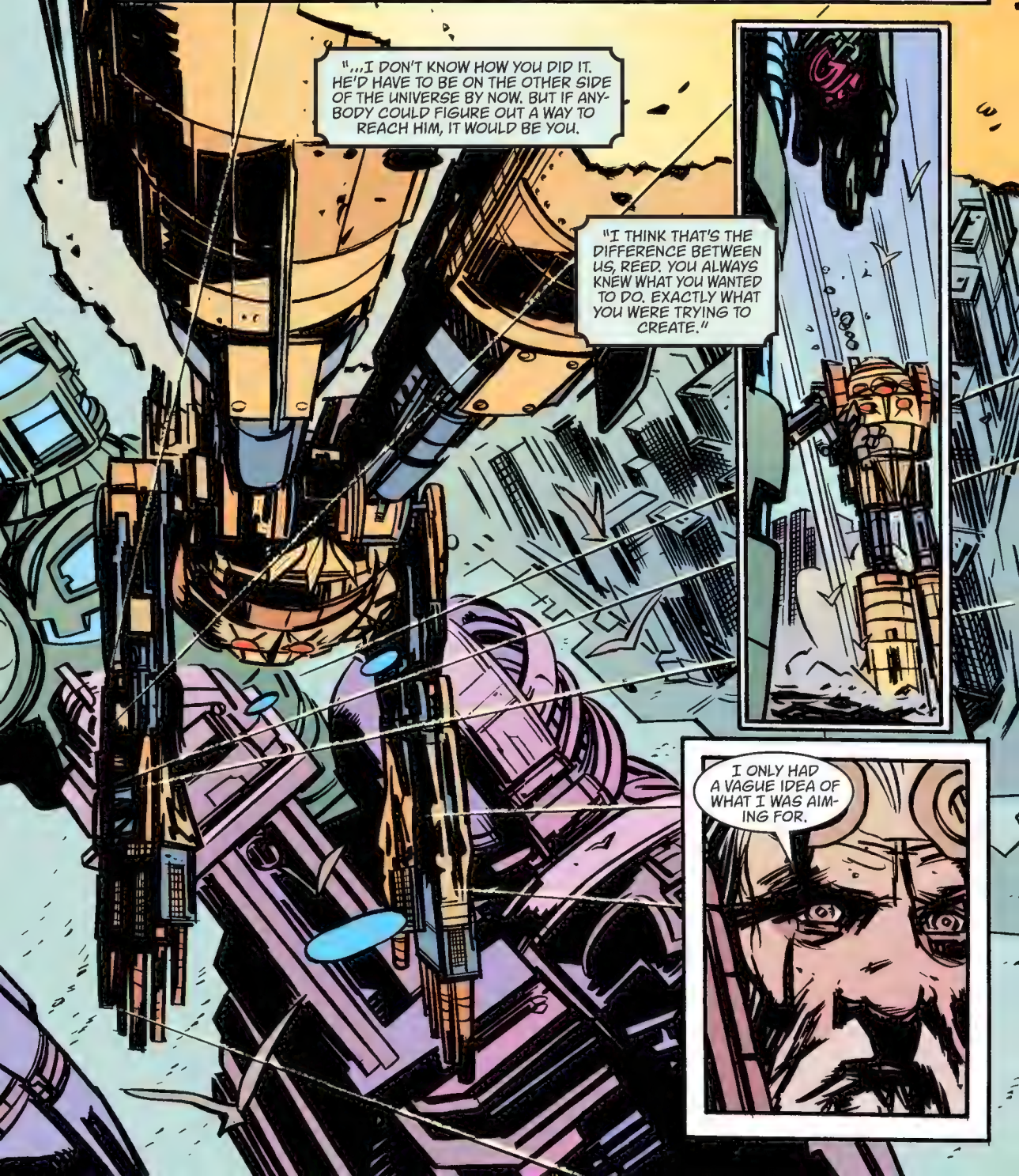
"...ALL OF IT
IS NOTHING."





"YOU TALK TOO MUCH, UATU."

I DON'T KNOW IF YOU CAN HEAR ME, REED... BUT IF YOU'RE THINKING WHAT I THINK YOU ARE... IF YOU'VE CONTACTED WHO I THINK YOU HAVE...

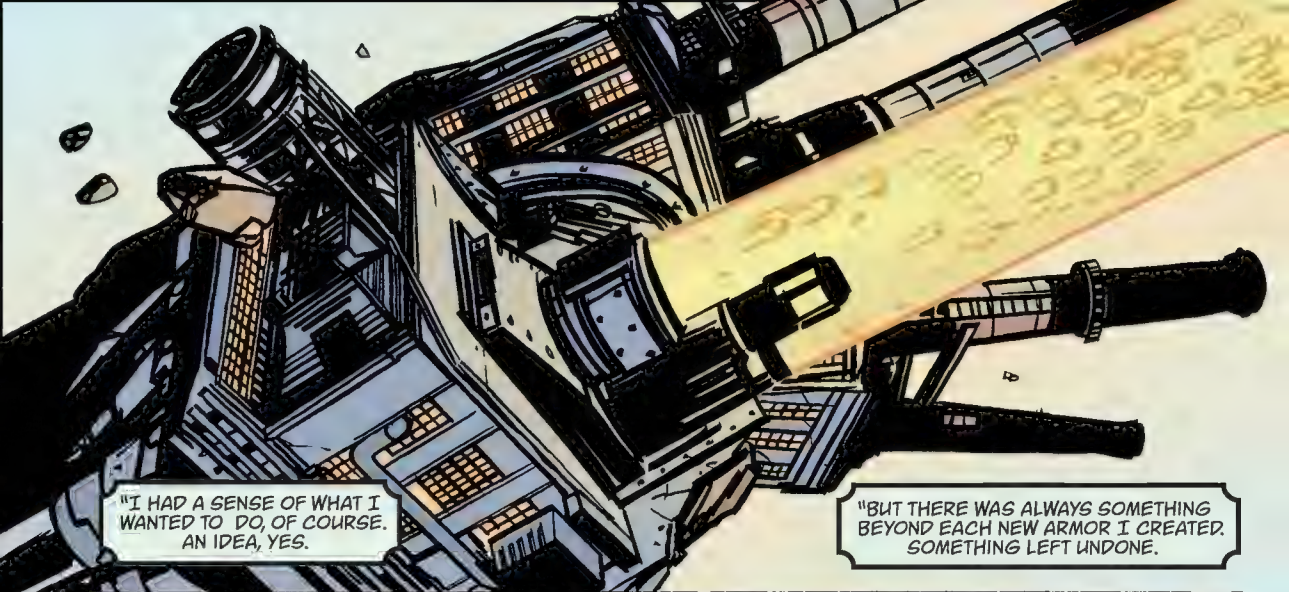


"...I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU DID IT. HE'D HAVE TO BE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE UNIVERSE BY NOW. BUT IF ANYBODY COULD FIGURE OUT A WAY TO REACH HIM, IT WOULD BE YOU."

"I THINK THAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN US, REED. YOU ALWAYS KNEW WHAT YOU WANTED TO DO. EXACTLY WHAT YOU WERE TRYING TO CREATE."

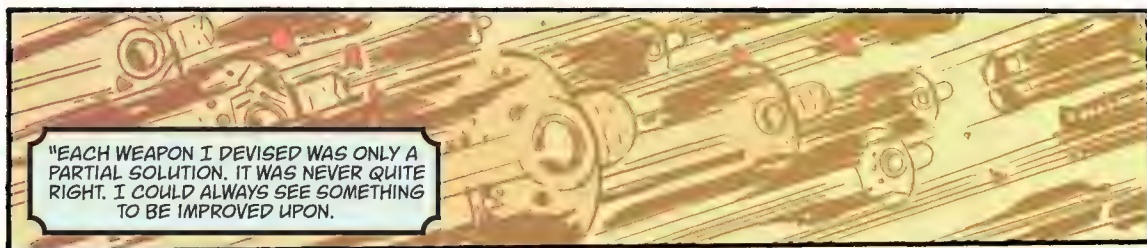


I ONLY HAD A VAGUE IDEA OF WHAT I WAS AIMING FOR.

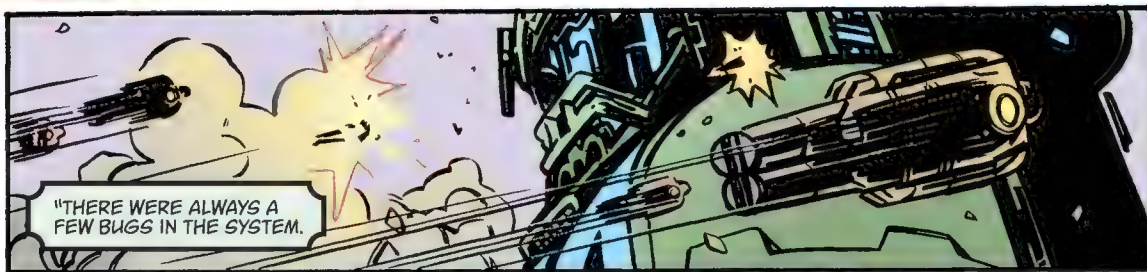


"I HAD A SENSE OF WHAT I
WANTED TO DO, OF COURSE.
AN IDEA, YES.

"BUT THERE WAS ALWAYS SOMETHING
BEYOND EACH NEW ARMOR I CREATED.
SOMETHING LEFT UNDONE.



"EACH WEAPON I DEvised WAS ONLY A
PARTIAL SOLUTION. IT WAS NEVER QUITE
RIGHT. I COULD ALWAYS SEE SOMETHING
TO BE IMPROVED UPON.



"THERE WERE ALWAYS A
FEW BUGS IN THE SYSTEM.



"I SUPPOSE THIS IS THE
WAY ALL CREATORS FEEL."



NO, NOT FATHER. MY EARS BLEED AT THE SOUND OF YOUR SILKEN, POISONED WORDS.

THAT I, THE HIGH KING OF THIS GOLDEN REALM, COULD EVER BE CALLED FATHER BY ONE SUCH AS YOU IS MORE THAN I CAN ENDURE.

FATHER.

I KNOW YOU NOT.



YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, FATHER. I'VE COME...

...TO RECLAIM THE WITCH, SNAKE.

YOU CANNOT HAVE HER.

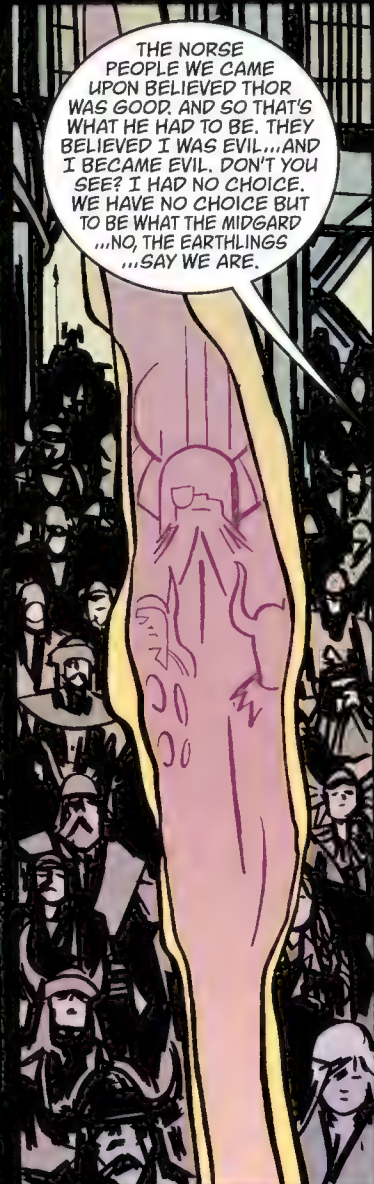


THIS IS ALL A CROCK!



IT'S ANOTHER TRICK, FATHER.

HE NO LONGER SPEAKS AS AN ASGARDIAN.





THERE IS
NO EAR IN ALL
OF ASGARD
FOR THEE TO
FILL...

...NO
ALE FOR THEE TO
DRINK...

...NO BED
FOR THEE TO FIND
WARMTH.

GO.

THE CELESTIALS
THREATEN TO DESTROY
EARTH, FATHER.

IF THEY
DO, AND ALL
MEN DIE, WE
WILL DIE
TOO.



LISTEN
TO ME, IT'S
TRUE.

PERHAPS WE
MIGHT NE'ER ESCAPE
THIS FATE, BUT TO ALLOW
LOKI TO TRANSFORM
US INTO FROGS...



I KNEW YOU
WOULDN'T BELIEVE
ME. NOT AMONG
THE LIVING.

WHEN I TRICKED
FATHER INTO LETTING ME
TURN YOU INTO A WOMAN, THOR,
I HAD NO CHOICE. AND IF WE
ARE TO SURVIVE, I HAVE
NO CHOICE NOW.

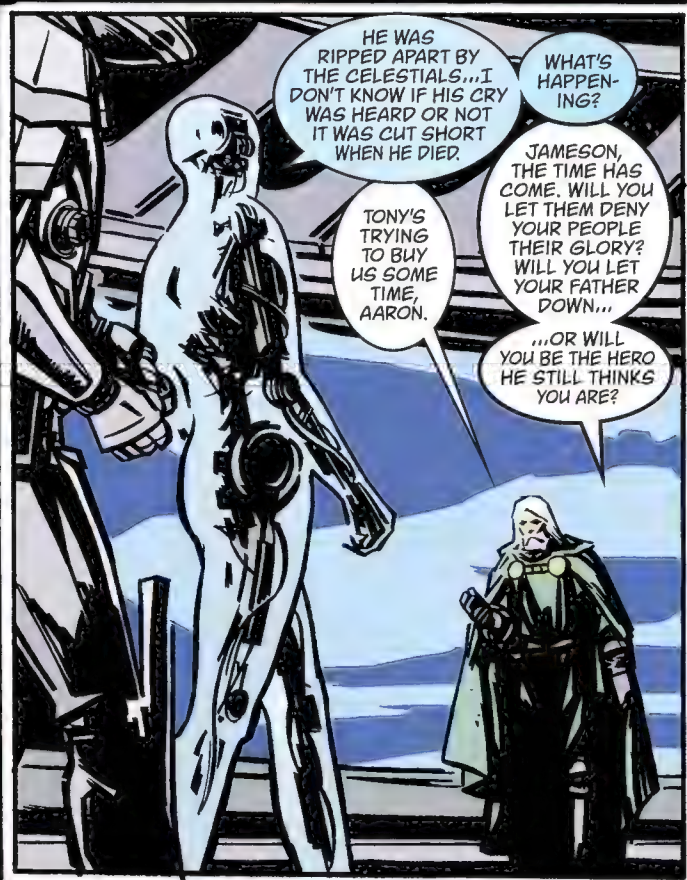


NONE.





"REED, BLACK BOLT IS DEAD."



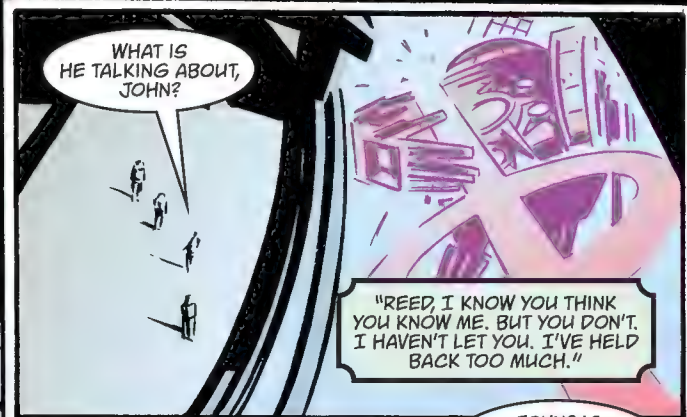
HE WAS
RIPPED APART BY
THE CELESTIALS...I
DON'T KNOW IF HIS CRY
WAS HEARD OR NOT
IT WAS CUT SHORT
WHEN HE DIED.

WHAT'S
HAPPENING?

TONY'S
TRYING
TO BUY
US SOME
TIME,
AARON.

JAMESON,
THE TIME HAS
COME. WILL YOU
LET THEM DENY
YOUR PEOPLE
THEIR GLORY?
WILL YOU LET
YOUR FATHER
DOWN...

...OR WILL
YOU BE THE HERO
HE STILL THINKS
YOU ARE?



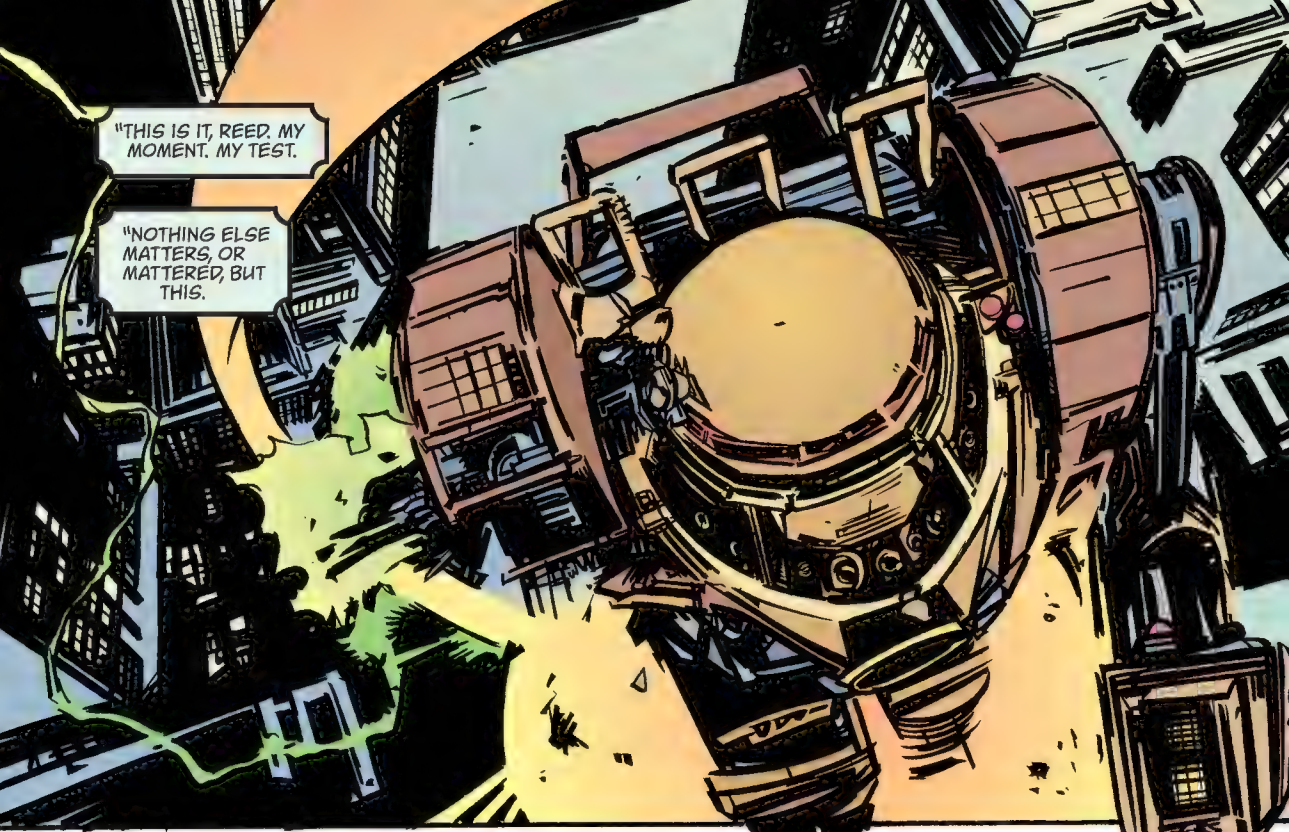
WHAT IS
HE TALKING ABOUT,
JOHN?

"REED, I KNOW YOU THINK
YOU KNOW ME. BUT YOU DON'T.
I HAVEN'T LET YOU. I'VE HELD
BACK TOO MUCH."



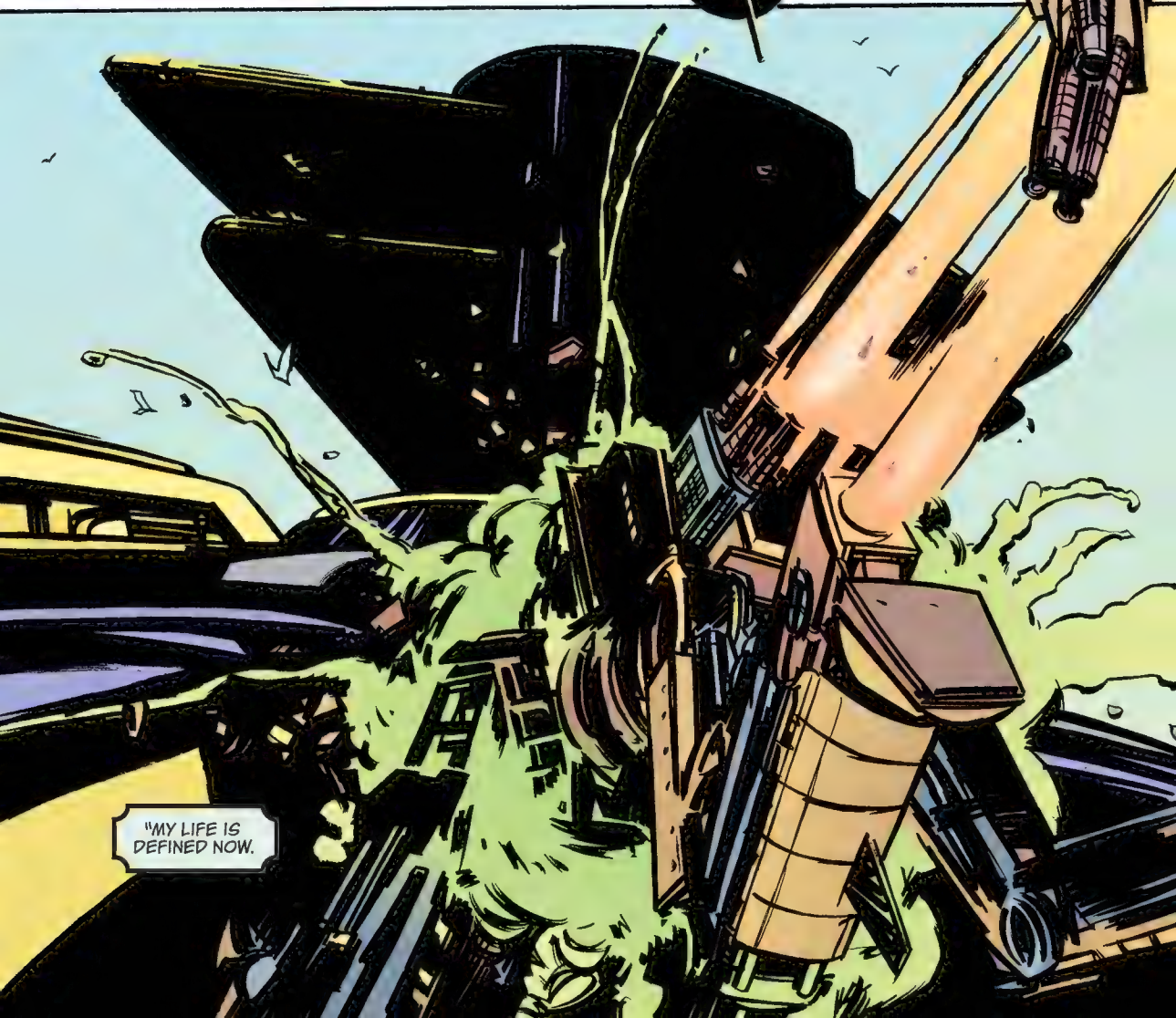
I'M SORRY,
REED. IT'S LIKE
THE WATCHER SAID--
WE WERE MEANT
FOR THE STARS.

JOHN? IS
THAT THE ULTIMATE
NULLIFIER?



"THIS IS IT, REED. MY
MOMENT. MY TEST.

"NOTHING ELSE
MATTERS, OR
MATTERED, BUT
THIS.



"MY LIFE IS
DEFINED NOW.



"WAS I GOOD
ENOUGH?"



GOOD-BYE,
REED.



GOOD-BYE,
TONY...



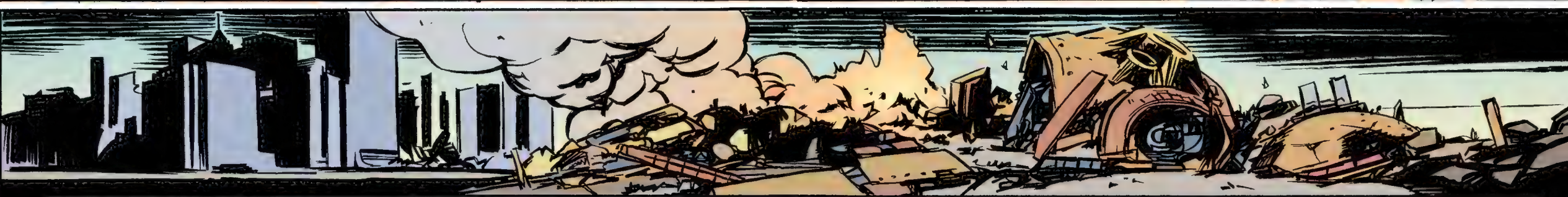
...GOOD-BYE,
IRON MAN.



"LISTEN TO ME, JAMESON.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE
WATCHER TOLD YOU. BUT I
KNOW WHAT HE TOLD ME.

"THE CELESTIALS AREN'T
OFFERING US THE STARS.
WE'RE NOTHING TO THEM.
THEY'RE THE STARS.

"CAN'T YOU
SEE THAT?"



I'M...
ALIVE?



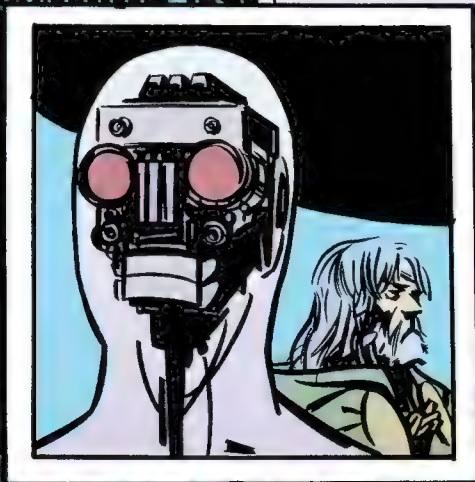
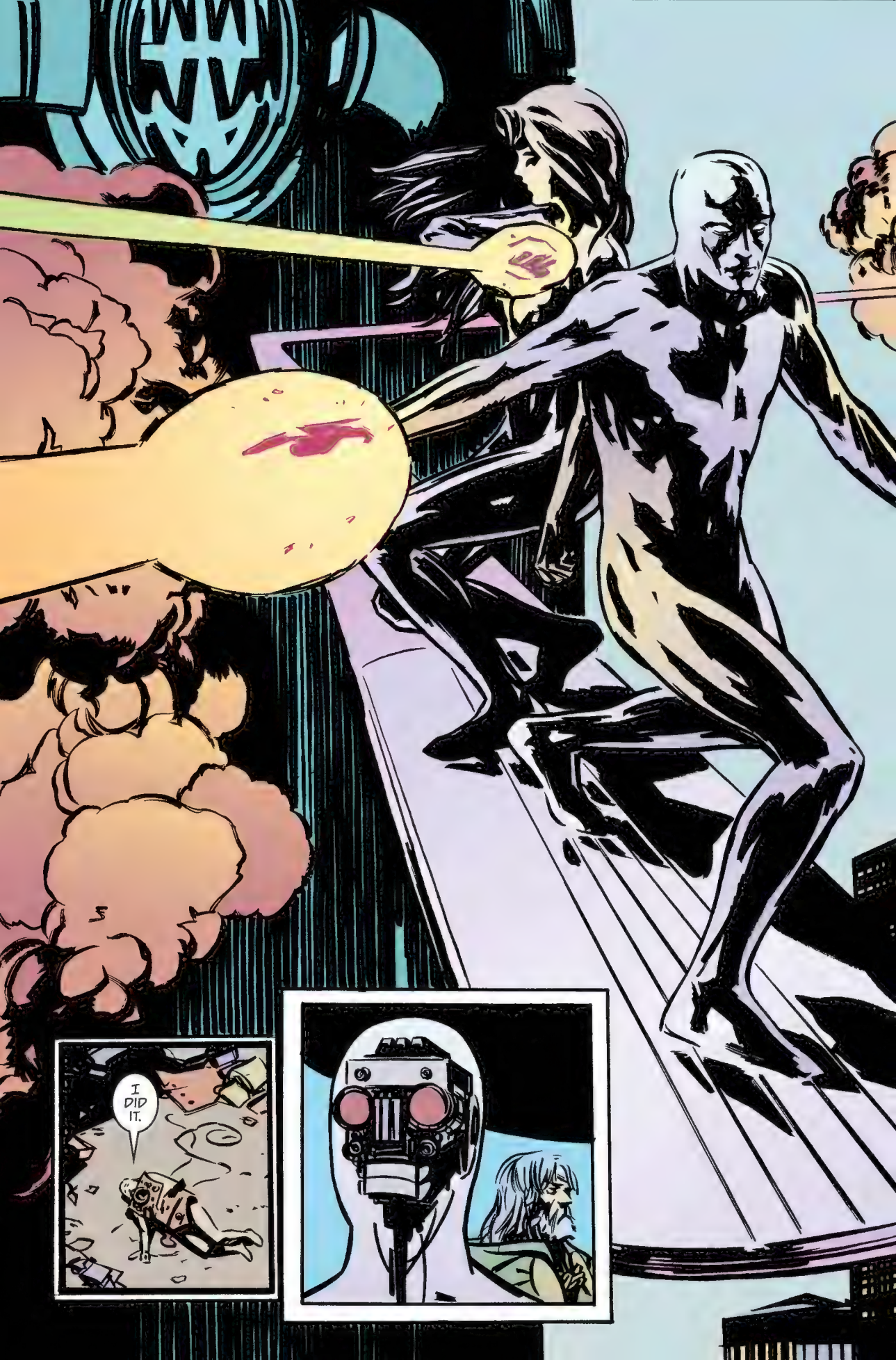
NO.

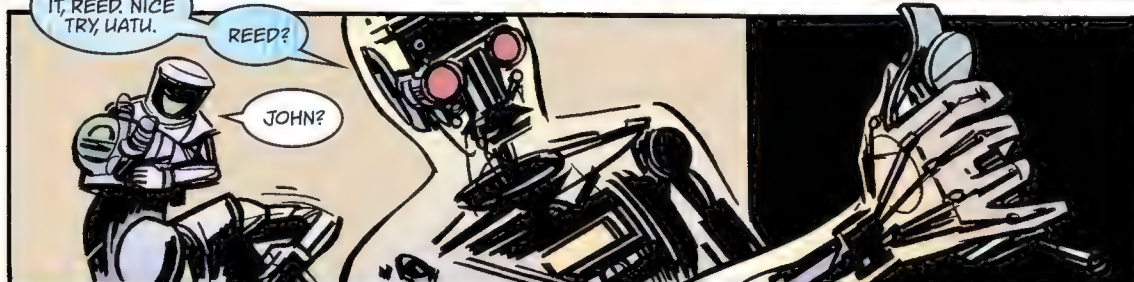
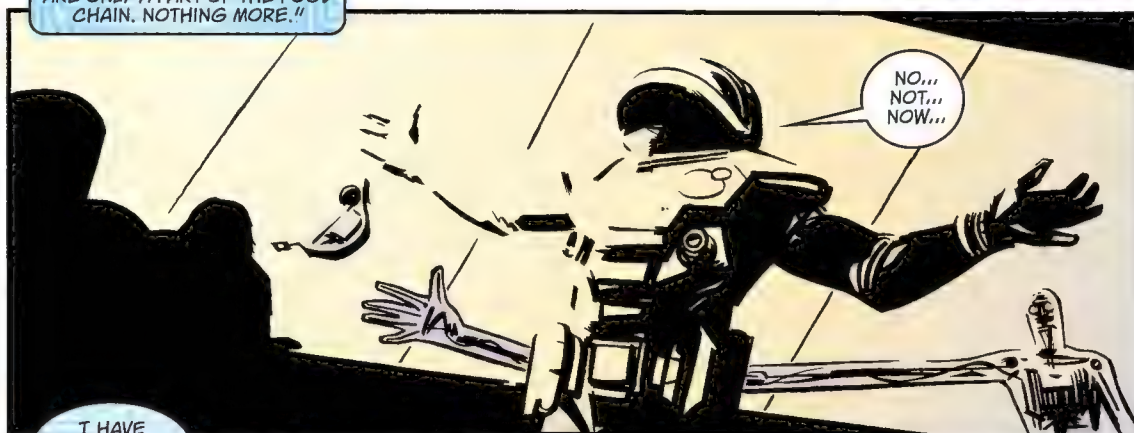
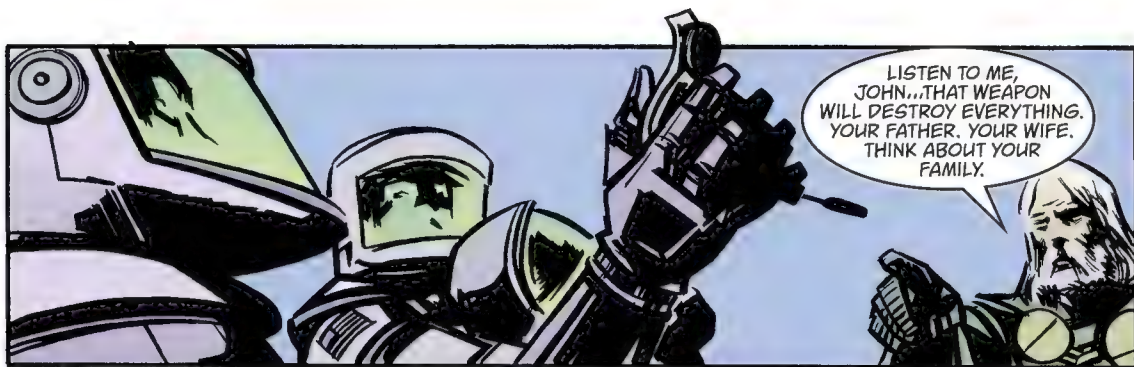


SORRY...

...SO
SORRY...









"THIS IS NO LONGER
A BATTLE OF MEN."

"Simon found he was looking
into a vast mouth. There was
a blackness within, a blackness
that spread." – William Golding,
Lord of the Flies

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER TWELVE

I L L U S T R A T I O N S B Y A L E X R O S S



They say Earth will not live another day. That this is the end. I have no one else to spend these last moments with.

I know you won't believe this, but I didn't have a choice. Not really. I was the only one on the planet you weren't trying to control. But I was the only one without a choice. You see, I'd forgotten, myself, what it meant to be free. I forgot that failing was a part of freedom. And rather than recognize my failure to stop you the first time as a sign that I was still free, I despaired.

And then I met someone. He called himself Daredevil. I don't think he's Matt Murdock. As far as I know, Matt's been dead for years. No, this Daredevil begged to help me stop you because he wanted to die and couldn't. Life was his cage. Death would have been his escape. He thought that by being my partner, he would die too. You see, I was wrong about Daredevil. He was fighting for freedom. And this reminded me that my definition of freedom was too narrow. I needed to change. I needed to fail. I hadn't before.

I needed to become free of even my staunch morality. I needed to be free from the trappings of what other men expected me to be. From people who remembered me from World War II. From people who thought I should be fighting the current administration.





I think you should know my name. It's Steve. Steve Rogers. One of us should know the other's name. I don't believe in unknown soldiers. And I don't believe that you should be known only as the Skull. Those familiar with my history would be horrified if I referred to you as James. But I need to be free of them as well.

That's why I'm burying you. That's why I'm honoring you. I'm somewhere around a hundred years old now. I've seen more history than I'd ever dreamed or hoped I would. Some good. A lot of it was bad. I suppose I should be grateful that I've probably saved many more lives than I've taken... but it's harder to remember the lives you've saved... even when there are so many. I do remember every death. I remember everyone I've ever killed.

Before I was Captain America, I had no powers, no special abilities. I was a skinny runt who didn't even have the strength to run away from a fight.

I was given the opportunity to be a part of a top secret government experiment. I was injected with an experimental drug known as the Super Soldier Formula. My body was then bombarded with vita-rays. The purpose of this process was to speed up the effects of the formula.





Shortly after, my weak and fragile body was changed. Where my Mother swore there was only skin and bone, cartilage and muscle grew. Suddenly, I had the body of an athlete.

I had never experienced such power before. I didn't know my own strength. One of those witnessing this inaugural testing of the formula, a foreign spy, shot the doctor who had administered the operation. The doctor died as I threw the spy across the room.

The spy died. I had killed him. It was the first death I had ever caused. I hadn't even known I was capable of such a thing. I wanted to be a soldier to stop the killing. And there I was, born again into this new body, only minutes old, and I had already joined the ranks of those I had wanted to stop.

That makes me wonder what it must have been like for you when you first found you could control people. I wonder what your life was like before you were given this new power. I wonder where you had learned to hate.

Doctor Erskine, the man who had given birth to Captain America that day, died as well. The formula was lost with him. And so, I would be the only super soldier to fight for my country in World War II. I was the newest weapon to aim at the enemy. And weapons kill.

Don't misunderstand me. It was war. Hitler was slaughtering thousands. He had to be stopped. And when you're in the field and bullets are whizzing past your head and you're watching your friends get blown to bits, it's not that easy to suggest that we all just sit down and talk about things. It was insane. The madness was infectious.

And sometimes, sometimes I killed people without even trying. Let me tell you about James. I had no right to let him come along with me on my missions. It was a time when I thought that my identity was best kept secret. And James threatened to expose that I was Captain America to my superiors — superiors who I now believe probably already knew who I was. Over the years I've been surprised to find how many people





knew I was Captain America.

So I let James, another James, tag along. I let him wear a mask. I let him come up with lighthearted one-liners to toss at the Axis powers when he'd run out of hand grenades. I let him join the good fight. And along the way, I discovered it wasn't that good. James was killed on the same mission that took me out of the war. It would be easy to blame the Axis powers for his death... but I brought him along. I let him get into the situation that killed him. I as good as pulled the trigger.

He didn't belong there fighting alongside a super soldier... just as you didn't belong here. He was about your age when he died.

Once I threw myself into a barrage of Nazi soldiers. They opened fire on me — their bullets bounced off my shield and ricocheted back into their ranks.

Not all of them died right away. One boy coughed and smiled. I didn't understand why he was smiling. He had black hair, brown eyes and an acne problem. Not at all the picture of a good Nazi soldier. Yet there he was, fighting to expand a nation around the world. A nation that could have one day turned on him for not living up to the Aryan ideal.

He looked up into my eyes and saw my blond brows above my blue eyes. He smiled again with bloodied lips. He was defeated by the very ideal he'd been fighting for.

I knew then that soldiers weren't really allowed to fight. We were given the freedom to shoot the enemy. We were given the freedom to die — but not to fight. Fighting isn't merely a physical phenomenon. This fight between us, James, was never about bone and blood. It was a battle for the mind. All wars are. Fighting requires mind and soul and strength. So many soldiers weren't allowed to think at all, only to take orders. And so they died while other, often lesser men did the thinking for them.

That is the horror. My horror.

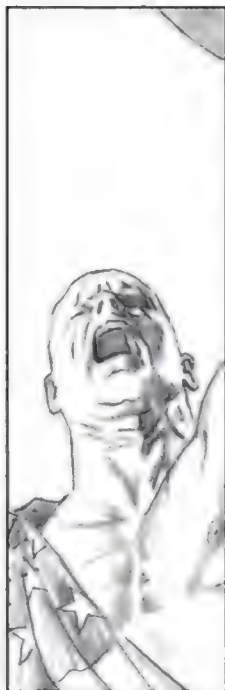
If there were a way to stop you without killing you, I would have done it.

But when I was young and without power, I believed that a soldier's duty was to fight. I was wrong. Maybe that's what some authorities and leaders would have us believe. But a soldier's duty is to stop the war. To end it. And until the war is over, no true soldier can rest.

Let me tell you about the Red Skull. You took his name. You should know the one you allied yourself with.

It's been said that at first, the Nazis killed the Jews because they hated them. And that later, they hated the Jews because they killed them. That's the summation of the Red Skull's reason for hating life. War makes us hate. It makes us hate everything including ourselves. And because we can't live for long hating ourselves, we begin to hate others because of what they let us do to them.



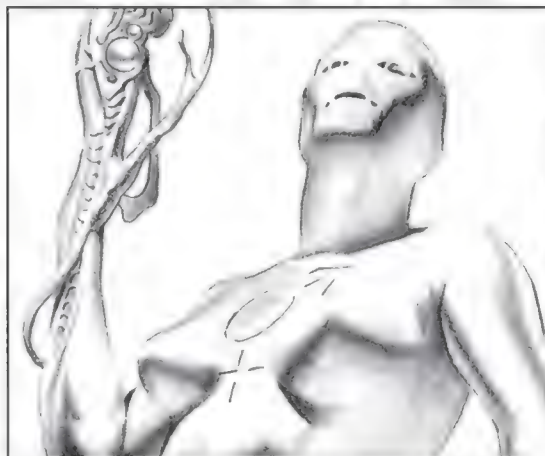
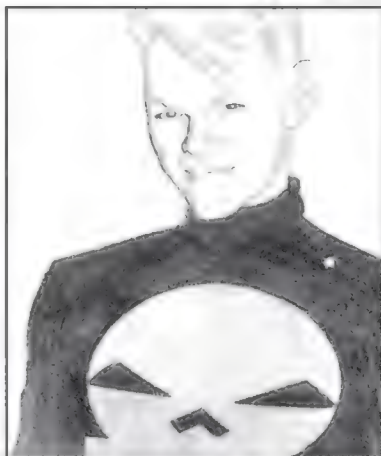


The Red Skull was born Johann Schmidt. John Smith. He and I could have been brothers. We both came from poverty. We both suffered rejection because we lacked strength and power. And were both chosen to become more than what we were.

But Johann was born into hatred as well as poverty. I wasn't. My family cared for me. And though we had little as far as money goes, we were happy. And that, perhaps, is the only difference between myself and the Red Skull, or between me and you. Where I was born, to whom I was born, determined what I would become. The same went for the Skull. Don't you see? There is no freedom in that. If we are born into hatred, we become hatred. If we are born into strife, strife becomes our life.

Were it not for the doctor who delivered him, Johann would have been murdered, only minutes after being born, by his own father. Johann's father, Hermann Schmidt, an alcoholic, blamed the child for the death of its mother. Johann's father killed himself the next day. The doctor took Johann to an orphanage where he remained until the age of seven. Seven years is the age of reason, some say. For Johann, it was the age of madness. He took to the streets. What his begging failed to provide, he stole. The nights not spent under the blanket of the cold German skies were spent in prison for various petty crimes.

As a young man, Johann went to work for a shopkeeper, a Jewish business-man whose daughter was perhaps the only person who had ever showed Johann any kindness at all. But when she denied his affections, he rewarded her past kindness by killing her.





This was Johann's first murder. It was his first moment of happiness. It is hard to be fair, especially when speaking of the man who would one day become the Red Skull. This senseless act was, of course, terribly evil, and motivated by the pain of rejection. A pain Johann swore he would never feel again — a pain that was the measure of his humanity.

As a bellboy in a Germany rife with rumors of war, Johann was given the "honor" of serving refreshments to certain members of the growing ranks of the Third Reich, including Adolf Hitler. Hitler saw something of himself in the young man and took it upon himself to mentor the bellhop. He gave the boy a mask, a mask the color of blood. The Red Skull was born.

The Skull commanded many covert operations for Hitler, operations that required both the absence of mercy and a vindictive joy of killing. Secret bases all over the world were funded by the Reich for the Skull's purposes. The Skull's subversive missions in the U.S. were so costly that the United States created a soldier to stop him... me. Captain America.

In time, the Skull actually had his brain transplanted into a clone of my own body, as ludicrous as that may sound. We were enemies now created equal. And when, at last, my own Super Soldier formula began to eat away at my body like a cancer, the Skull saved me with a blood transfusion.

Why would he save me? Why rescue from death the very man he hated more than life itself?





I think the Skull, at last, believed he'd found a way to defeat me. There was now something inside Captain America that was also the Skull's. And though I killed him, in the end he died believing that his hatred still flowed in my veins. That his hatred was a part of Captain America.

The Skull died thinking he had made me something I already was. When I became Captain America, I killed a man almost instantly because I had the power to do so. I hadn't had the power before that.

I killed you because I was too weak to save you. If there had been a way to make you stop, to control you the way you had controlled your followers, it still would have meant nothing. I could never have changed your heart. I'm not that strong.

For a while, I fooled myself into believing that people would see what I did when I was a hero and want to do the same. They didn't. I fought to make them free. Instead, they depended on me more and more to keep them safe. And more and more they depended on me to remind them what America was.

It was like they gave me control of their national identity. Then you took control. And neither situation was right. I'm an old man. You were a boy, James. But neither of us has the right to control others, even if others choose to give up that control.

America is the land of opportunity.

And opportunity is the key word. Because there is within this nation the opportunity to better ourselves — to rise above our humble beginnings, no matter what they may be.

Only by stopping you could I hope to become something more than a soldier who only follows orders — but in order to stop you, I had to be what I've been trained my entire life to be.

Sometimes I think people like to be controlled. I think they think there's a freedom in not having to make decisions. In not having to be in a position in which mistakes can be made.

But what kind of world would this be if our actions were determined for us?

Thank God we have the freedom to make mistakes. Without failure there cannot be freedom. Without freedom, there cannot be success. And that, again, is why I am sorry I failed you. Sorry, and relieved.



Should Earth survive this day, I have no doubt that there
will be others like you. Men who think that the world would be
better off if they were in control. Who knows if I'll still be
here to stop them? I believe this day that my war is over.
Should another begin, someone will fight for freedom.
And freedom will be won, as it always must be.



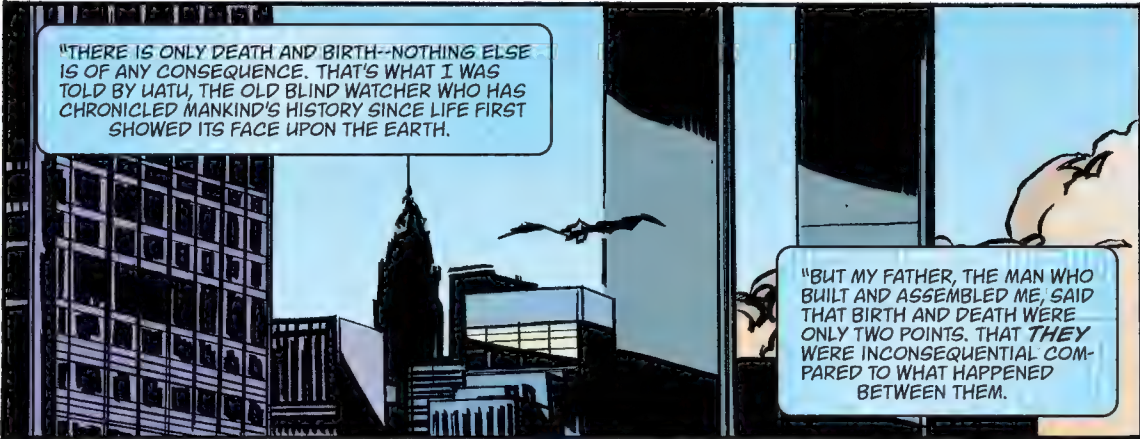


X E A R T H



**KRUEGER
LEON
REINHOLD**

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"THERE IS ONLY DEATH AND BIRTH--NOTHING ELSE IS OF ANY CONSEQUENCE. THAT'S WHAT I WAS TOLD BY UATU, THE OLD BLIND WATCHER WHO HAS CHRONICLED MANKIND'S HISTORY SINCE LIFE FIRST SHOWED ITS FACE UPON THE EARTH.

"BUT MY FATHER, THE MAN WHO BUILT AND ASSEMBLED ME, SAID THAT BIRTH AND DEATH WERE ONLY TWO POINTS. THAT *THEY* WERE INCONSEQUENTIAL COMPARED TO WHAT HAPPENED BETWEEN THEM.



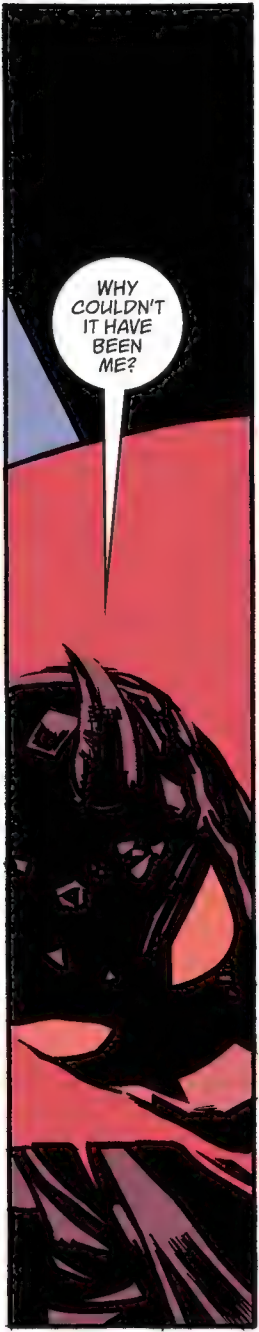
"OF COURSE, UATU SAID THAT THIS WAS JUST A LINE--SOMETHING HUMANITY CLINGS TO IN ORDER TO EASE THE FEAR OF DEATH AND INFUSE ITS EXISTENCE WITH MEANING.

"MY FATHER SAID THAT THE WAY WE DIE DEFINES US. IT GIVES US IDENTITY. IT REFLECTS THE WAY WE'VE LIVED."

TONY?

IS HE DEAD?

YES.



WHY COULDN'T IT HAVE BEEN ME?



"THIS IS A RECORDING, AN INTERNAL MONOLOGUE WRITTEN ALONG AN INDEPENDENT CIRCUIT TO MY MOTOR FUNCTIONS.

"A MESSAGE IN A BOTTLED MAN FOR THOSE WHO MIGHT COME UPON MY BODY...IT WILL SERVE AS A WARNING OF THE CELESTIAL PLAN FOR UNIVERSAL DOMINATION.

"IT WILL ALSO EXPLAIN WHY THERE IS A MOON, BUT NO WORLD FOR IT TO ORBIT.

"MANY YEARS AGO, THE CELESTIALS IMPREGNATED THE PLANET EARTH BY PLACING THEIR SEED WITHIN IT. THIS SEED, OVER HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF YEARS, FED OFF THAT PLANET'S NATURAL RESOURCES AND GREW. THIS IS HOW CELESTIALS REPRODUCE.

"THEY THEN TAKE THE INDIGENOUS LIFE-FORMS ON A GIVEN PLANET AND EMPOWER THEM, MUTATING THEM TO UNKNOWINGLY PROTECT THE EGG GROWING WITHIN THE PLANET'S CORE.

"THESE MUTATED PROTECTORS WERE EARTH'S SUPER HEROES...ITS LEGENDS AND CHAMPIONS OF VIRTUE.

"THE CELESTIALS EVEN SET UP A NURSE OF SORTS TO WATCH OVER THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CELESTIAL EMBRYO. THESE MIDWIVES ARE KNOWN AS WATCHERS. EARTH'S WATCHER WAS KNOWN AS UATU.

"BUT BLINDED BY THE KING OF THE INHUMANS, AND THEREFORE UNABLE TO WATCH, UATU TRANSFORMED ME INTO THIS TRANSPARENT CARICATURE OF MY FATHER'S ORIGINAL DESIGN AND TOLD ME I WAS TO BE THE NEW WATCHER.

"LEFT TO THEIR OWN DEVICES, THE CELESTIALS WOULD GROW IN NUMBERS TO RULE THE UNIVERSE.

"AS IT IS, THERE'S ONLY BEEN ONE BEING IN ALL CREATION WHO WAS ABLE TO KEEP THEIR EXPANSION AT BAY.

"HE HAS HAD MANY NAMES. GALACTUS. THE GREAT BALANCER. THE DESTROYER. THE DEVOURER OF WORLDS.

"GALACTUS TRAVELED TO PLANETS IMPREGNATED BY THE CELESTIALS AND CONSUMED THE EMBRYOS GROWING WITHIN.

"BUT GALACTUS WAS TRANSFORMED INTO A STAR YEARS AGO BY THE FANTASTIC FOUR'S REED RICHARDS..."

"...SO IF GALACTUS IS GONE, THEN WHO IS THIS?"

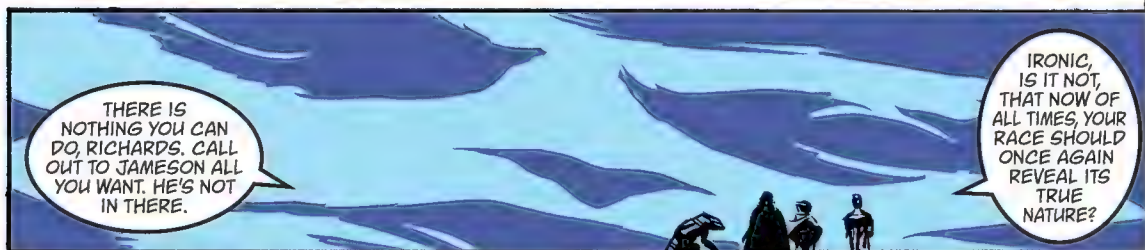


"I'M NOT CERTAIN OF THE FORM IN WHICH YOU'LL FIND ME SHOULD YOU COME ACROSS THIS RECORDING. WE'VE HAD SOME PROBLEMS."

JOHN?

JAMESON?
I KNOW YOU'RE
IN THERE. LISTEN
TO ME. REMEM-
BER WHO YOU
ARE.

IT'S NO
USE, REED. LOOK
AT HIS EYES.



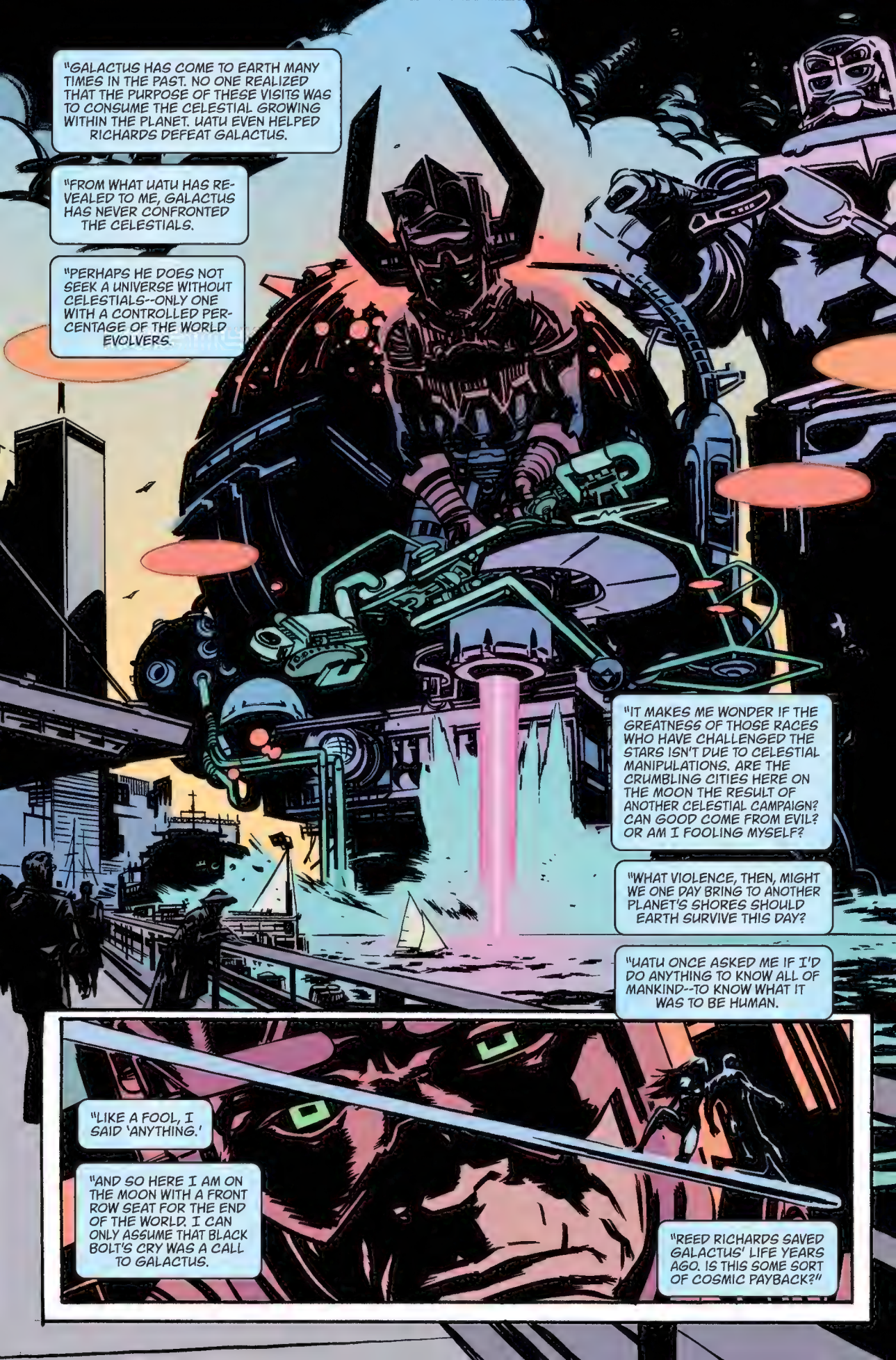
THERE IS
NOTHING YOU CAN
DO, RICHARDS. CALL
OUT TO JAMESON ALL
YOU WANT. HE'S NOT
IN THERE.

IRONIC,
IS IT NOT,
THAT NOW OF
ALL TIMES, YOUR
RACE SHOULD
ONCE AGAIN
REVEAL ITS
TRUE
NATURE?



"YOU AND YOUR
KIND ARE NOTHING
BUT SENSELESS
BEASTS."

"BEASTS WHO SHOULD
BE GRATEFUL TO HAVE
SERVED ANY PURPOSE
AT ALL."



"GALACTUS HAS COME TO EARTH MANY TIMES IN THE PAST. NO ONE REALIZED THAT THE PURPOSE OF THESE VISITS WAS TO CONSUME THE CELESTIAL GROWING WITHIN THE PLANET. UATU EVEN HELPED RICHARDS DEFEAT GALACTUS.

"FROM WHAT UATU HAS REVEALED TO ME, GALACTUS HAS NEVER CONFRONTED THE CELESTIALS.

"PERHAPS HE DOES NOT SEEK A UNIVERSE WITHOUT CELESTIALS--ONLY ONE WITH A CONTROLLED PERCENTAGE OF THE WORLD EVOLVERS.

"IT MAKES ME WONDER IF THE GREATNESS OF THOSE RACES WHO HAVE CHALLENGED THE STARS ISN'T DUE TO CELESTIAL MANIPULATIONS. ARE THE CRUMBLING CITIES HERE ON THE MOON THE RESULT OF ANOTHER CELESTIAL CAMPAIGN? CAN GOOD COME FROM EVIL? OR AM I FOOLING MYSELF?

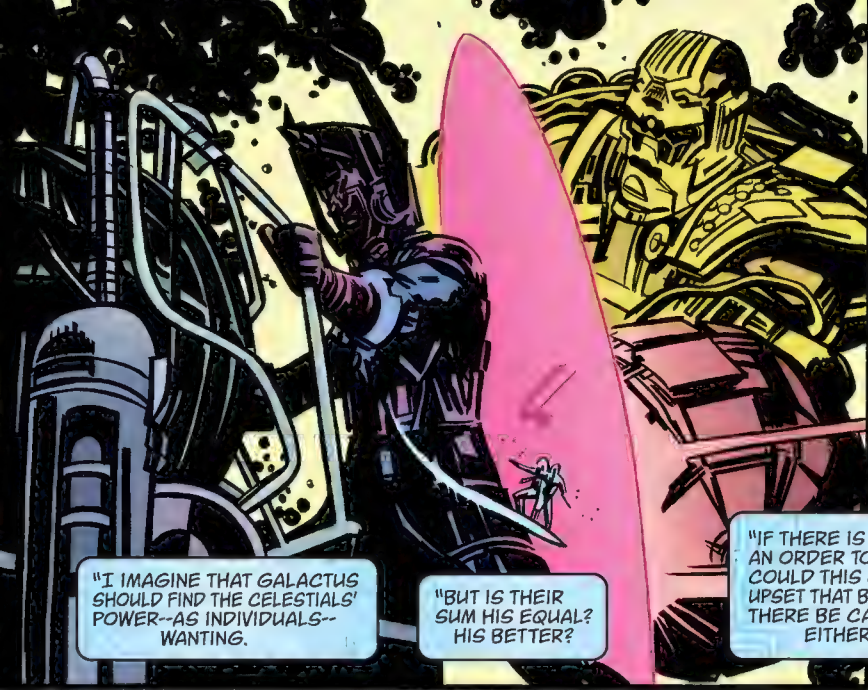
"WHAT VIOLENCE, THEN, MIGHT WE ONE DAY BRING TO ANOTHER PLANET'S SHORES SHOULD EARTH SURVIVE THIS DAY?

"UATU ONCE ASKED ME IF I'D DO ANYTHING TO KNOW ALL OF MANKIND--TO KNOW WHAT IT WAS TO BE HUMAN.

"LIKE A FOOL, I SAID 'ANYTHING.'

"AND SO HERE I AM ON THE MOON WITH A FRONT ROW SEAT FOR THE END OF THE WORLD. I CAN ONLY ASSUME THAT BLACK BOLT'S CRY WAS A CALL TO GALACTUS.

"REED RICHARDS SAVED GALACTUS' LIFE YEARS AGO. IS THIS SOME SORT OF COSMIC PAYBACK?"



"I IMAGINE THAT GALACTUS SHOULD FIND THE CELESTIALS' POWER--AS INDIVIDUALS--WANTING."

"BUT IS THEIR SUM HIS EQUAL? HIS BETTER?"

"IF THERE IS A BALANCE, AN ORDER TO ALL MATTER... COULD THIS CONFRONTATION UPSET THAT BALANCE SHOULD THERE BE CASUALTIES ON EITHER SIDE?"



"WHAT HAVOC MIGHT SUCH A BATTLE WREAK ON THE REST OF THE COSMOS?"

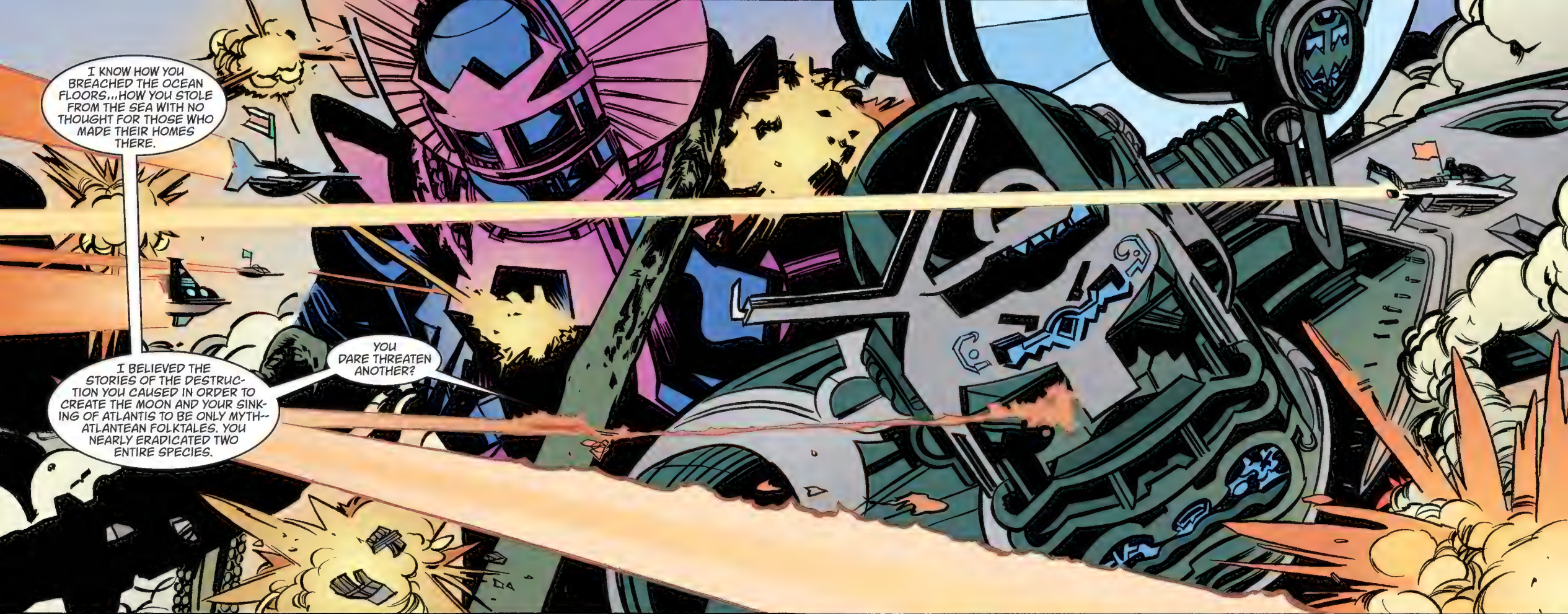
"YOU SHOULD NOT HAVE COME BACK HERE."



"THERE ARE SOME AMONG MY PEOPLE WHO REMEMBER YOU."

"YOU BROUGHT DEATH TO THE DINOSAURS AND THE ATLANTEANS ALIKE, AND WE WILL NOT FORGIVE YOU."





I KNOW HOW YOU BREACHED THE OCEAN FLOORS...HOW YOU STOLE FROM THE SEA WITH NO THOUGHT FOR THOSE WHO MADE THEIR HOMES THERE.

I BELIEVED THE STORIES OF THE DESTRUCTION YOU CAUSED IN ORDER TO CREATE THE MOON AND YOUR SINKING OF ATLANTIS TO BE ONLY MYTH-ATLANTIAN FOLKTALES. YOU NEARLY ERADICATED TWO ENTIRE SPECIES.

YOU DARE THREATEN ANOTHER?



"I HAVE KNOWN VENGEANCE AND MANIPULATION ALL MY LIFE. MY ANCESTORS CRY OUT FOR A RECKONING FROM THE DEPTHS.

"THE SEA WILL BE YOUR GRAVE."



IMPERIUS REX!



"SHOULD GALACTUS FALL, WHAT HOPE HAVE WE OF DEFEATING THE CELESTIALS?"

"SHOULD THE CELESTIALS FALL, WHAT HOPE HAS HUMANITY OF DEFEATING GALACTUS NOW THAT UATU HAS NO REASON TO HELP US?"

"THIS IS THE REASON I BELIEVE THAT EVEN IF WE SURVIVE THIS STRUGGLE AGAINST JOHN JAMESON HERE ON THE MOON, EARTH WILL NOT SURVIVE ITS OWN BATTLE."



"THESE, THEN, MAY BE THE LAST MOMENTS TO BE RECORDED IN EARTH'S HISTORY."



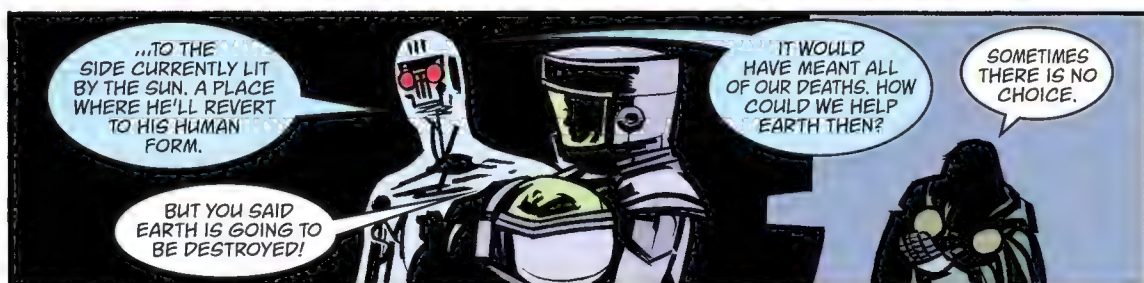
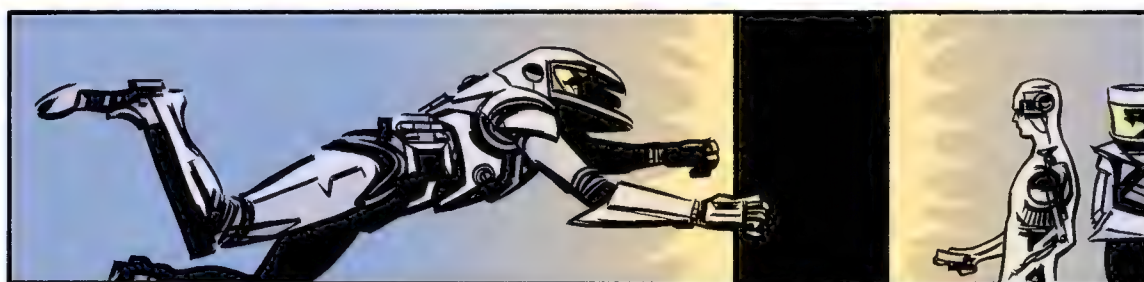
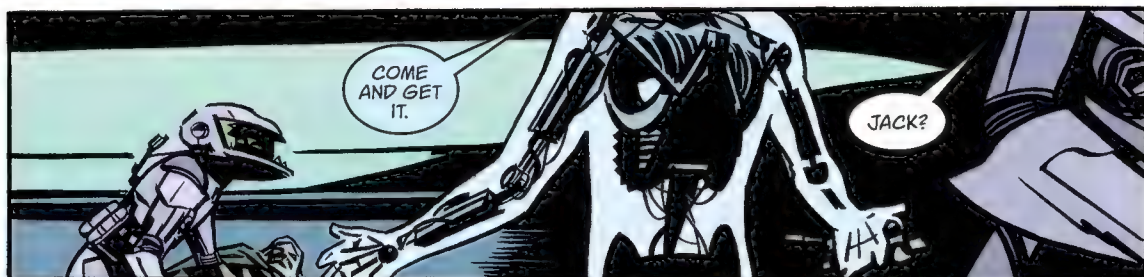
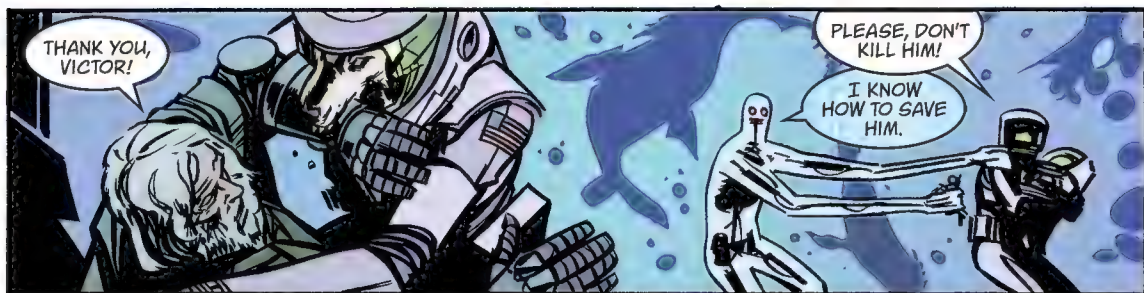
"I THINK THAT'S WHY KING NAMOR BATTLES ON AGAINST THE CELESTIALS. HE KNOWS HE WILL DIE."

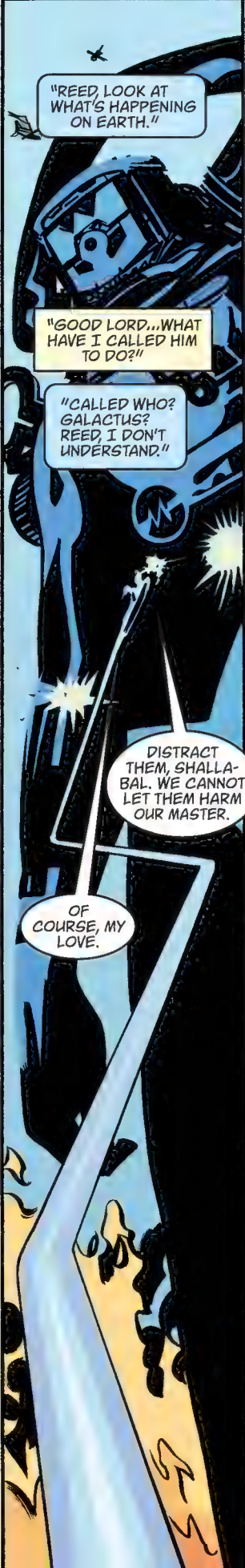
"HE KNOWS HE WILL FAIL."

"BUT HIS DEATH IS INCONSEQUENTIAL. WHAT MATTERS IS HOW HE SPENDS THESE LAST MOMENTS."

"MY FATHER WAS RIGHT... REGARDLESS OF THE EVIDENCE UATU PROVIDED TO THE CONTRARY."







"REED, LOOK AT
WHAT'S HAPPENING
ON EARTH."

"GOOD LORD...WHAT
HAVE I CALLED HIM
TO DO?"

"CALLED WHO?
GALACTUS?
REED, I DON'T
UNDERSTAND."

DISTRACT
THEM, SHALLA-
BAL. WE CANNOT
LET THEM HARM
OUR MASTER.

OF
COURSE, MY
LOVE.



I'D DO
ANYTHING
FOR THE ONE
WHO BROUGHT
US BACK TO-
GETHER.



SHALLA-BAL!



NOOOOOOOO!



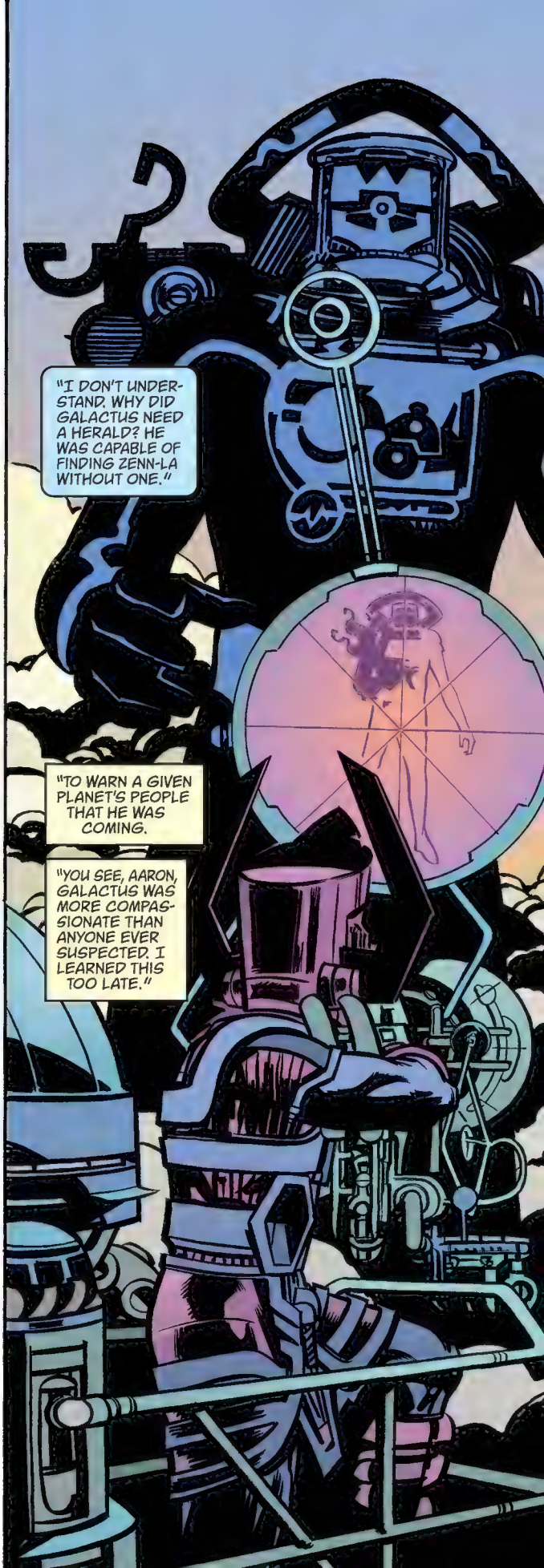
"REED...YOU'RE
CRYING. WHO
WAS SHALLA-
BAL?"

"NORRIN RADD'S
REASON FOR
LIVING. HIS
REASON FOR
BECOMING A
HERO."

"THE REASON
NORRIN RADD
BECAME THE
SILVER SURFER
WAS TO KEEP
GALACTUS FROM
CONSUMING HIS
HOMEWORLD,
ZENN-LA.

"OF COURSE,
HE HAD NO
KNOWLEDGE OF
THE GROWING
CELESTIAL
WITHIN ZENN-LA.
HE DID IT FOR
HIS PEOPLE. HE
DID IT FOR HER.

"HE BECAME
GALACTUS'
HERALD. HE
BECAME A
HARBINGER
OF DEATH SO
THAT SHE
MIGHT LIVE."



"I DON'T UNDER-
STAND. WHY DID
GALACTUS NEED
A HERALD? HE
WAS CAPABLE OF
FINDING ZENN-LA
WITHOUT ONE."

"TO WARN A GIVEN
PLANET'S PEOPLE
THAT HE WAS
COMING.

"YOU SEE, AARON,
GALACTUS WAS
MORE COMPAS-
SIONATE THAN
ANYONE EVER
SUSPECTED. I
LEARNED THIS
TOO LATE."

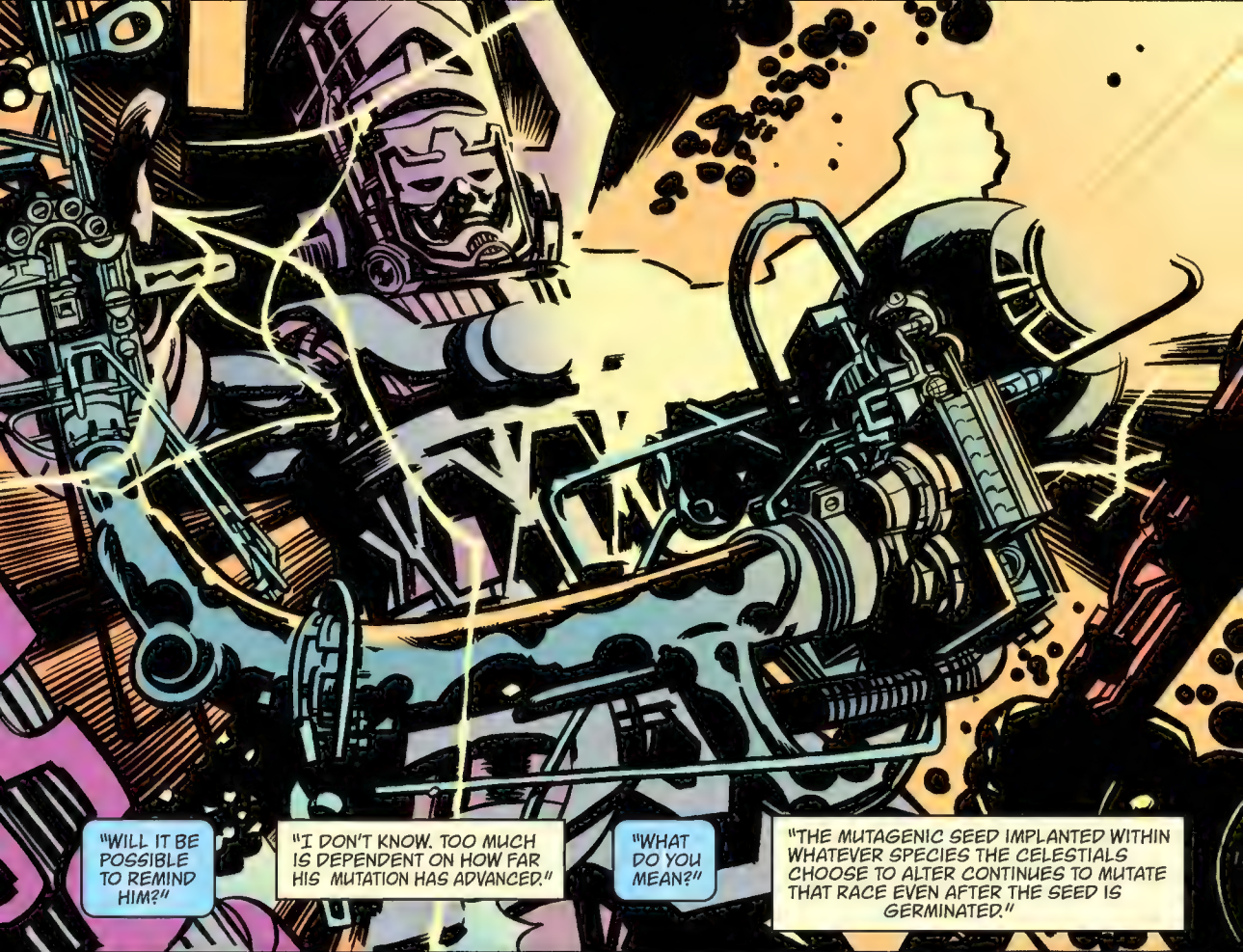
"TOO LATE?
TOO LATE FOR
WHAT?"

"TOO LATE TO HALT THE PROCESS
OF PARTICLE ACCELERATION. I
TRANSFORMED HIS LIFE-ENERGIES
INTO SOMETHING LIFELESS. I
TURNED HIM INTO A STAR."

"I DON'T UNDER-
STAND, RICHARDS.
IF GALACTUS IS
A STAR...WHO IS
THIS?"

"I'M NOT CERTAIN IF EVEN HE
REMEMBERS WHO HE WAS. IF
HE DOESN'T, IT DOESN'T MATTER
WHETHER HE WINS OR NOT.
EARTH WILL BE DESTROYED."





"WILL IT BE POSSIBLE TO REMIND HIM?"

"I DON'T KNOW. TOO MUCH IS DEPENDENT ON HOW FAR HIS MUTATION HAS ADVANCED."

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN?"

"THE MUTAGENIC SEED IMPLANTED WITHIN WHATEVER SPECIES THE CELESTIALS CHOOSE TO ALTER CONTINUES TO MUTATE THAT RACE EVEN AFTER THE SEED IS GERMINATED."



"HOW DO YOU KNOW THIS?"

"WATU CONFIRMED THAT MANKIND, GIVEN THE TIME TO FURTHER EVOLVE, WOULD HAVE BECOME A RACE OF SHAPE-SHIFTERS. EVERYONE WOULD HAVE DEVELOPED THE SAME ABILITIES. EVERYONE WOULD HAVE HAD THE SAME POWERS."



"THE WATCHER ALSO SAID THAT THERE WAS AN EVOLUTIONARY STEP AFTER THIS, A FINAL FAILSAFE, I BELIEVE, TO KEEP ANY MUTATED RACE FROM CHALLENGING THE CELESTIALS."

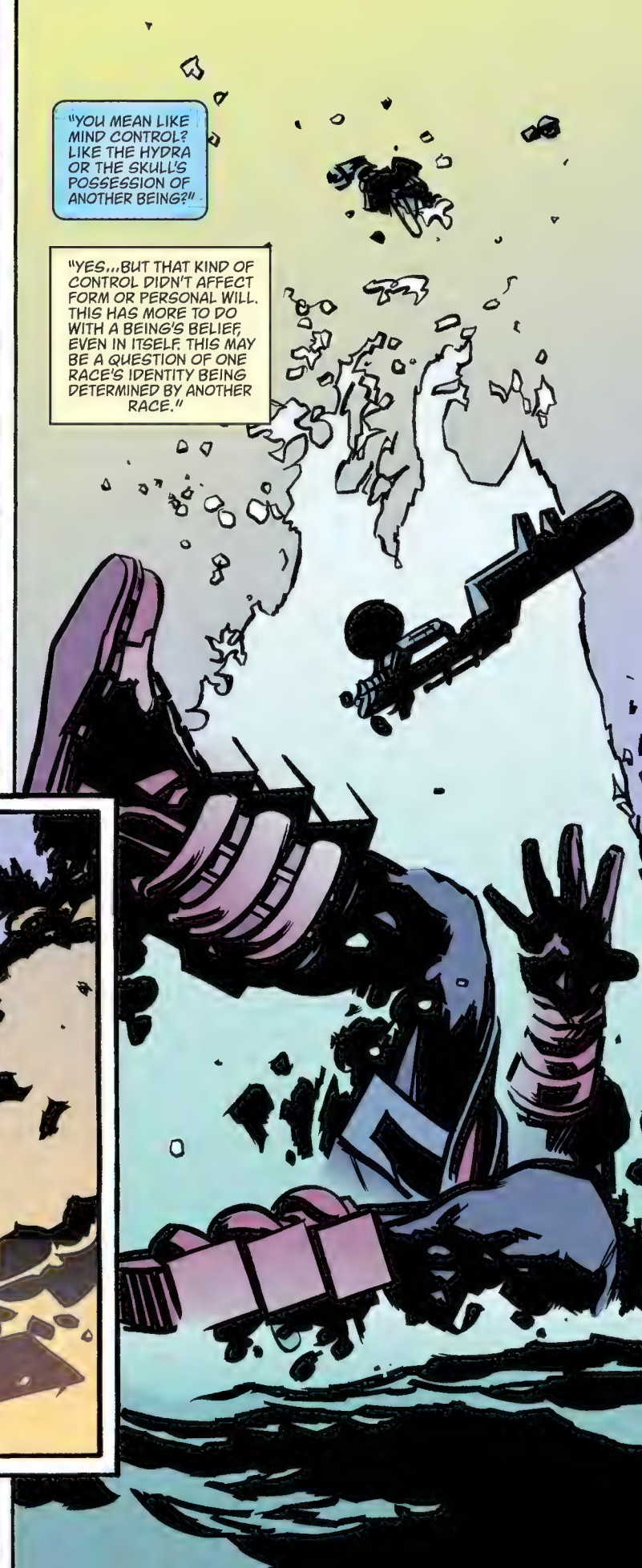
"WHAT IS THAT
FAILSAFE?"

"I DON'T KNOW. WATU
TOLD ME TO ASK YOU."



"YOU MEAN LIKE
MIND CONTROL?
LIKE THE HYDRA
OR THE SKULL'S
POSSESSION OF
ANOTHER BEING?"

"YES...BUT THAT KIND OF
CONTROL DIDN'T AFFECT
FORM OR PERSONAL WILL.
THIS HAS MORE TO DO
WITH A BEING'S BELIEF,
EVEN IN ITSELF. THIS MAY
BE A QUESTION OF ONE
RACE'S IDENTITY BEING
DETERMINED BY ANOTHER
RACE."

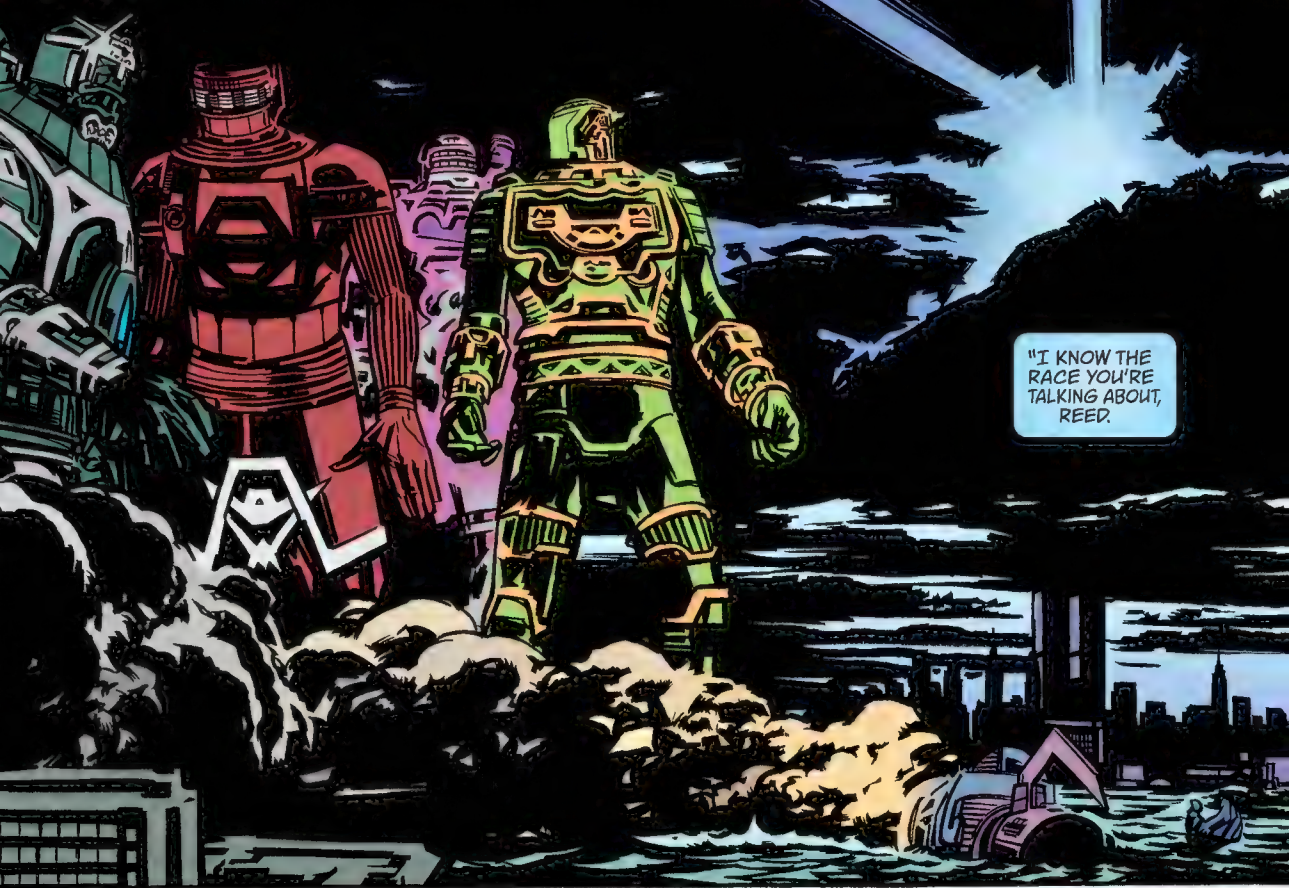


"BUT HOW
WOULD I
KNOW?"

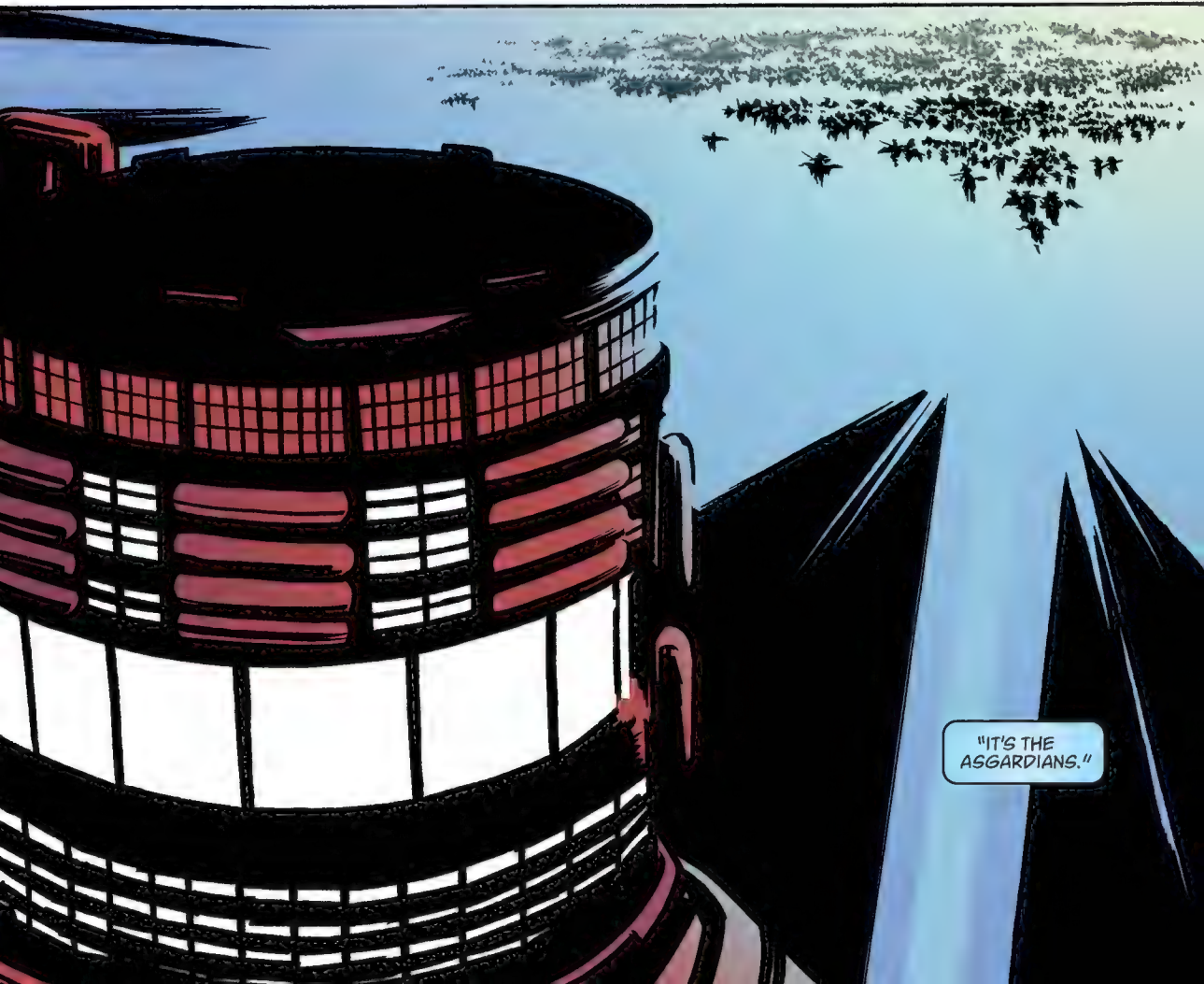
"IF THERE IS A MUTATION
BEYOND THE ABILITY TO
TAKE ON ANY SHAPE, I
BELIEVE IT MUST BE RE-
LATED TO THE SPIRIT OR
THE WILL...AN INTERNAL
METAPHYSICAL MUTATION
AS OPPOSED TO MERELY
A BIOLOGICAL ONE."

"IN LIGHT OF ALL
YOU'VE SEEN, IS
THERE A RACE
WHOSE VERY EXIS-
TENCE OR FORM IS
DEPENDENT UPON
ANOTHER BEING'S
WILL?"

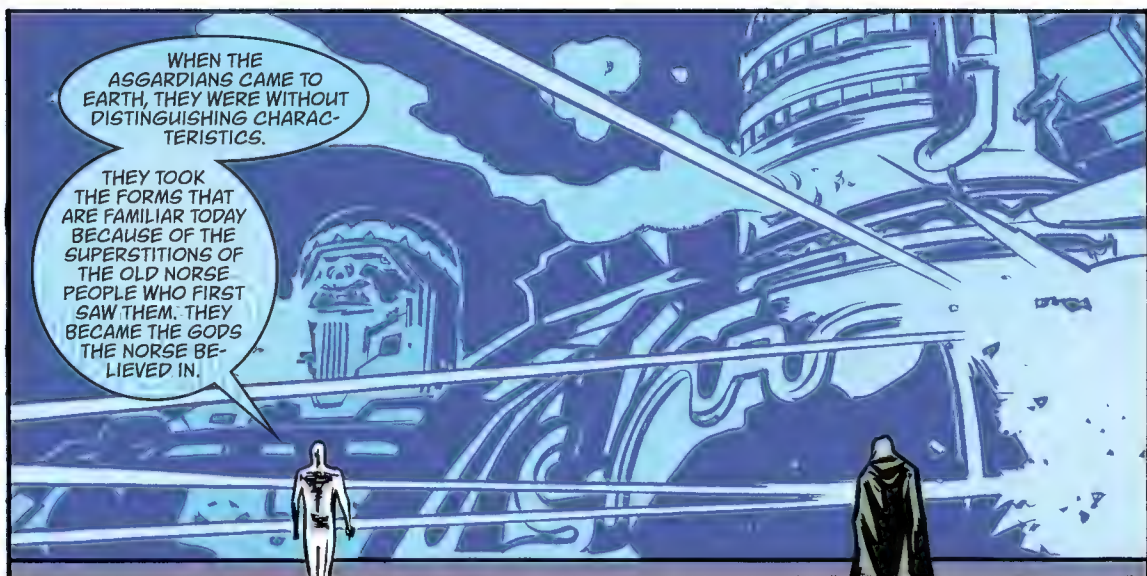




"I KNOW THE
RACE YOU'RE
TALKING ABOUT,
REED."



"IT'S THE
ASGARDIANS."



WHEN THE
ASGARDIANS CAME TO
EARTH, THEY WERE WITHOUT
DISTINGUISHING CHARAC-
TERISTICS.

THEY TOOK
THE FORMS THAT
ARE FAMILIAR TODAY
BECAUSE OF THE
SUPERSTITIONS OF
THE OLD NORSE
PEOPLE WHO FIRST
SAW THEM. THEY
BECAME THE GODS
THE NORSE BE-
LIEVED IN.



THEN ANY
SUGGESTION THAT
GALACTUS IS NOT WHAT
HE APPEARS TO BE MIGHT
IMPERIL NOT ONLY EARTH, BUT
ALL THE OTHER WORLDS
MANIPULATED BY THE
CELESTIALS.



THIS IS
NOT GALACTUS,
IS IT?

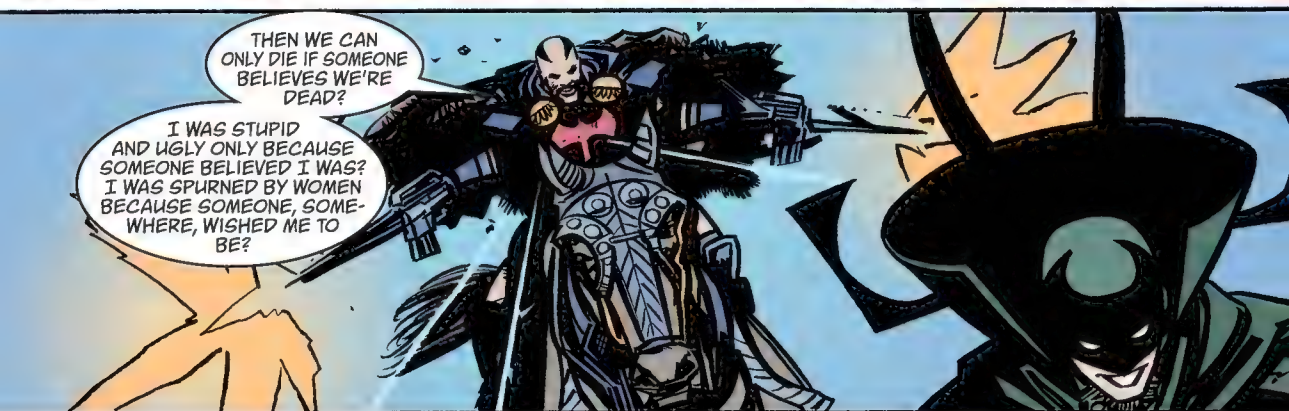
I'M NOT SURE,
WATH. HE CAN CHANGE
SIZE. WE'VE SEEN THAT TODAY.
PERHAPS HIS MUTATION HAS
ALREADY ADVANCED TO THE
SAME DEGREE AS THAT OF
THE ASGARDIANS.

PERHAPS
HE IS GALACTUS
AS LONG AS NO
ONE TELLS HIM
HE ISN'T.



YOU SPOKE TRUTH, LOKI. INDEED, THERE IS NO REASON FOR WE WHO WERE CONSIDERED DEAD TO TOIL UNDER HELA'S BOSOM ANOTHER DAY.

JUST AS THERE'S NO REASON TO TALK LIKE AN IDIOT, BALDAR. OR EVEN TO HAVE TO CALL YOU BALDAR FOR THAT MATTER.



THEN WE CAN ONLY DIE IF SOMEONE BELIEVES WE'RE DEAD?

I WAS STUPID AND UGLY ONLY BECAUSE SOMEONE BELIEVED I WAS? I WAS SPURNED BY WOMEN BECAUSE SOMEONE, SOMEWHERE, WISHED ME TO BE?



"CAN THEY STOP THE CELESTIALS?"

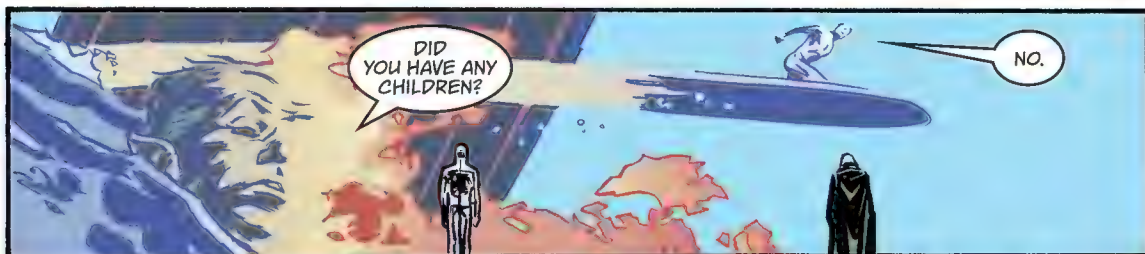
"I DON'T KNOW. DO THEY BELIEVE THEMSELVES THE EQUALS OF THE CELESTIALS? OR CAN THE CELESTIALS CONVINCE THESE ASGARDIANS THEY ARE DEAD?"

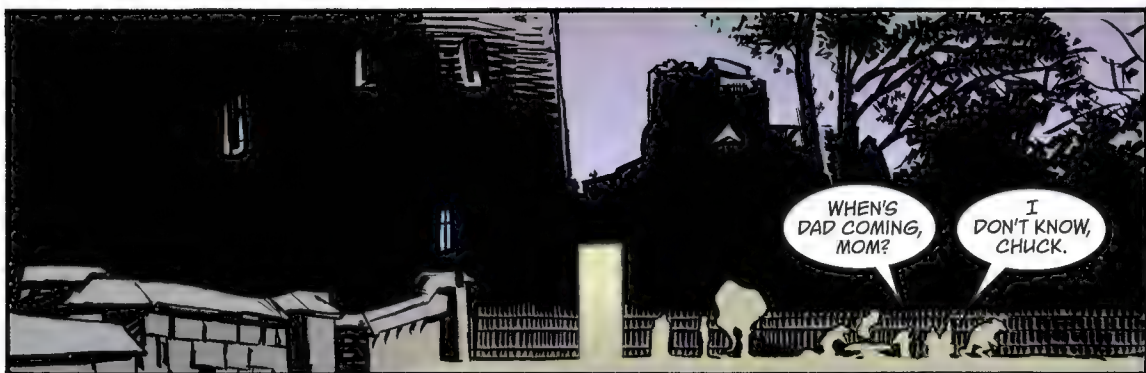


"YOU'RE RIGHT, REED. THIS WAS THE CELESTIAL FAILSAFE."

NOOOO! YOU'RE ALIVE! LISTEN TO ME!!!

YOU ARE ALIVE! WE'VE BEEN THROUGH THIS.





WHEN'S
DAD COMING,
MOM?

I
DON'T KNOW,
CHUCK.



REED?

HE'S DEAD,
ISN'T HE? MY BOLT
IS DEAD.



THERE'S
NOTHING LEFT
FOR US HERE.
KARNAK, GET THE
OTHERS. IT'S
TIME TO
LEAVE.

BEFORE
YOU GO, I
THOUGHT YOU'D
WANT TO SEE
YOUR SON.

HE'S
ALIVE?

HE'S BEEN
IN KING BRITAIN'S
CARE.

LET ME
TAKE YOU TO
HIM.



BRIAN.

IT'S YOU.



WHERE IS
MY SON?



I'VE TRIED
TO RAISE HIM TO BE
A KING.

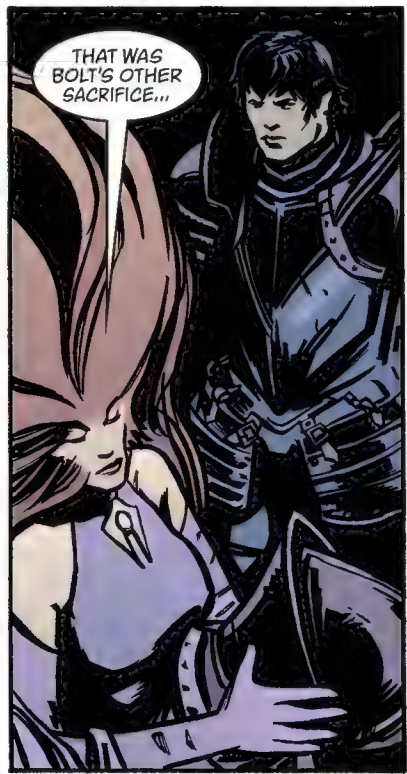
I NEVER
THOUGHT THE
ROYAL FAMILY WOULD
RETURN. WHEN BLACK
BOLT GAVE ME THE
CHILD AND SWORE ME
TO SILENCE, I THOUGHT
HE MIGHT ONE DAY
BE MY OWN
HEIR.

I NEVER
UNDERSTOOD HOW HE
COULD LEAVE HIS SON
BEHIND.



I SUPPOSE
YOU CANNOT, KING
BRITAIN.

BUT MY SON...
BLACK BOLT'S SON
HAD TO BE LEFT HERE
ON EARTH BECAUSE
INHUMANITY WOULD ONE
DAY REQUIRE AN HEIR.
EVEN I NEVER KNEW
WHAT BLACK BOLT
WAS PLANNING.

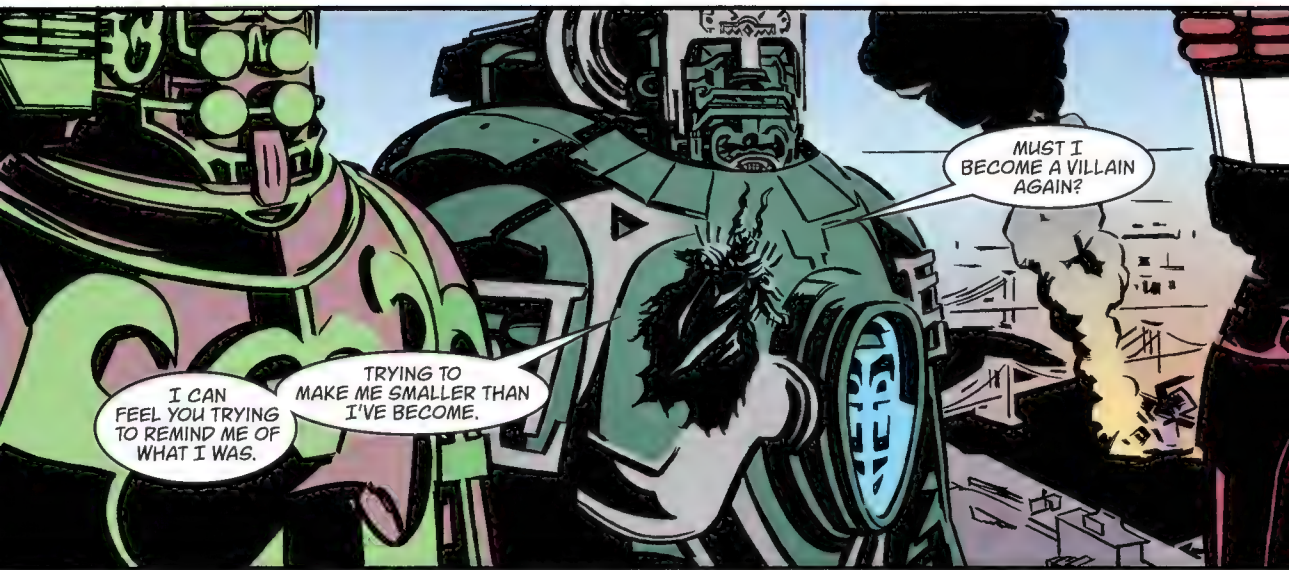


THAT WAS
BOLT'S OTHER
SACRIFICE...



...TO GIVE
UP OUR CHILD
FOR THE SAKE OF
EVERYONE ON
EARTH-TO LEAVE
MANKIND HIS SON
TO LEAD IT INTO
ITS NEW AGE.

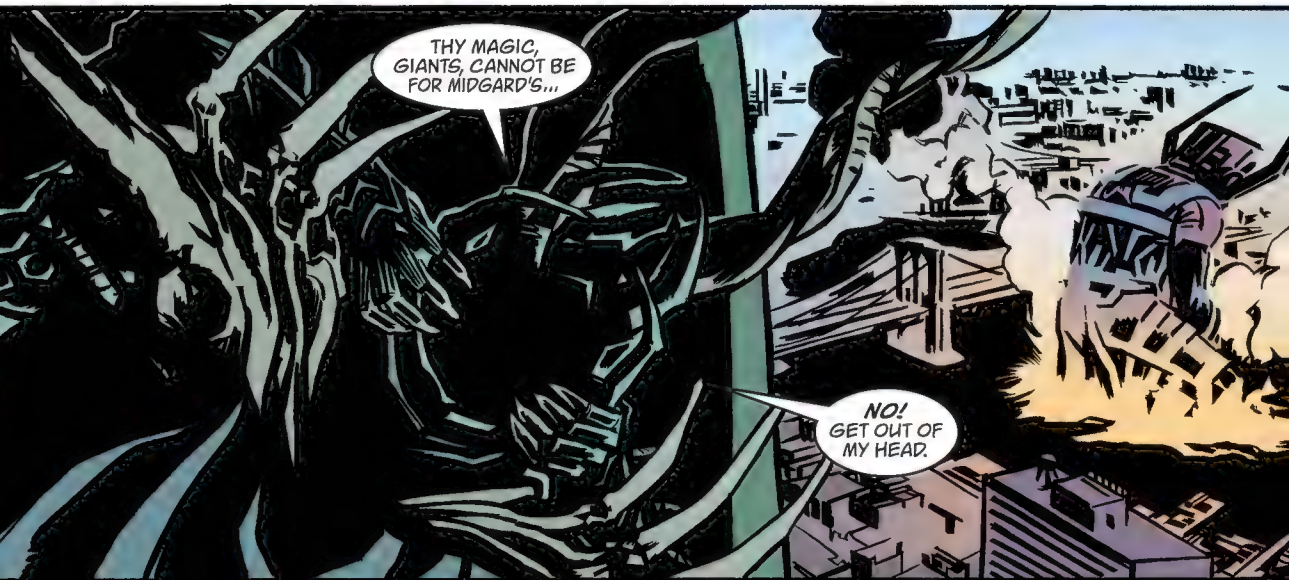
DO YOU
HAVE ANY IDEA
HOW DIFFICULT IT
WAS TO BE MARRIED
TO A PERFECT
MAN?



MUST I
BECOME A VILLAIN
AGAIN?

I CAN
FEEL YOU TRYING
TO REMIND ME OF
WHAT I WAS.

TRYING TO
MAKE ME SMALLER THAN
I'VE BECOME.



THY MAGIC,
GIANTS, CANNOT BE
FOR MIDGARD'S...

NO!
GET OUT OF
MY HEAD.



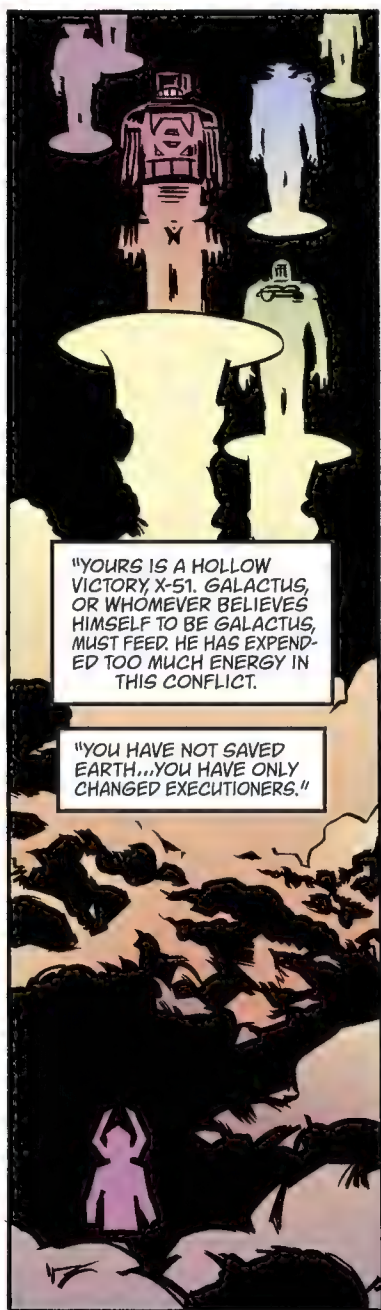
THE CELESTIALS
CREATED THE ETERNALS
AND THE DEVIANTS AND EARTH'S
SUPER HERO COMMUNITY AS
ANTIBODIES TO PROTECT
THE EARTH, UATH.

WE'RE
DEFENDING OUR-
SELVES FROM FOREIGN
INVASION. YOUR PLAN...
THEIR PLAN...WORKED
TOO WELL.



"YOU'VE
LOST, UATU."

"I ONLY WISH
YOU STILL HAD
EYES TO SEE IT
FOR YOURSELF."



"YOURS IS A HOLLOW
VICTORY, X-51. GALACTUS,
OR WHOMEVER BELIEVES
HIMSELF TO BE GALACTUS,
MUST FEED. HE HAS EXPEN-
DED TOO MUCH ENERGY IN
THIS CONFLICT."

"YOU HAVE NOT SAVED
EARTH...YOU HAVE ONLY
CHANGED EXECUTIONERS."



"BUT HIS EQUIPMENT WAS
DESTROYED IN THE BATTLE
WITH THE CELESTIALS, UATU."

"IT IS NO MATTER, X-51. HE
WILL RETURN ONCE IT IS
REPAIRED. UNTIL THEN, THE
CELESTIAL WITHIN YOUR
PLANET'S CRUST STILL LIVES.
THERE ARE OTHERS WHO
CAN..."



GALACTUS!



I KNOW I
CALLED YOU. I KNOW
THE NAME YOU HEARD
MUST HAVE CONFUSED
YOU.

PERHAPS
IF I COULD SEE
YOUR FACE AGAIN,
IT WOULD BE EASIER
FOR US TO
COMMUNICATE.



"IT'S...IT'S FRANKLIN
RICHARDS. REED'S SON."

"WHAT?!?"

"IF THE CELESTIALS HAD
GUESSED THAT THIS WAS
NOT GALACTUS, THEY MIGHT
HAVE DEFEATED HIM THE
SAME WAY THEY DID THE
ASSGARDIANS."



"NO MATTER. SHOULD RICHARDS CONVINCE THIS GALACTUS THAT HE IS INDEED HIS SON, THE CELESTIAL WILL STILL BE BORN AND THERE WILL BE NO GALACTUS TO STOP THE CELESTIALS AGAIN.

"AND SHOULD FRANKLIN RICHARDS REMAIN UNMOVED, EARTH IS DOOMED WHEN HE CONSUMES THE CELESTIAL."

"YOU'RE A FOOL, UATU. DON'T YOU SEE WHAT'S HAPPENING?"

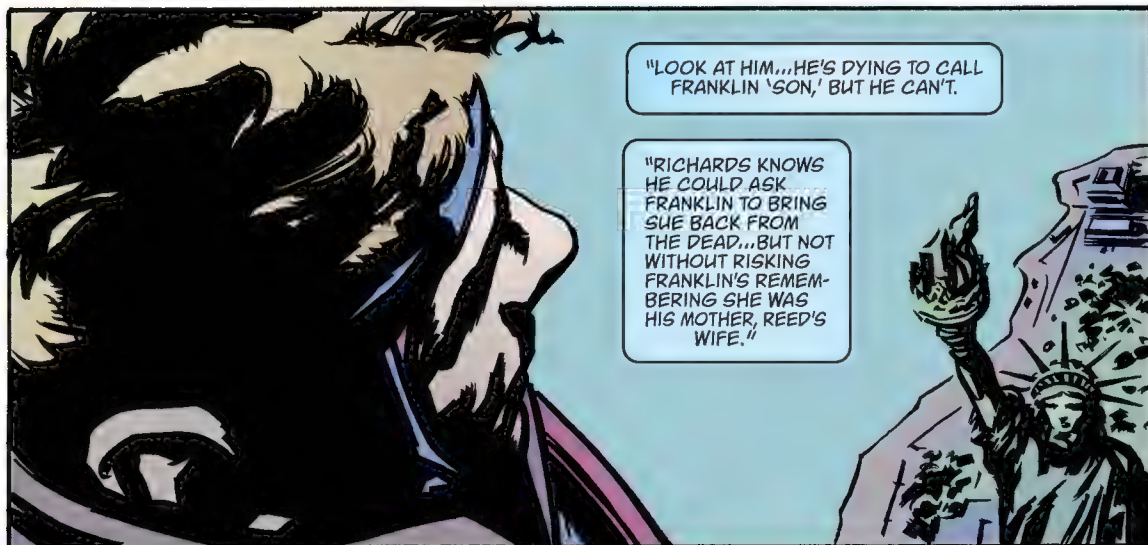
I KNOW YOU WANT TO CONSUME THE CELESTIAL WITHIN THE EARTH, MIGHTY GALACTUS.



BUT I ASK YOU NOT TO DESTROY EARTH. IF YOU REMEMBER, I SAVED YOUR LIFE LONG AGO AND FACED THE WRATH OF MANY WORLDS AS A RESULT.

YOU WOULDN'T BE HERE IF IT WEREN'T FOR ME. YOU COULDN'T FULFILL YOUR PURPOSE IF I HADN'T SAVED YOU LONG AGO.

"THIS IS BREAKING REED'S HEART. HE HAS TO DENY FRANKLIN FOR THE SAKE OF EVERYONE IN THE UNIVERSE.



"LOOK AT HIM...HE'S DYING TO CALL FRANKLIN 'SON,' BUT HE CAN'T.

"RICHARDS KNOWS HE COULD ASK FRANKLIN TO BRING SHE BACK FROM THE DEAD...BUT NOT WITHOUT RISKING FRANKLIN'S REMEMBERING SHE WAS HIS MOTHER, REED'S WIFE."



I HAVE HEARD THAT YOU ARE MUCH MORE COMPASSIONATE THAN YOU WERE IN THE PAST. I'VE HEARD THAT YOU'VE ACTUALLY TRANSPORTED WHOLE POPULATIONS TO SAFE WORLDS.

YOU ARE INDEED MIGHTY AND GREAT OF HEART, GALACTUS.

"THAT'S NOT TRUE. GALACTUS WOULD NEVER..."

"REED'S MAKING IT TRUE BY SUGGESTING TO GALACTUS THAT THIS IS WHAT'S BELIEVED ABOUT HIM."



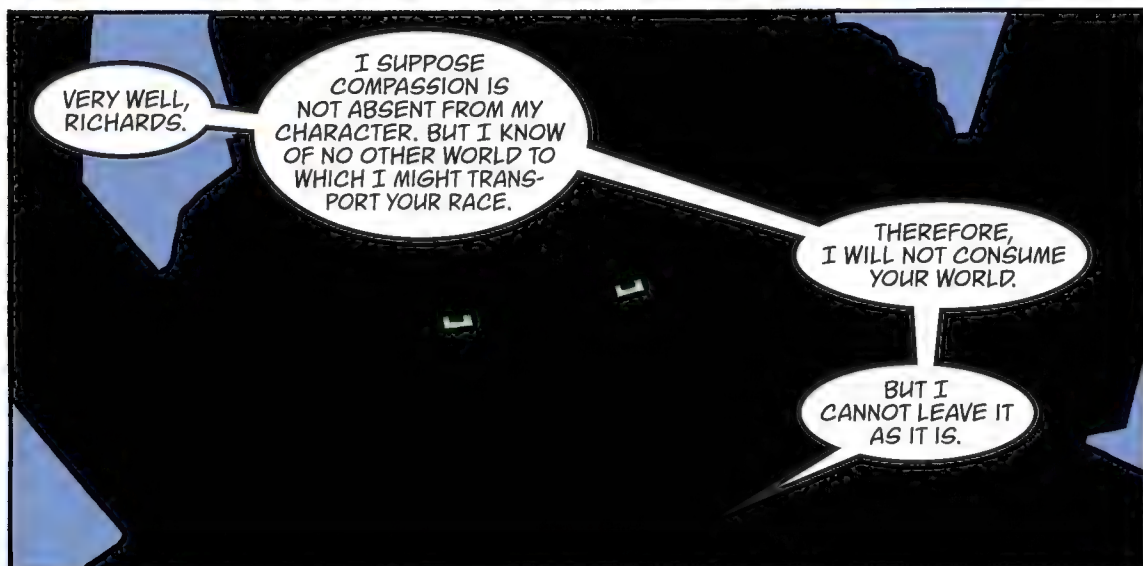
THE VOICE I HEARD CALL OUT TO ME CALLED ME "FRANKLIN."

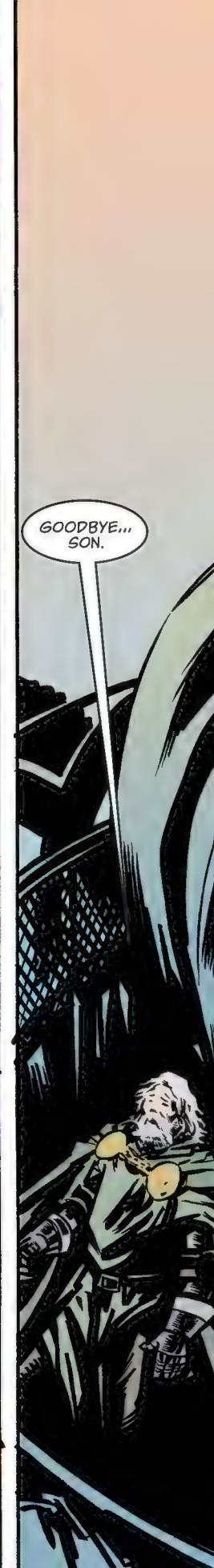


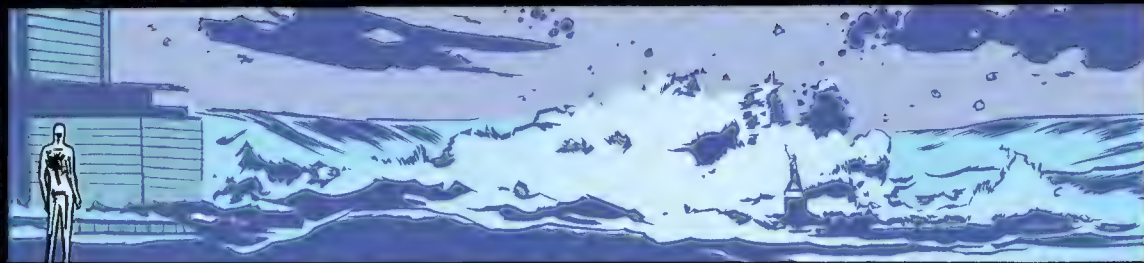
I...IT WAS... ONLY TO GET YOUR ATTENTION. WHY WOULD I CALL YOU BY MY SON'S NAME?

I...LOVE... MY SON.

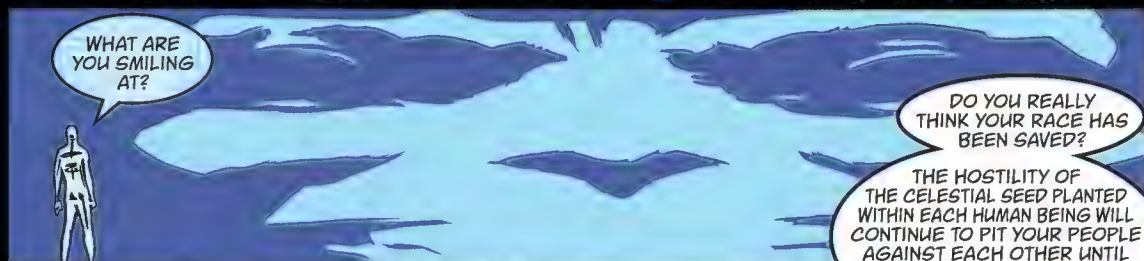
I'D DO... ALMOST ANYTHING FOR HIM.







WHAT ARE YOU SMILING AT?



DO YOU REALLY THINK YOUR RACE HAS BEEN SAVED?

THE HOSTILITY OF THE CELESTIAL SEED PLANTED WITHIN EACH HUMAN BEING WILL CONTINUE TO PIT YOUR PEOPLE AGAINST EACH OTHER UNTIL YOUR RACE DESTROYS ITSELF OR OBLITERATES THE EARTH.



THE SKULL IS DEAD. THEREFORE, YOUR PEOPLE HAVE NO HOPE OF UNIFORMITY.

THIS IS NOT A VICTORY.

YOU DON'T KNOW WHEN TO QUIT, DO YOU?

REED HAS A WAY TO CAUSE THE SEEDS WITHIN MANKIND TO RETREAT INTO DORMANCY AGAIN.

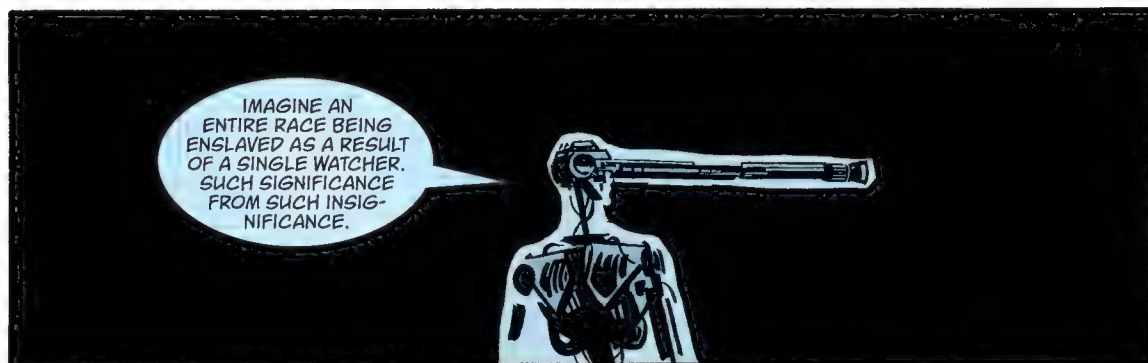
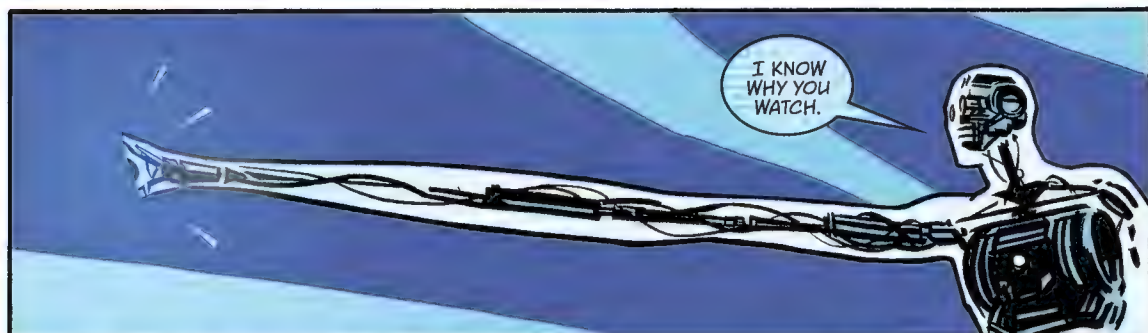
HE JUST NEEDS TO FIGURE OUT A WAY TO NEUTRALIZE THE TERRIGEN MISTS THAT CAUSE THE MUTATIONS.



OF COURSE.



"X-51? COME BACK, X-51. YOU CAN'T LEAVE ME HERE. YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'VE DONE TO ME."



YOU WERE
RIGHT, UATU. SOMETIMES
ONE MAN DOES DETERMINE
THE DESTINY OF AN
ENTIRE PEOPLE.



I KNOW THERE WAS
A DAY MILLIONS OF YEARS AGO
WHEN ONE OF YOUR PEOPLE COULD HAVE
STOPPED THE BIRTH OF GALACTUS, THE BEING
WHO WOULD COME TO BALANCE THE NUMBER
OF CELESTIALS IN THE COSMOS. THAT
WATCHER DID NOTHING. NON-INTER-
FERENCE IS YOUR CREED.

FROM THAT MOMENT
FORWARD, THE CELESTIALS FORCED
YOUR RACE TO WATCH WORLD AFTER WORLD
COME TO TEEM WITH LIFE AND THEN DIE. ALL
SO THAT OTHER CELESTIALS MIGHT LIVE. YOU
WARNED THEM OF GALACTUS' COMING. YOU
GAVE RICHARDS A WAY TO KILL GALACTUS
WITH THE ULTIMATE NULLIFIER...AND
I KNOW WHY.

THAT IS YOUR
INDIVIDUAL PENANCE
FOR YOUR RACE'S NON-
INTERFERENCE.

YOU WATCH.
ALL OF YOU WATCH YOUR
DIFFERENT PLANETS. YOU WATCH
AND WAIT FOR PEOPLE TO DIE
SO THAT YOU CAN BE
FREE.

BUT FOR
WHAT? TO DO NOTHING
AGAIN?

TO NOT
INTERFERE FROM THAT
DAY FORWARD?

THERE'S SO MUCH
GOOD YOU COULD HAVE DONE,
UATU. THERE'S SO MUCH YOU KNOW,
SO MUCH YOU COULD REMIND
PEOPLE OF.

YOU SAID
THERE'S NO EVIL,
UATU. YOU SAID
THERE'S NO DEVIL.
THERE IS. YOU'RE
IT. YOU'RE
HIM.

YOU
COULD HAVE
HELPED US. YOU
COULD HAVE DONE
SUCH AMAZING
THINGS. SUCH
GLORIOUS
THINGS.

BUT
YOU ONLY
THOUGHT
OF YOUR-
SELF.



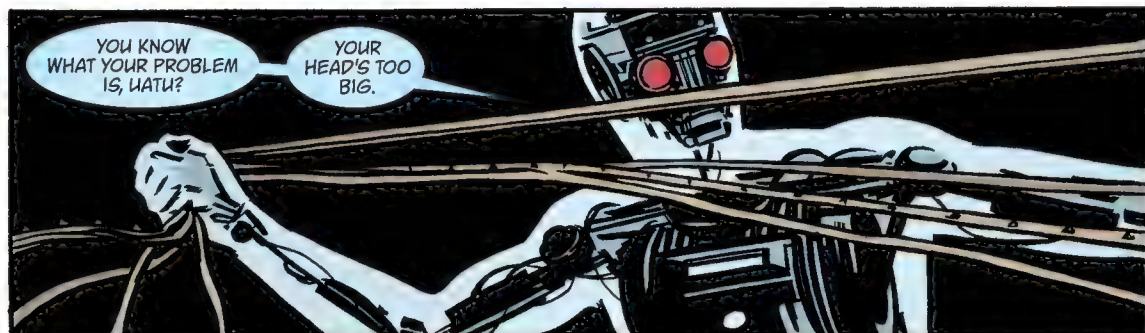


TO DO
NOTHING IN THE
FACE OF NEED,
UATH, THAT'S
EVIL.



HOW...DARE
YOU COME HERE
AND LOOK AT ME
LIKE THIS.

YOU HAVE
NO RIGHT TO SPEAK
TO ME SO. YOU DON'T
KNOW WHO YOU'RE
SPEAKING TO. YOU
CAN NOT...



YOU KNOW
WHAT YOUR PROBLEM
IS, HATU?

YOUR
HEAD'S TOO
BIG.



WHAT HAVE
YOU DONE? I CAN'T
EVEN HEAR ANYTHING
ON EARTH.

YOU'VE
CUT ME OFF
COMPLETELY.

X-51. IT'S
INHUMAN, X-51.
YOU CAN'T DO
THIS TO ME.

X-51?

X-51?



X-51?

X-51...
PLEASE.



AARON?



I HAD TO DO IT, REED. HE DOESN'T HAVE THE RIGHT TO WATCH. HE TOOK MY FACE.

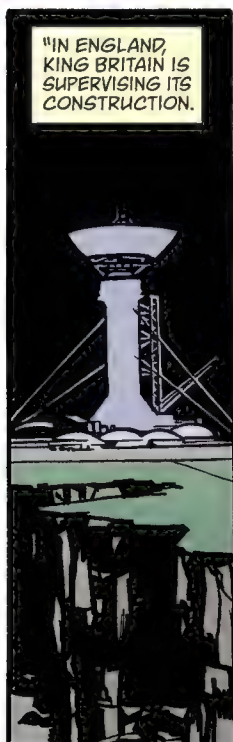


HE CAN'T TAKE AWAY WHO YOU ARE ON THE INSIDE, AARON.



THIS TORCH IS REALLY GOING TO BURN THE TERRIGEN MISTS OUT OF THE AIR?

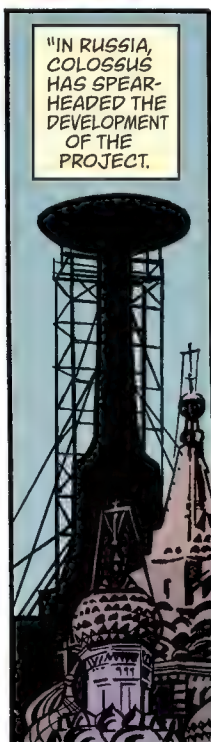
NOT JUST THIS ONE. GIANT TORCHES ARE BEING BUILT ALL OVER THE WORLD INTO THE CRATERS LEFT FROM MY VIBRANIUM BEACONS.



"IN ENGLAND, KING BRITAIN IS SUPERVISING ITS CONSTRUCTION.



"IN JAPAN, SUNFIRE IS OVERSEEING THE BUILDING OF THEIR OWN TORCH.



"IN RUSSIA, COLOSSUS HAS SPEAR-HEADED THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROJECT.



"IN ANTARCTICA, KEVIN PLUNDER AND SHANNA HAVE DEVELOPED A SIMILAR DEVICE.



"THE SAME GOES FOR GUARDIAN IN CANADA. MANY OTHER COUNTRIES ARE ALSO..."

"ARE THERE ANY NATIONS UNWILLING TO COMPLY WITH YOUR ATTEMPTS TO REVERSE THE MUTATIONS?"

"A FEW. T'CHALLA IS PROBABLY THE MOST VOCAL IN HIS CONDEMNATION OF MY PLAN."

I WILL NOT HEAR ANOTHER WORD, MCCOY. THE SPIRITS IN THE GREAT BEASTS HAVE BEEN GIVEN VOICE. THEIR GUIDANCE IS ALL THAT I REQUIRE.

THIS WILL SET YOU AGAINST ALL THOSE YOU ONCE CALLED FRIENDS, KING OF THE WAKANDANS.

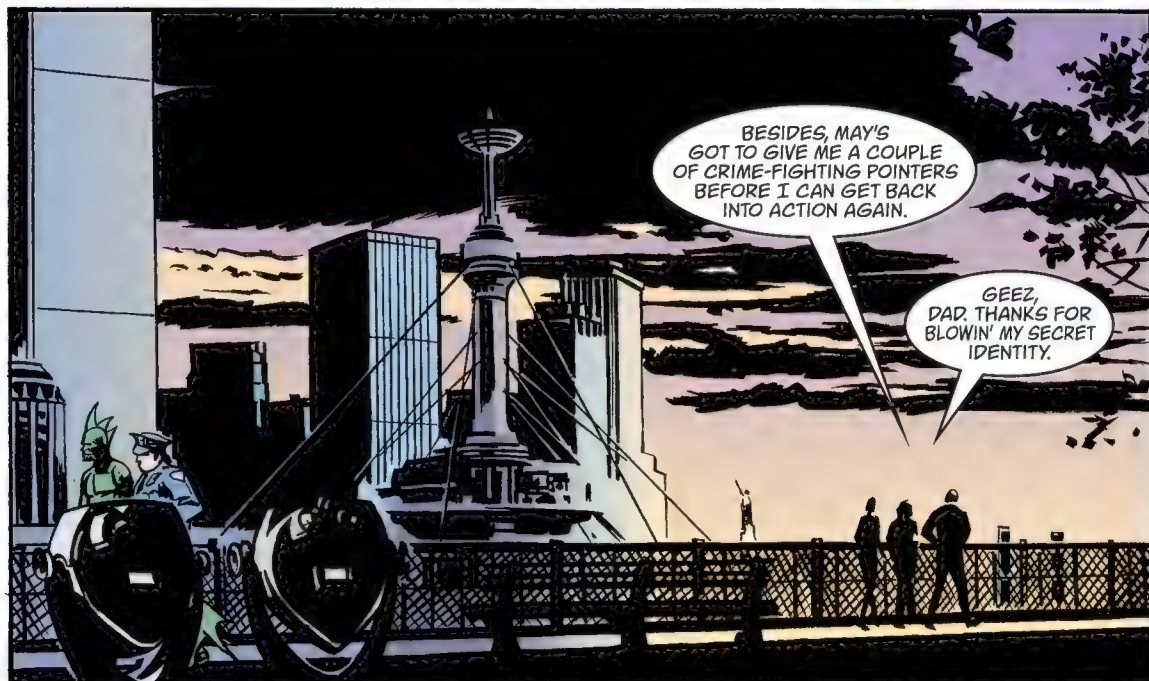
WE ARE CONCERNED FOR YOU.

I AM YOUR SERVANT. MY CONCERN MUST BE FOR YOU AND NOT FOR MYSELF. REED'S PLAN, THOUGH WELL-INTENTIONED, THREATENS TO MUTE YOU ALL. I CANNOT ALLOW THIS.

I CAN DENY A FRIEND, BUT NOT A SPIRIT.

HOW CAN ONE COMMAND THE WIND?

PRESENT COMPANY EXCLUDED, MY QUEEN.

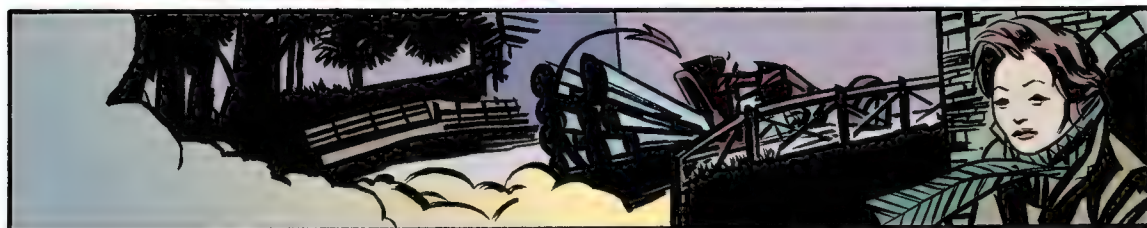
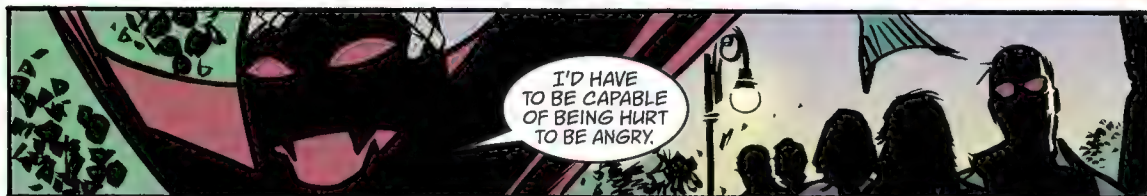


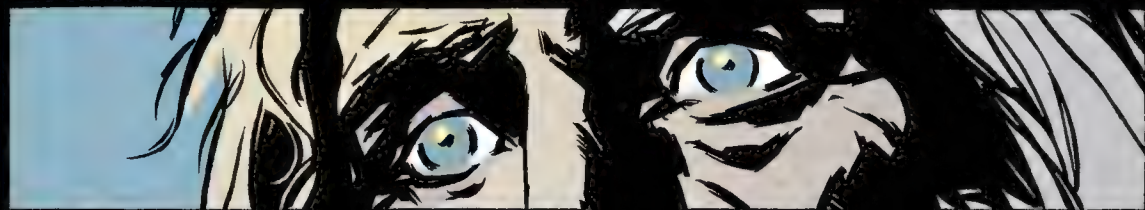


THINK LIKE
A TEAM. FIND HIS
WEAK SPOTS.

I DON'T GET
THIS. WHY ARE YOU
STILL TRAINING? THE
SKULL'S DEAD. EARTH
IS SAVED. LET'S GET
OUT OF CENTRAL PARK
AND GET BACK TO
THE MONEY.

YOU SHOULD
JOIN US, MR. S. "THE
MAN WHOSE LOOKS CAN
KILL." I CAN SEE THE
POSTER NOW...MAYBE
IT SHOULD SQUIRT
ACID.







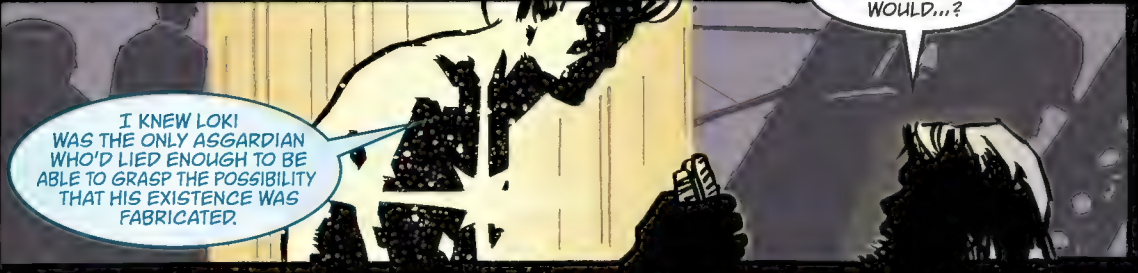


THEN I'M ASLEEP
NOW, IS THAT IT? THAT'S WHY
ONLY YOU AND I ARE MOVING.
THIS IS ALL A DREAM?

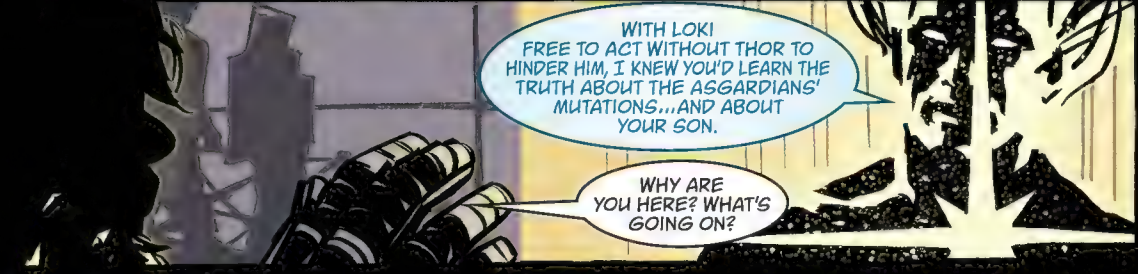
AND
YOU WONDER
WHY I DON'T
SLEEP.

I WAS
ACTUALLY FORCED
TO GO THROUGH BANNER
TO GET THOR OFF
EARTH.

I DON'T
UNDERSTAND. WHY
WOULD...?

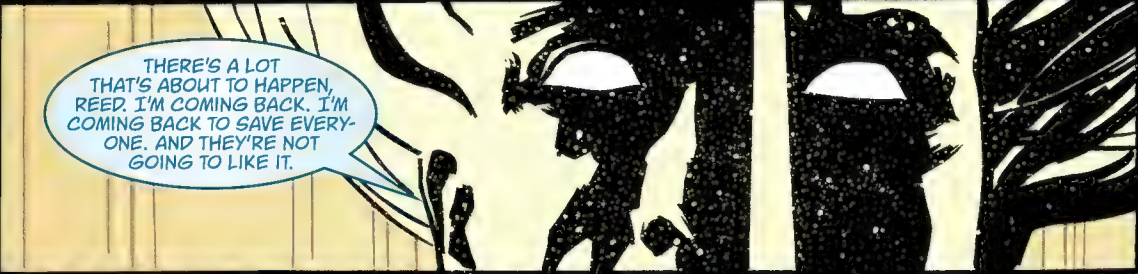


I KNEW LOKI
WAS THE ONLY ASGARDIAN
WHO'D LIED ENOUGH TO BE
ABLE TO GRASP THE POSSIBILITY
THAT HIS EXISTENCE WAS
FABRICATED.



WITH LOKI
FREE TO ACT WITHOUT THOR TO
HINDER HIM, I KNEW YOU'D LEARN THE
TRUTH ABOUT THE ASGARDIANS'
MUTATIONS...AND ABOUT
YOUR SON.

WHY ARE
YOU HERE? WHAT'S
GOING ON?



THERE'S A LOT
THAT'S ABOUT TO HAPPEN,
REED. I'M COMING BACK. I'M
COMING BACK TO SAVE EVERY-
ONE. AND THEY'RE NOT
GOING TO LIKE IT.



LIKE
WHAT? WHAT
ARE YOU TALKING
ABOUT?



YOU'LL SEE, WE'LL
TALK UPON MY RETURN. YOU'RE
GOING TO NEED TO FIND A WAY TO
HIDE ME, THOUGH. MY RETURN
WON'T BE KEPT SECRET
FOR LONG.

BUT...
HOW?



...BUT
HOW?



"HOW WILL
YOU COME
BACK?"



WAIT!
MAR-VELL! COME
BACK!

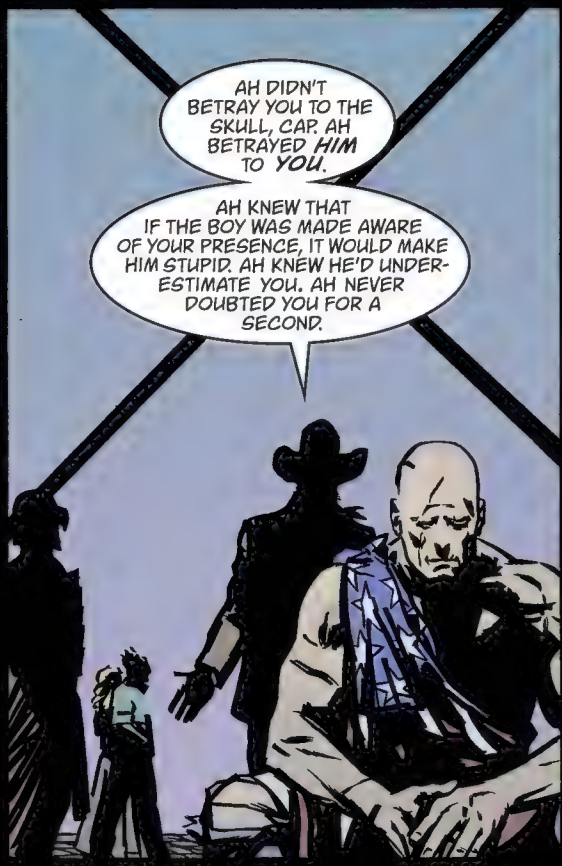
WHAT WAS
THAT YOU SAID ABOUT
REFUELING, DOCTOR
RICHARDS?



WHAT ABOUT
SHE? HAVE YOU
SEEN HER?



SHE MISSES
YOU, REED.



AH DIDN'T BETRAY YOU TO THE SKULL, CAP. AH BETRAYED HIM TO YOU.

AH KNEW THAT IF THE BOY WAS MADE AWARE OF YOUR PRESENCE, IT WOULD MAKE HIM STUPID. AH KNEW HE'D UNDERESTIMATE YOU. AH NEVER DOUBTED YOU FOR A SECOND.



AN' AH DON'T WANT YOU FEELIN' BAD ABOUT THE BOY. YOU DID HIM A MERCY. AH HAD THE FEELIN' THAT HE WASN'T IN CONTROL OF HIMSELF, LET ALONE THE REST OF US.

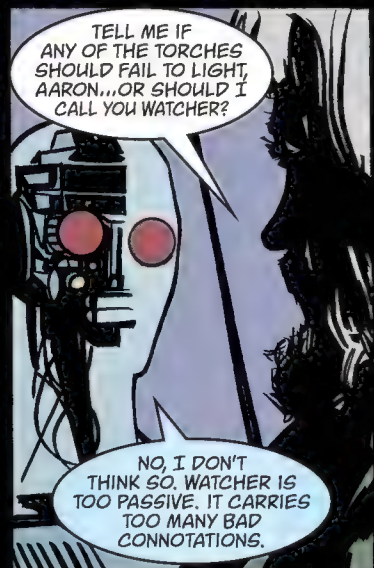


THANK YOU, JACK. BUT NOTHING CAN CHANGE WHAT I'VE DONE.



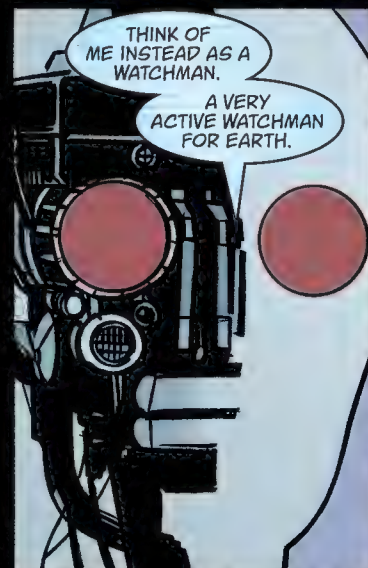
I CAN'T STOP YOU FROM GOING UP THERE, CAN I?

I THINK SOMEONE SHOULD KEEP AN EYE ON THINGS.



TELL ME IF ANY OF THE TORCHES SHOULD FAIL TO LIGHT, AARON...OR SHOULD I CALL YOU WATCHER?

NO, I DON'T THINK SO. WATCHER IS TOO PASSIVE. IT CARRIES TOO MANY BAD CONNOTATIONS.

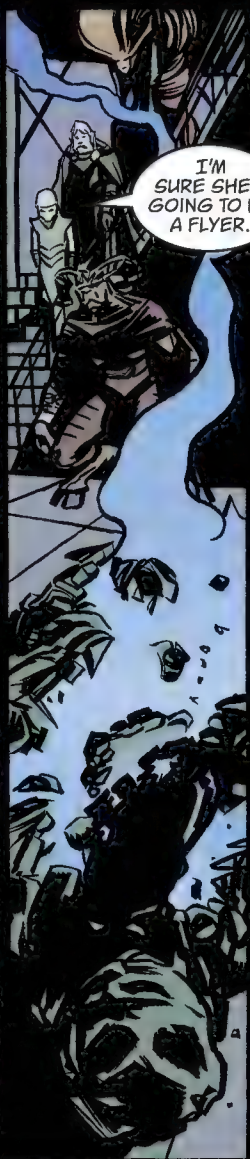


THINK OF ME INSTEAD AS A WATCHMAN.

A VERY ACTIVE WATCHMAN FOR EARTH.



REED!
IT'S TIME. LUNA'S
CHANGE IS ALMOST
COMPLETE.



I'M
SURE SHE'S
GOING TO BE
A FLYER.

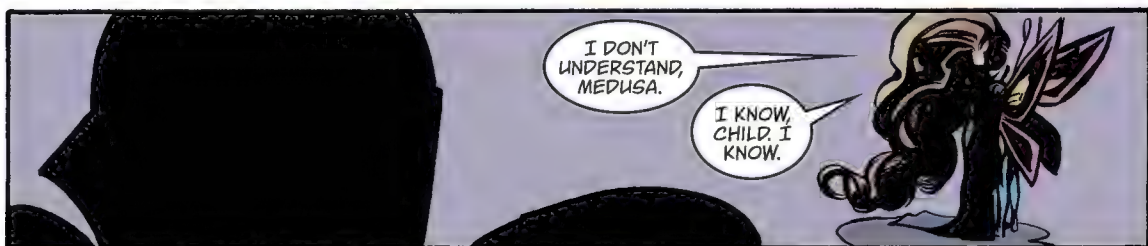
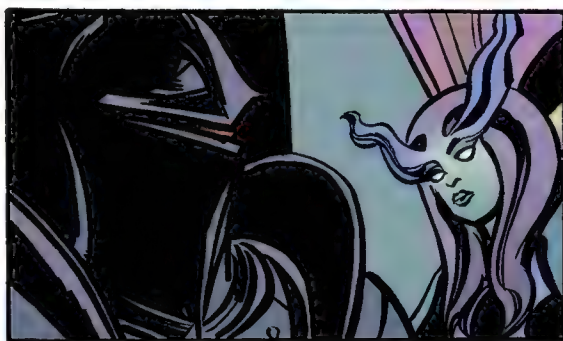


I TOLD YOU.
SHE WILL BE THE
PERFECT MATE FOR
THE KING AND
QUEEN'S SON.



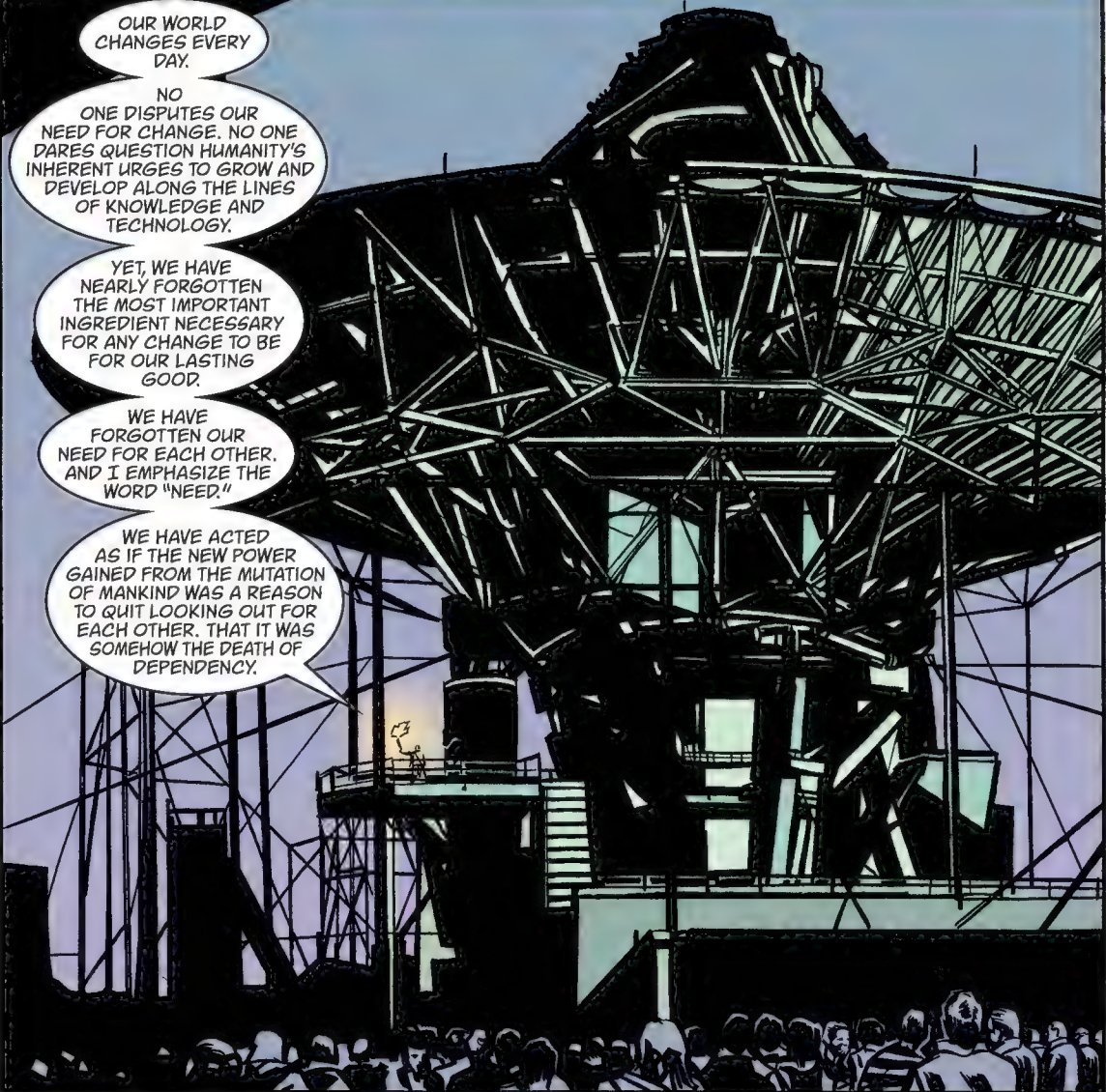
ISN'T IT
MARVELOUS?!?

NOW
WE CAN BE
MARRIED.



I DON'T
UNDERSTAND,
MEDUSA.

I KNOW,
CHILD. I
KNOW.



OUR WORLD
CHANGES EVERY
DAY.

NO
ONE DISPUTES OUR
NEED FOR CHANGE. NO ONE
DARES QUESTION HUMANITY'S
INHERENT URGES TO GROW AND
DEVELOP ALONG THE LINES
OF KNOWLEDGE AND
TECHNOLOGY.

YET, WE HAVE
NEARLY FORGOTTEN
THE MOST IMPORTANT
INGREDIENT NECESSARY
FOR ANY CHANGE TO BE
FOR OUR LASTING
GOOD.

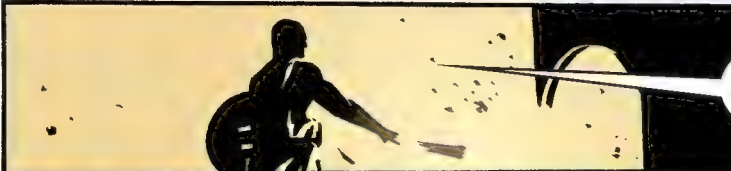
WE HAVE
FORGOTTEN OUR
NEED FOR EACH OTHER.
AND I EMPHASIZE THE
WORD "NEED."

WE HAVE ACTED
AS IF THE NEW POWER
GAINED FROM THE MUTATION
OF MANKIND WAS A REASON
TO QUIT LOOKING OUT FOR
EACH OTHER. THAT IT WAS
SOMEHOW THE DEATH OF
DEPENDENCY.



BUT IF WE
SLAY OUR DEPENDENCY
UPON EACH OTHER, WE ALSO
SACRIFICE DEMOCRACY

WE MUST NEVER
FORGET THAT THIS COUNTRY
WAS FOUNDED UPON THE BELIEF
THAT DIFFERENT PEOPLE--REGARD-
LESS OF RACE, CREED, AGE OR
GENDER--CAN STILL LIVE TO-
GETHER, UNITED IN A
STATE OF PEACE.



BUT THAT'S ONLY
GOING TO HAPPEN ONE WAY.
INSTEAD OF LOOKING INSIDE YOUR-
SELVES FOR POWER, LOOK FOR NEED.
SEE THE NEED IN YOURSELF, AND SEE
THE NEED IN YOUR FELLOW
CITIZENS.



WE HAVE TO REMEMBER THAT WE ARE HUMAN BEFORE WE ARE ANYTHING ELSE.

THESE TORCHES ARE VERY IMPORTANT. NOT ONLY TO FACILITATE THE RETURN TO THE STATE OF A MEEKER MANKIND, A MANKIND THAT WILL INHERIT AN EARTH THAT ISN'T RAVAGED BY THE MADNESS OF SELF-INDULGENCE AND GREED.

BUT ALSO AS REMINDERS TO EACH ONE OF US OF WHO WE ARE. INDEED, OF OUR HIGHEST CALLING: TO BE HUMAN.



"AND SHOULD, GENERATIONS FROM NOW, ANOTHER SPECIES COME TO OUR PLANET SEEKING TO ONCE AGAIN MANIPULATE OUR PEOPLE..."



"...LET THEM SEE THE FIRES OF OUR HUMANITY AND BE TURNED BACK IN FEAR OF THAT WHICH MAKES US TRULY A WORLD POWER.

"LET THEM SEE THIS, OUR HUMAN TORCH."

END.



EARTH X 1 / 2



"THEY CALL THE YAHOO
IN CHARGE OF THIS GIRL
SCOUT RALLY *THE SKULL*.

"HE'S REALLY JUST ANOTHER
WET-NOSED PUNK WHO'S GOT
TOO MUCH POWER TO KNOW
WHAT TO DO WITH IT.

"HE CONTROLS THE MOTOR
PART A PEOPLE'S MINDS.
MAKES 'EM DO ANYTHING
HE WANTS.

"BUT THE BRAT'S GOT
NO IMAGINATION AT ALL.

"RIGHT NOW HE WANTS TO
TAKE OVER THE COUNTRY.

"SO HE'S BUILDING AN ARMY WITH
A DRAFT CALL NOT EVEN OL' 'SLICK
WILLIE' COULD DODGE.

"HE THINKS HE HAS
ME UNDER CONTROL.

"BETTER WOMEN THAN YOU
HAVE TRIED AND FAILED, KID.

"I'M NICK FURY. THE BEST YOU'VE
DONE IS SLOW ME DOWN A LITTLE."

"I KNEW THE SKULL
THE RED SKULL, AND
YOU AIN'T HIM.

"WITH THE HELP'A THE HOWLING
COMMANDOS, I ALREADY BEAT
THE BLUE BLAZES OUTTA GOOSE-
STEPPERS LIKE JOHANN AND
BARON STRUCKER.

"THEY LOST, JUST LIKE YOU WILL,
KID, AN' YOU KNOW WHY? I'LL TELL
YA, I'LL TELL YA WHY YOU SHOULD
LET ALL THESE PEOPLE GO RIGHT
NOW AN' JUST GO HOME AN' SHAVE
YER HEAD LIKE A GOOD LITTLE
NEO-NAZI.

"IT'S AN OLD SOLDIERS' SECRET.

"THEY LOST 'CAUSE THEY DIDN'T
THINK THEY COULD LOSE.

"YER GONNA LOSE, KID. I KNOW IT.
I CAN FEEL IT DOWN INSIDE OF ME.

"TOWARDS THE END OF THE WAR, AFTER
CAP HAD ALREADY DISAPPEARED, I WAS
SEPARATED FROM THE HOWLERS.

"I TRIED TO ESCAPE A NAZI PATROL BY
CUTTIN' ACROSS A MINE FIELD IN FRANCE,
FIGGERIN' I COULD TAKE 'EM ALL OUT
WITHOUT EVER MAKIN' MY TRIGGER FINGER
BREAK A SWEAT.

"I SHOULD'A DIED THAT DAY AS WELL.

"BUT SOME PARTISANS HAULED MY
BUTT, AT LEAST THE PIECES OF IT
THEY COULD FIND OUTTA THERE AND
TOOK ME TO A DOCTOR KNOWN AS
STERNBERG.

"STERNBERG DID MORE'N PATCH ME
UP, HE MADE ME AN 'IMMORTAL' USIN'
MY BODY TO TEST HIS 'INFINITY
FORMULA' ON.

"AT FIRST, I WONDERED
WHY ANY DOCTOR WOULD
WANNA MAKE HIS JOB
OBSOLETE.

"THEN I SAW WHAT
WOULD HAPPEN TO ME
IF I DIDN'T DRINK FROM
THIS 'FOUNTAIN O'
YOUTH' EVERY YEAR.

"SHORTLY AFTER THE
WAR ENDED, STERN-
BERG SENT ME HIS
FIRST EXTORTION
LETTER AND A LIMITED
SUPPLY OF THE
FORMULA. THE DOC
EXPLAINED THAT IF I
DIDN'T PAY, I'D DIE.

"TALK ABOUT YOUR
HYPOCRITICAL OATHS."

"GUYS LIKE CAP-HE WAS AFRAID OF
LOSIN' FREEDOM--AN' IT MADE HIM
FIGHT ALL THE MORE.

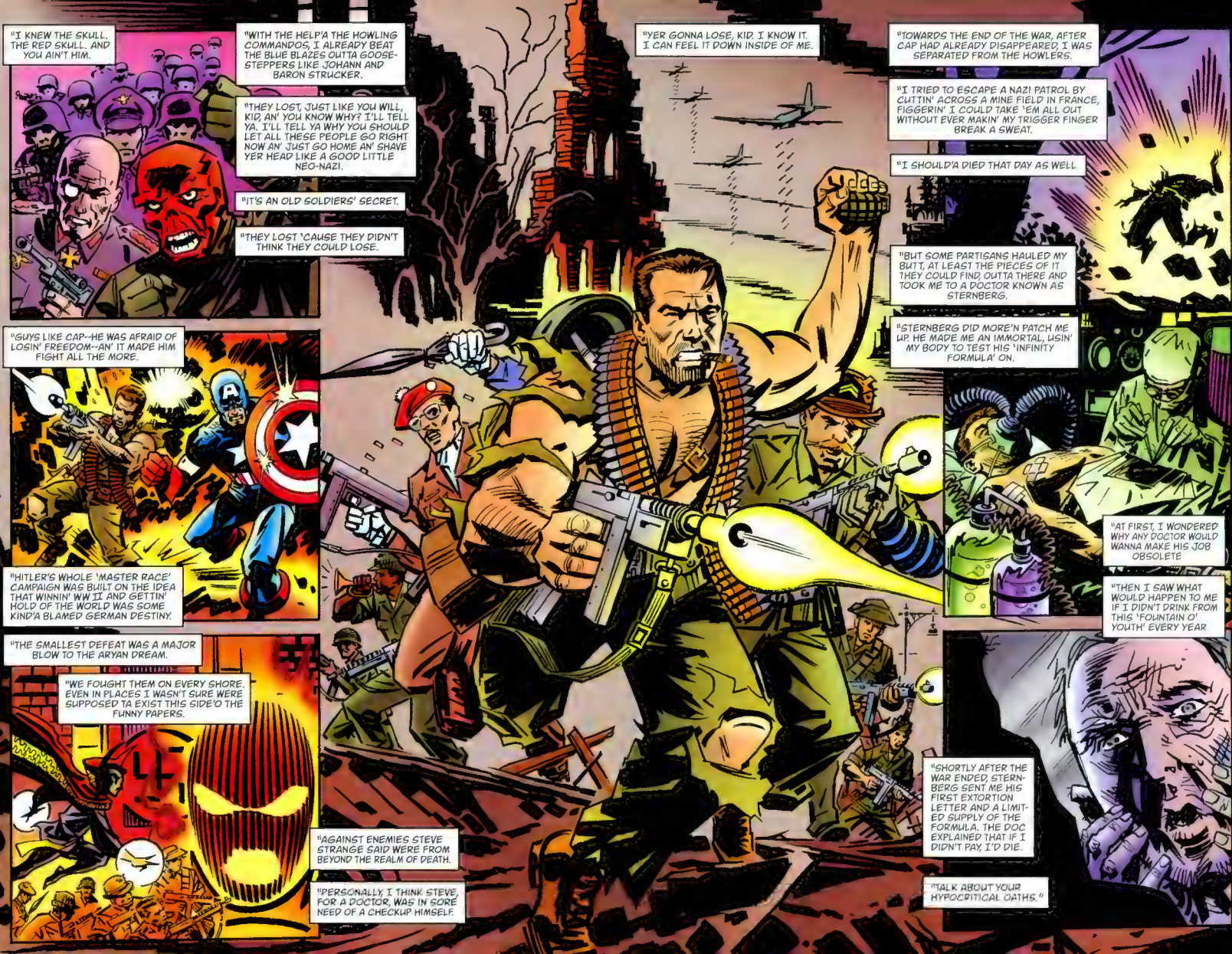
"HITLER'S WHOLE 'MASTER RACE'
CAMPAIGN WAS BUILT ON THE IDEA
THAT WINNIN' WW II AND GETTIN'
HOLD OF THE WORLD WAS SOME
KIND'A BLAMED GERMAN DESTINY.

"THE SMALLEST DEFEAT WAS A MAJOR
BLOW TO THE ARYAN DREAM.

"WE FOUGHT THEM ON EVERY SHORE,
EVEN IN PLACES I WASN'T SURE WERE
SUPPOSED TA EXIST THIS SIDE'O THE
FUNNY PAPERS.

"AGAINST ENEMIES STEVE
STRANGE SAID WERE FROM
BEYOND THE REALM OF DEATH.

"PERSONALLY I THINK STEVE
FOR A DOCTOR, WAS IN SOME
NEED OF A CHECKUP HIMSELF.



"A FEW YEARS LATER, DURING THE COLD WAR, I WAS ASKED TO HEAD UP AMERICA'S SPY GROUP, S.H.I.E.L.D.

"THAT'S WHERE I MET AN INVENTOR WHO WAS SOME SORTA CROSS BETWEEN POPULAR MECHANICS AN' AMAZING STORIES. HIS NAME WAS TONY STARK.

"STARK WAS NOT ONLY RESPONSIBLE FOR SOME OF THE GREATEST WEAPONS I'M IMAGINABLE, BUT HE ALSO DESIGNED FOR ME A CAR THAT COULD FLY...

"...AND AN AERIAL PARKING LOT WHERE I COULD LEAVE IT.

"AN' THEN, SOMETHIN' STARTED TO HAPPEN TO THE ENEMY. HE... IT... THEY... BEGAN TA BLUR AT TIMES.

"HE BEGAN LOOKIN' LIKE SOMEONE I OUGHTTA BE DEFENDIN'.

"SHORTLY AFTER TAKIN' OVER S.H.I.E.L.D., I WAS TOLD TO 'CONTAIN' THE MUTANT EPIDEMIC. MY SUPERIORS FEARED THAT US HOMO SAPIENS WOULD NO LONGER BE THE DOMINANT SPECIES ON EARTH IF MUTANT NUMBERS INCREASED.

"I TOLD THEM THAT I'D ALREADY HAD MY FILL OF 'MASTER RACES'.

"FIGHTIN' COMMUNISM WAS EASY. JUST GIVE ME A GUN AN' TELL ME WHERE TA POINT. THAT'S WHAT I TOLD THEM.

"BUT THESE MUTANTS WERE AMERICANS. AN' THIS WAS A COUNTRY WHERE PEOPLE HAD THE RIGHT TA BE ANYTHING THEY WANTED, BECOME WHATEVER THEY WANTED. I FIGURED THAT MEANT BEIN' ONE OF THE X-MEN.

"I DISCOVERED THEN THAT S.H.I.E.L.D. WAS NEVER GONNA LIVE UP TA ITS NAME."

"NOT TA MENTION ENOUGH LOOK-AN-GOUND ALIKE ROBOT VERSIONS OF ME THAT I'D NEVER HAVE TA GO TRAMPIN' THROUGH MINE FIELDS AGAIN TA LOSE THE ENEMY.

"THOSE WERE GOOD TIMES. A FEW OF THE HOWLERS JOINED ME AS WE MADE THE WORLD SAFE FOR DEMOCRACY DAY AFTER DAY.

"EVEN CAPTAIN AMERICA RESURFACED AFTER HAVING SPENT YEARS IN SUSPENDED ANIMATION.

"THERE WE WERE... TWO OLD SOLDIERS YOU'D NEVER KNOW HAD FOUGHT HITLER TOGETHER ALL THOSE YEARS BEFORE.





"'COURSE, ONE WAR
CAN ALWAYS MAKE
YA FORGET ANOTHER.

"THERE WAS ALWAYS SOME-
ONE TRYING TO TAKE OVER
THE WORLD...INCLUDIN' A
GROUP KNOWN AS HYDRA--
NOT THE HYDRA YOU KNOW.

"AT LEAST THIS HYDRA
YA COULD KILL WITH A
CLEAR CONSCIENCE.

"I'D TRIED TA KEEP *S.H.I.E.L.D.*
CLEAN ALL THOSE YEARS.

"BUT THE NEAR DEATH OF A
ROGUE AGENT CODE-NAMED
MOCKINGBIRD REVEALED
JUST HOW DIRTY A JOB
DEFENDIN' DEMOCRACY HAD
BECOME.

"TURNED OUT THAT MY BLIND
EYE WASN'T MERELY A
PHYSICAL SCAR.

"MY INVESTIGATION TURNED
ME AGAINST MY FELLOW
AGENTS. I WAS ON THE RUN.
BRANDED A TRAITOR.

"I DESTROYED *S.H.I.E.L.D.*
FROM WITHIN AND REBUILT IT
WITH CERTAIN SAFEGUARDS
IN PLACE.

"HOW COULD ANY OF US HAVE
KNOWN THAT IT WOULD ALL END
BECAUSE OF A GUY I KNEW
BACK IN THE BIG ONE?

"A GUY NAMED
REED RICHARDS."

"RICHARDS TRIED TO POWER THE WORLD FROM ONE SOURCE AND ACCIDENTALLY CAUSED THE MUTANT EPIDEMIC I HAD BEEN ORDERED TO CONTAIN YEARS BEFORE.

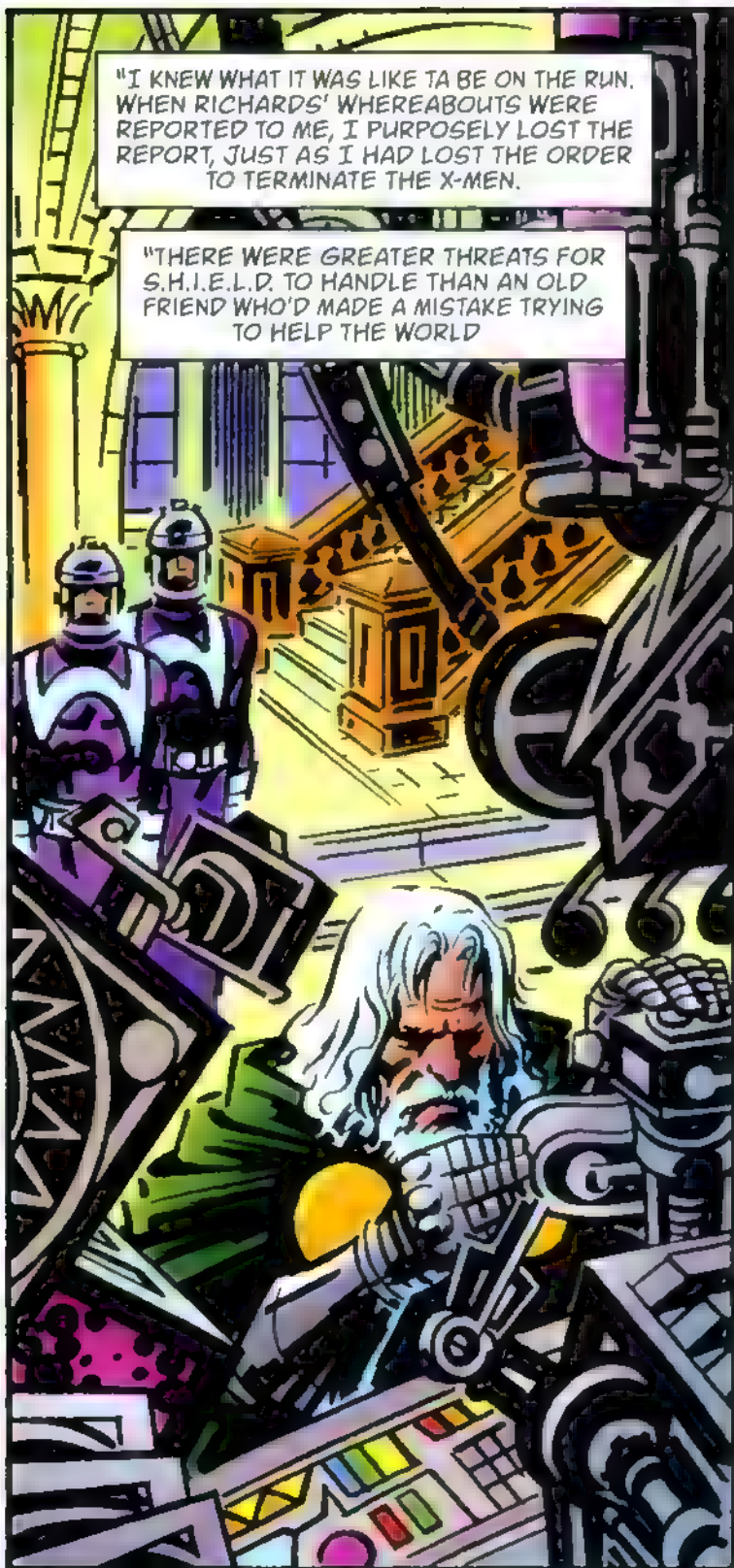
"THE WORLD CHANGED AFTER RICHARDS' PLAN BLEW UP IN HIS AND EVERYONE ELSE'S COLLECTIVE FACE...NOT THAT THOSE FACES WERE EVEN RECOGNIZABLE AFTER THE MUTATIONS.

"THE ONLY REASON I DIDN'T MUTATE HAD TO BE THAT STERNBERG'S INFINITY FORMULA WAS KEEPIN' ME SAFE.



"I KNEW WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO BE ON THE RUN. WHEN RICHARDS' WHEREABOUTS WERE REPORTED TO ME, I PURPOSELY LOST THE REPORT, JUST AS I HAD LOST THE ORDER TO TERMINATE THE X-MEN.

"THERE WERE GREATER THREATS FOR S.H.I.E.L.D. TO HANDLE THAN AN OLD FRIEND WHO'D MADE A MISTAKE TRYING TO HELP THE WORLD



"NORMAN OSBORN HAD ONLY BEEN A PETTY WHITE-COLLAR CRIMINAL UP TO THIS POINT. NOT AT ALL THE TYPE OF ENEMY S.H.I.E.L.D. WOULD BE ORDERED TO DEAL WITH. WHO COULD HAVE KNOWN THEN WHAT OSBORN WAS PLANNING?

"WHAT OSBORN MEANT TO DO COULDN'T BE UNDER ANY KIND'A SCRUTINY, SO HE ATTACKED THE ONLY SERIOUS FORUM OF INVESTIGATION IN NEW YORK BEFORE HE SET HIS SIGHTS ON S.H.I.E.L.D.

"HE PLANNED THE DESTRUCTION OF THE DAILY BUGLE."



"JAMESON HATED SPIDER-MAN. HE HATED HIM MORE'N I'VE SEEN ANYBODY HATE ANYBODY BEFORE.

"THE BUGLE SHUT ITS
DOORS A FEW WEEKS
LATER.

"MOST PEOPLE STOPPED
READIN' ANYTHING AFTER
THAT.

"THERE WERE OTHER CONCERNS.

"MEAT WAS BECOMING SCARCE.

"INDUSTRY WAS
FAILIN' FAST

"WHAT IT ONCE TOOK A MACHINE
AND AN ASSEMBLY LINE TO DO,
ONE MUTATED MAN WAS NOW ABLE
TO ACCOMPLISH WITH HIS LITTLE
PINKIE.

"PEOPLE STARTED STAYIN' HOME,
AND STARTED TAKING WITH THEIR
NEW POWERS WHAT THEY HAD ONCE
WORKED TO EARN."



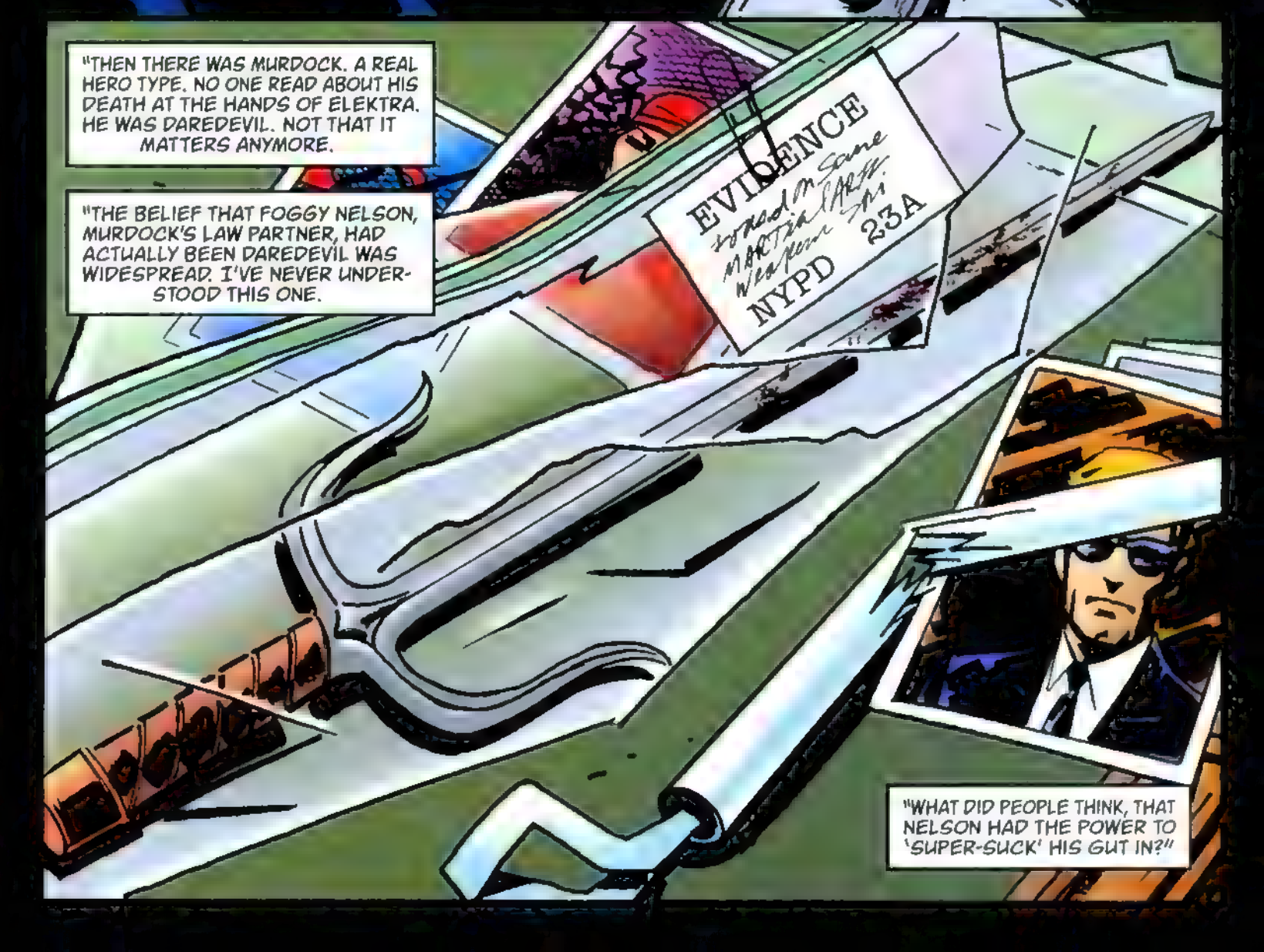


"MOST PEOPLE DIDN'T EVEN KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO FRANK CASTLE. THAT'S HIS SHIRT YOU'RE WEARING, KID.

"THE PUNISHER COMMITTED SUICIDE AFTER ACCIDENT'LLY KILLIN' A FAMILY IN HIS ONE-MAN WAR ON CRIME.

"HE WAS ANOTHER OLD SOLDIER. HE ONCE THOUGHT HE'D EVEN KILLED ME.

"'COURSE IT WAS ONLY ANOTHER ONE OF THE FURY LIFE MODEL DECOYS THAT HE BURIED... REMEMBER THE L.M.D.S STARK CREATED? SOMETIMES I COULDN'T EVEN TELL THE ORIGINAL FROM THE REST...AN' I'M ME.



"THEN THERE WAS MURDOCK. A REAL HERO TYPE. NO ONE READ ABOUT HIS DEATH AT THE HANDS OF ELEKTRA. HE WAS DAREDEVIL. NOT THAT IT MATTERS ANYMORE.

"THE BELIEF THAT FOGGY NELSON, MURDOCK'S LAW PARTNER, HAD ACTUALLY BEEN DAREDEVIL WAS WIDESPREAD. I'VE NEVER UNDERSTOOD THIS ONE.

EVIDENCE
*Found on scene
MARTIN LARKE
Weapon -
NYPD 23A*

"WHAT DID PEOPLE THINK, THAT NELSON HAD THE POWER TO 'SUPER-SUCK' HIS GUT IN?"

"THE CITY WAS A WOUND
PICKIN' AT ITS OWN SCAB.

"S.H.I.E.L.D. WAS CALLED IN TO
RESTORE ORDER AND NEW YORK
BECAME OUR RESIDENCE.

"IT WAS STRANGE WATCHIN' A GUY
LIKE CAP TRY TO STRONG-ARM
CIVILIANS IN THE NAME OF PEACE.

"IT WAS LIKE HE FELT BETRAYED
HAVING TO STOP AMERICANS FROM
LOOTING BECAUSE FOOD WAS SO
SCARCE. AND THEY FELT BETRAYED
BY CAP. YOU COULD SEE IT IN THE
EYES OF EVERY ONE OF THEM HE
TOOK DOWN.

"WHICH WAS EXACTLY
WHAT OSBORN WANTED.
HE WANTED THEM TO
WANT A NEW AMERICA.
THAT MEANT A NEW
CAP, TOO.



"STEVE'S DISILLUSIONMENT WAS
DEEPER STILL ONCE WORD REACHED
HIM OF THE DEATH OF THE AVENGERS
AT THE HANDS OF CRUSHER CREEL.

"AND THE MAN WHO WAS ONCE KNOWN
AS THE GREEN GOBLIN SET HIMSELF UP
TO BECOME KING. HE SET US AGAINST
OURSELVES."

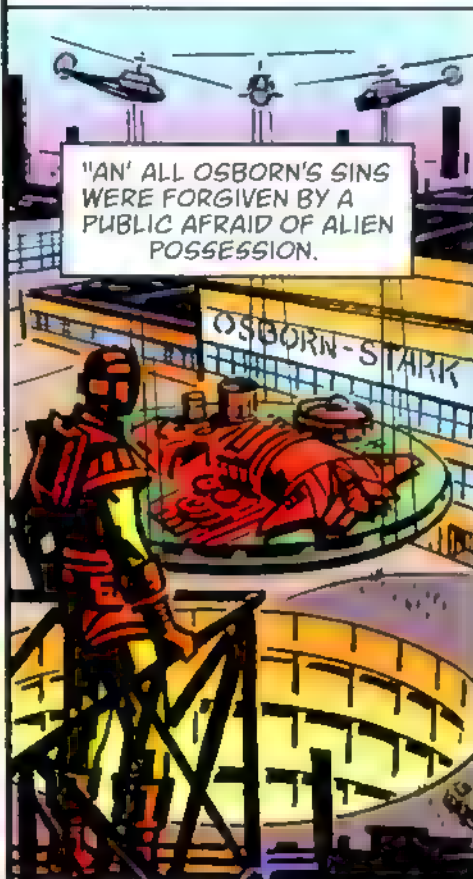
"NO ONE KNEW WHAT HE'D BE WILLIN' TA DO TA BECOME PRESIDENT. NOT EVEN STARK.

"WHEN THE HYDRA FIRST APPEARED, IT SEEMED LIKE THE LAST NAIL IN ALL A OUR COFFINS. EARTH WAS BEIN' INVADED NOW, TOO.



"CRAZY THING WAS, NO ONE THOUGHT IT COULD GET WORSE.

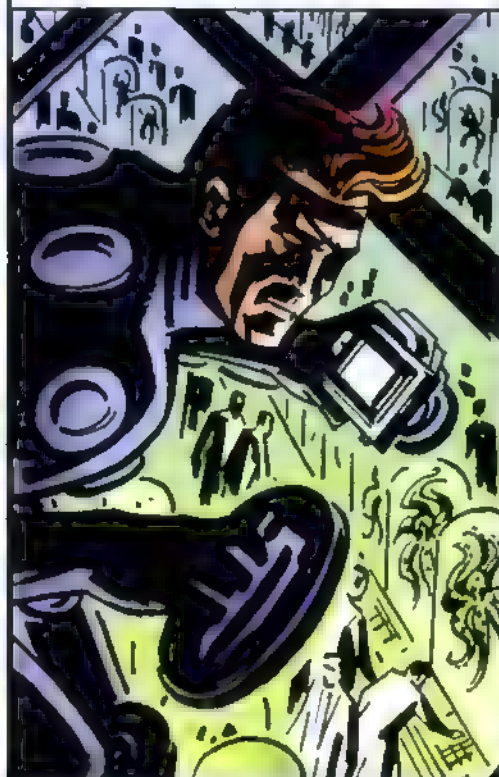
"STARK INDUSTRIES JOINED FORCES WITH OSBORN CHEMICAL TO STOP THE INVASION.



"AN' ALL OSBORN'S SINS WERE FORGIVEN BY A PUBLIC AFRAID OF ALIEN POSSESSION.

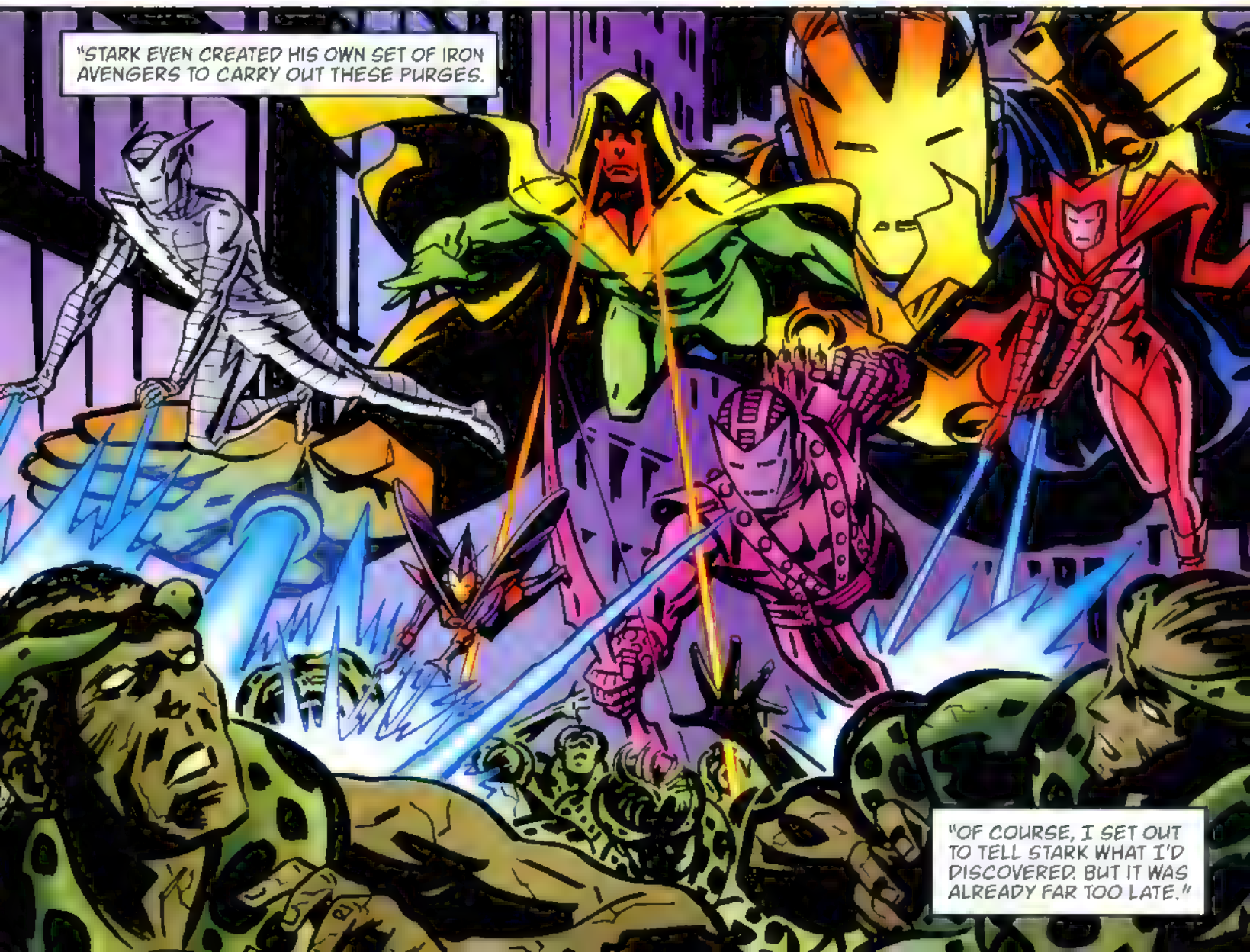
"WHEN PEOPLE SAW TWO MEN WHO HAD HATED EACH OTHER AND WORKED AGAINST EACH OTHER FOR YEARS COME TOGETHER TO STOP A COMMON FOE, IT BROUGHT THE WHOLE CITY TOGETHER.

"'COURSE, I FOUND OUT TOO LATE THAT THESE ALIENS WERE ACTUALLY GROWN AT OSBORN CHEMICAL. THEY WEREN'T AN ALIEN RACE AT ALL. THIS WAS OSBORN'S BID FOR THE COUNTRY. HE CREATED AN ENEMY ONLY HE'D BE ABLE TO SAVE THE WORLD FROM.



"HE HAD THE KEY TO STOPPING THE HYDRA... A KEY HE ALLOWED HIS UNKNOWING BUSINESS PARTNER TA DISCOVER. STARK ENGINEERED A 'PURGE' WHICH KILLED THE HYDRA WITHOUT BURNIN' THE CITY.

"STARK EVEN CREATED HIS OWN SET OF IRON AVENGERS TO CARRY OUT THESE PURGES.



"OF COURSE, I SET OUT TO TELL STARK WHAT I'D DISCOVERED. BUT IT WAS ALREADY FAR TOO LATE."



"BEFORE I COULD WARN STARK, S.H.I.E.L.D. WAS ATTACKED BY HYDRA."

"I DON'T KNOW HOW I LIVED THROUGH THE FALL OF THE HELI-CARRIER. STERNBERG'S FORMULA MUST'A DONE MORE FOR ME THAN EVEN HE COUL'DA GUESSED."

"I AWOKE LATER, UNABLE TO REMEMBER HOW I'D GOTTEN OUT."

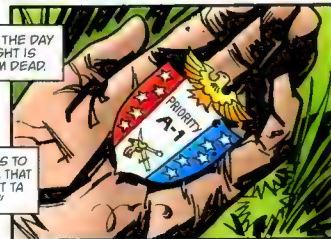
"I WAS FACED WITH AN IMPOSSIBLE CHOICE."

"BY REVEALING OSBORN'S PLAN, I RISKED THE POSSIBILITY OF CHAOS AN' LOOTIN' STARTING UP IN NEW YORK ALL OVER AGAIN."

"'CEPT NOW THERE WASN'T A S.H.I.E.L.D. AROUND TA CONTAIN THE PROBLEM."

"'COURSE, THE DAY I CAN'T FIGHT IS THE DAY I'M DEAD."

"AN' THANKS TO STERNBERG, THAT AIN'T ABOUT TA HAPPEN."



"BEFORE I COULD WARN STARK
AND TAKE THE WAR TO OSBORN,
I HEARD OF A KID--YEAH, YOU--
CALLING HIMSELF THE SKULL,
AND FORCING PEOPLE TO DO
EVERYTHING HE WANTED.

"I HEADED TO CALIFORNIA
AND FOUND THE BODY OF YER
AUNT ROSEMARY. I ALSO SAW
WHAT YA DID TA DOC SAMSON.
YER A REAL SICKO.

"YA THINK THAT BY MAKIN'
NAMOR DO ALL YER FISHIN'
FOR YA THAT PEOPLE'LL
ACCEPT WHAT YA DO TO THEM?

"YA REALLY THINK THAT
THEY'LL CARE WHEN
YOU'RE DEAD?

"I WATCHED YOU MAKE YOUR
'PEOPLE' THROW ROCKS AT
CAP WHILE THEY BEGGED HIM
TO SAVE THEM FROM YOU.

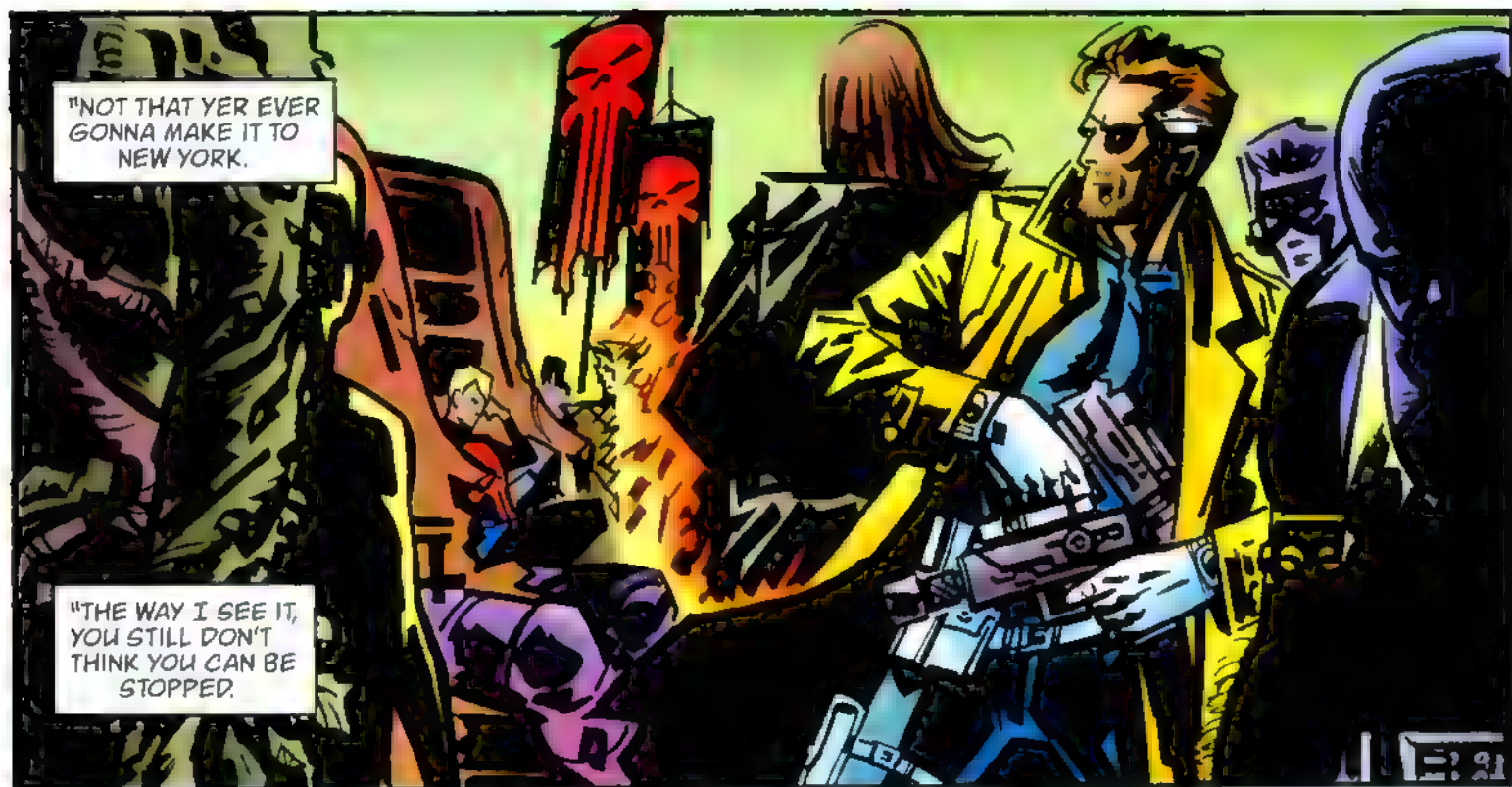
"YOU CAN'T EVEN GUESS WHAT
THAT MUST HAVE DONE FOR
STEVE. I'LL BET HE STILL
HEARS 'EM BEGGING TA BE
SAVED.

"HE'LL BE WAITIN' FER
YA IN NEW YORK, PUNK.

"HE'S STRONGER'N
YOU CAN GUESS.
AN' YOU'VE MADE
'IM STRONGER.

"WE'RE
ONLY
MADE
O' CLAY,
KID.

"BUT CAP, HE'S
SOMETHIN' ELSE
ALTOGETHER."



"NOT THAT YER EVER
GONNA MAKE IT TO
NEW YORK."

"THE WAY I SEE IT,
YOU STILL DON'T
THINK YOU CAN BE
STOPPED."



"BUT WE CAN'T
BOTH WIN."



"ALL YOU DID
WAS SLOW ME
DOWN A LITTLE."

"BUT I'VE
FACED FAR
WORSE THAN
YOU."

"YOU MUST'A HEARD SOME-
ONE SAY THAT OLD SOLDIERS
NEVER DIE. IT'S NEVER BEEN
TRUER THAN OF ME."



RIGHT NOW,
I FIGURE I KNOW
EXACTLY WHAT YER
THINKIN'...

...DAMN
INFINITY
FORMULA.

COULD
SOMEONE
SHUT HIM
UP?

HOW MANY
TIMES DO WE
HAVE TO HEAR
THIS?

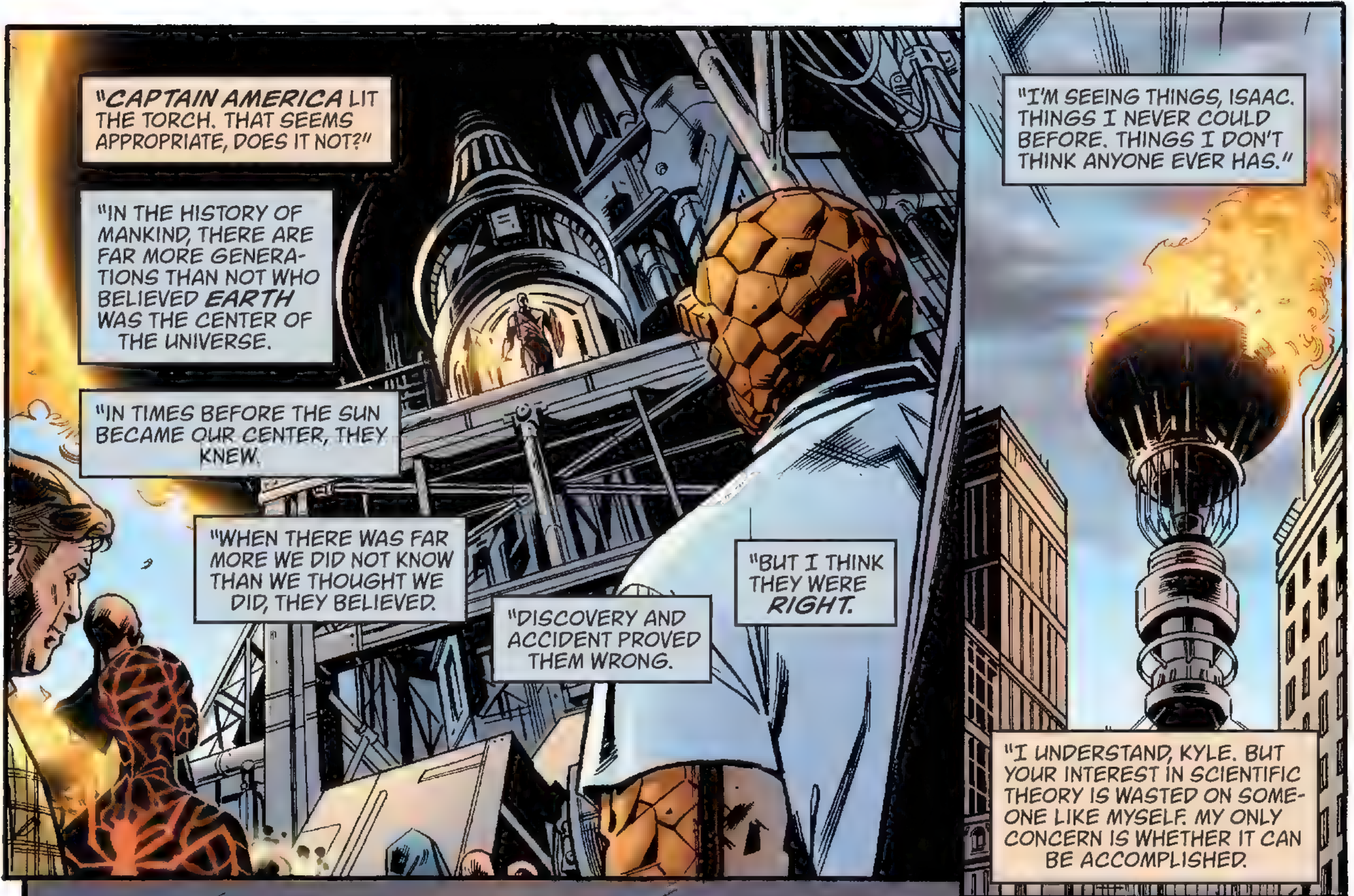
AND WHY
DIDN'T ANY OF YOU
TELL ME I COULDN'T
CONTROL ROBOTS? NOW I
HAVE TO TRASH THE IRON
AVENGERS, TOO. WHAT
A PAIN.



U N I V E R S E



KRUEGER
BRAITHWAITE
REINHOLD



"CAPTAIN AMERICA LIT THE TORCH. THAT SEEMS APPROPRIATE, DOES IT NOT?"

"IN THE HISTORY OF MANKIND, THERE ARE FAR MORE GENERATIONS THAN NOT WHO BELIEVED **EARTH** WAS THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE.

"IN TIMES BEFORE THE SUN BECAME OUR CENTER, THEY KNEW.

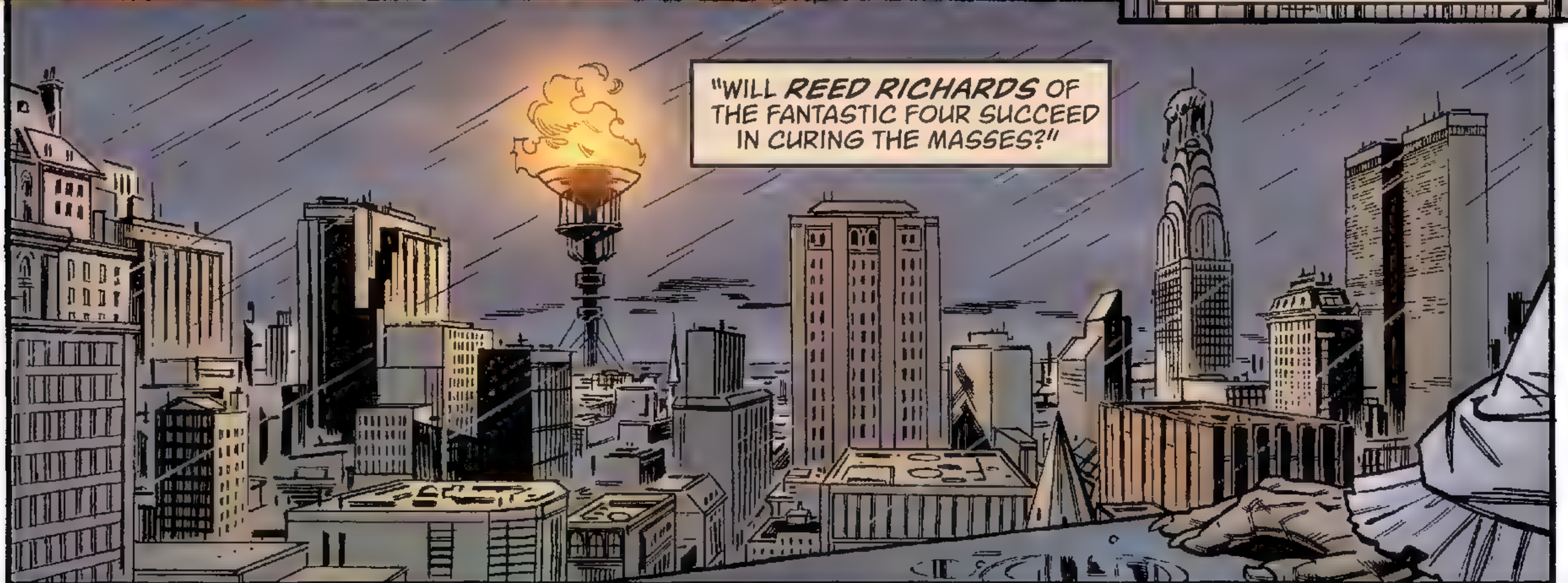
"WHEN THERE WAS FAR MORE WE DID NOT KNOW THAN WE THOUGHT WE DID, THEY BELIEVED.

"DISCOVERY AND ACCIDENT PROVED THEM WRONG.

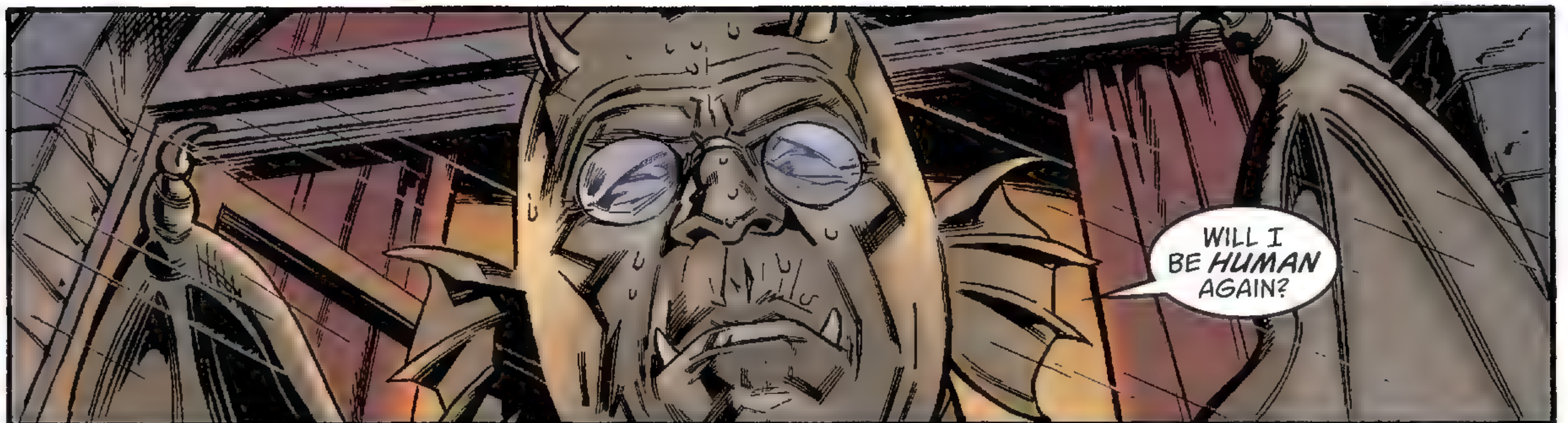
"BUT I THINK THEY WERE **RIGHT**.

"I'M SEEING THINGS, ISAAC. THINGS I NEVER COULD BEFORE. THINGS I DON'T THINK ANYONE EVER HAS."

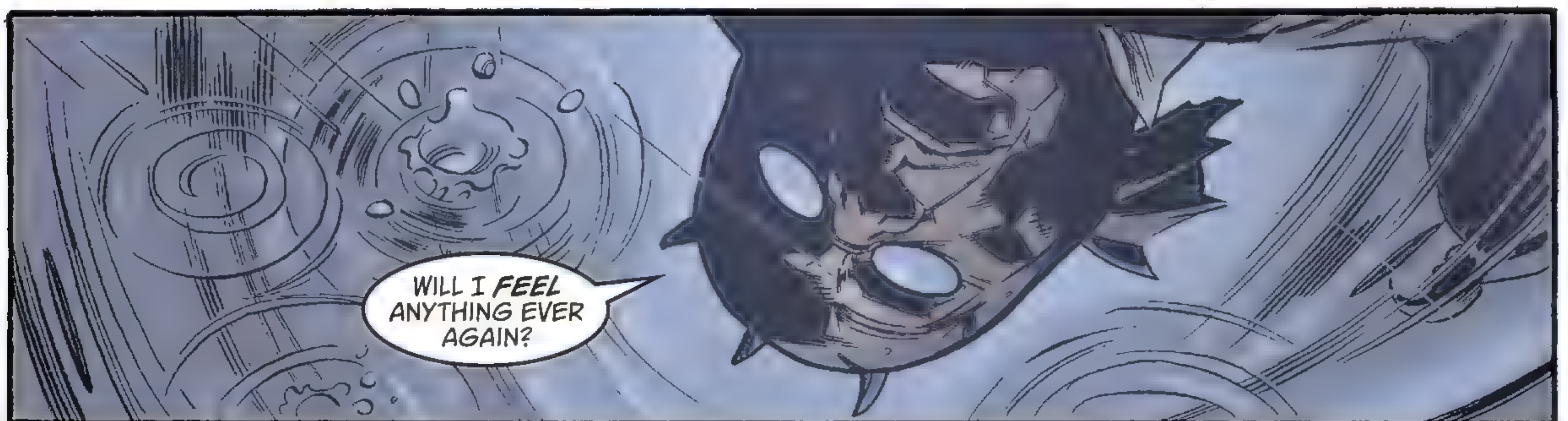
"I UNDERSTAND, KYLE. BUT YOUR INTEREST IN SCIENTIFIC THEORY IS WASTED ON SOMEONE LIKE MYSELF. MY ONLY CONCERN IS WHETHER IT CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED.



"WILL **REED RICHARDS** OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR SUCCEED IN CURING THE MASSES?"



WILL I BE **HUMAN** AGAIN?



WILL I **FEEL** ANYTHING EVER AGAIN?

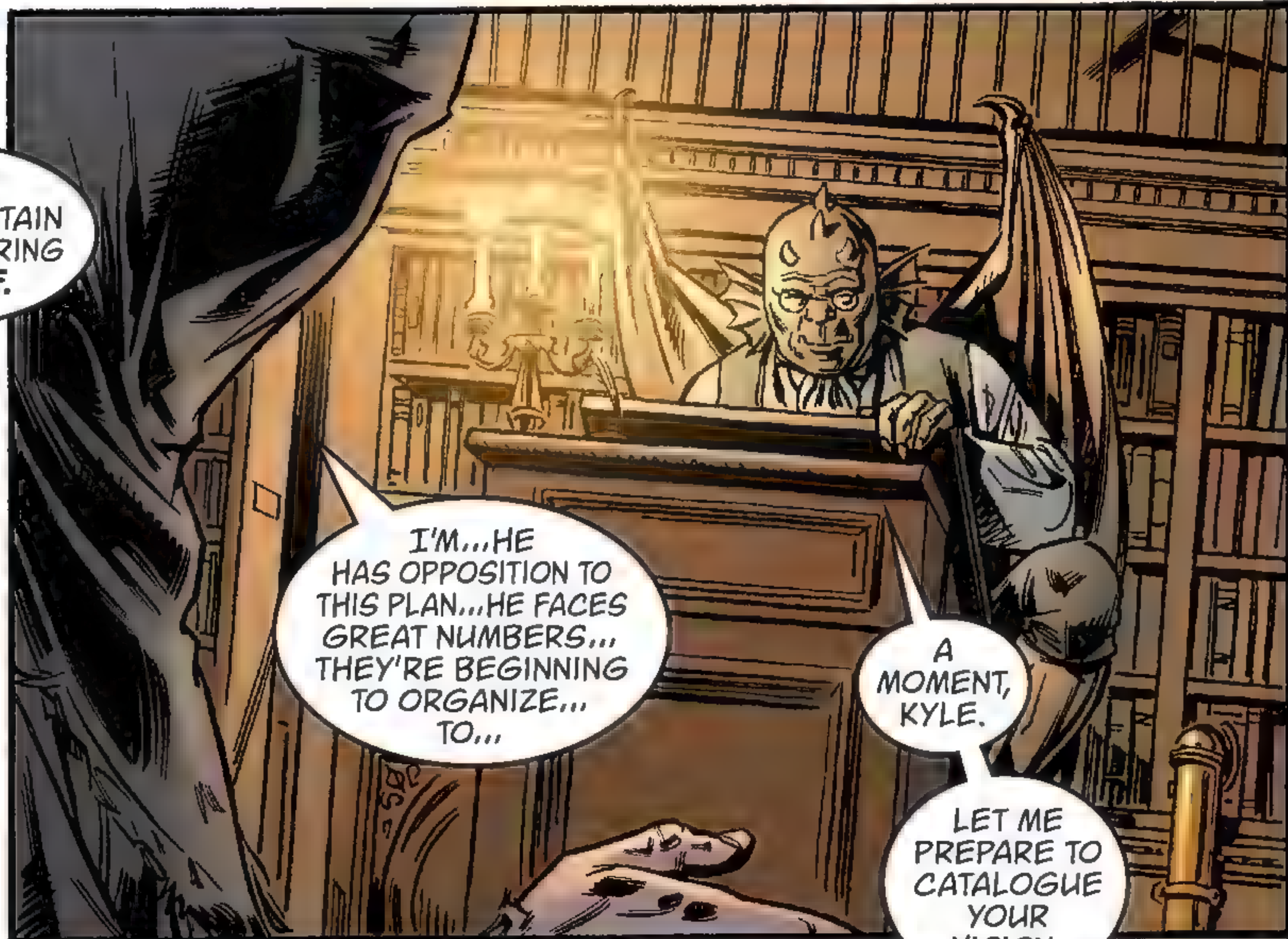


NO.



EVEN IF THE
"HUMAN TORCHES"
SUCCEED IN BURNING...
WHAT WAS IT? OH, YES--
THE "TERRIGEN MISTS"
FROM THE AIR, RICHARDS
CAN'T CURE EVERY-
ONE.

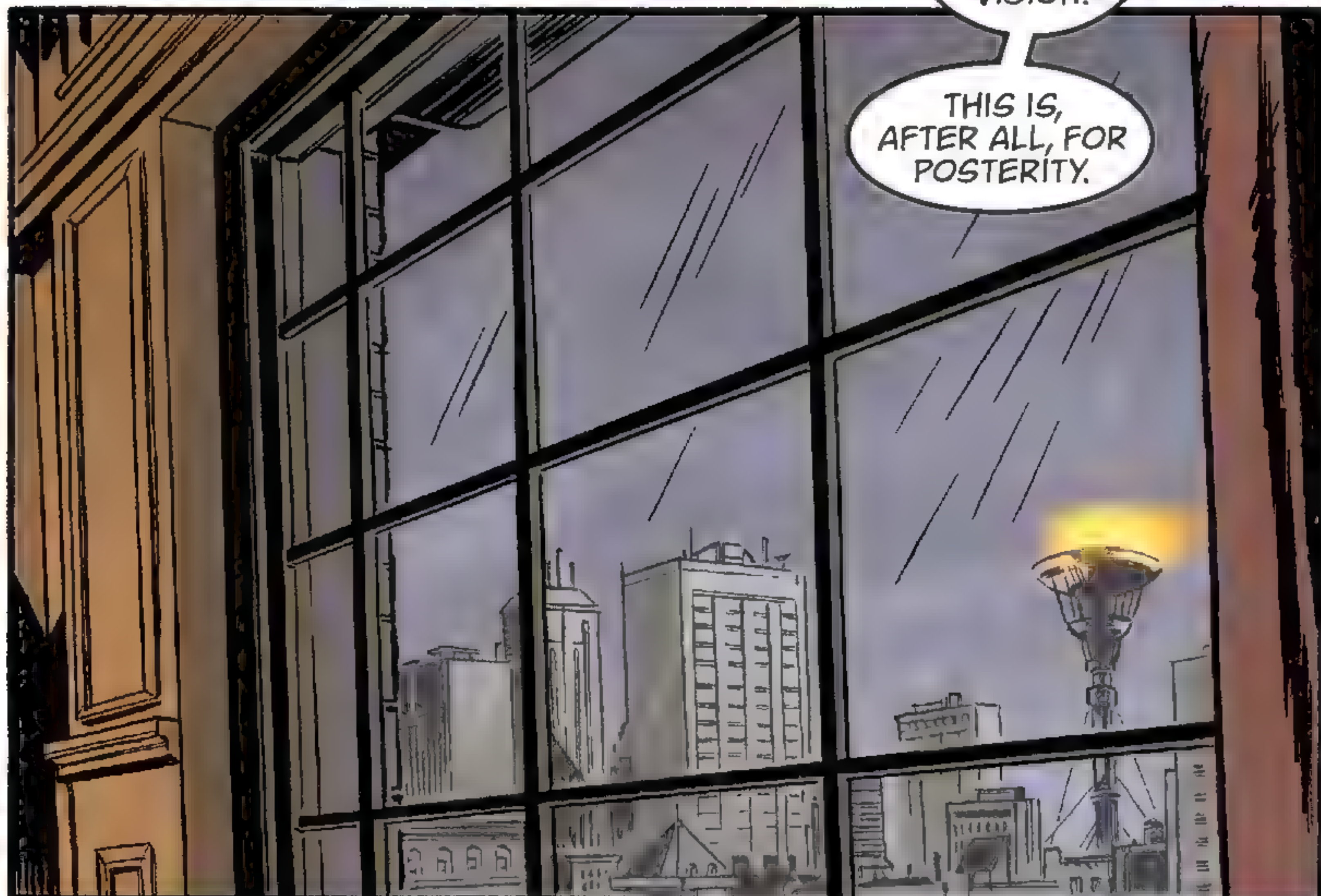
IN FACT,
I'M NOT CERTAIN
I SEE HIM CURING
ANYONE.



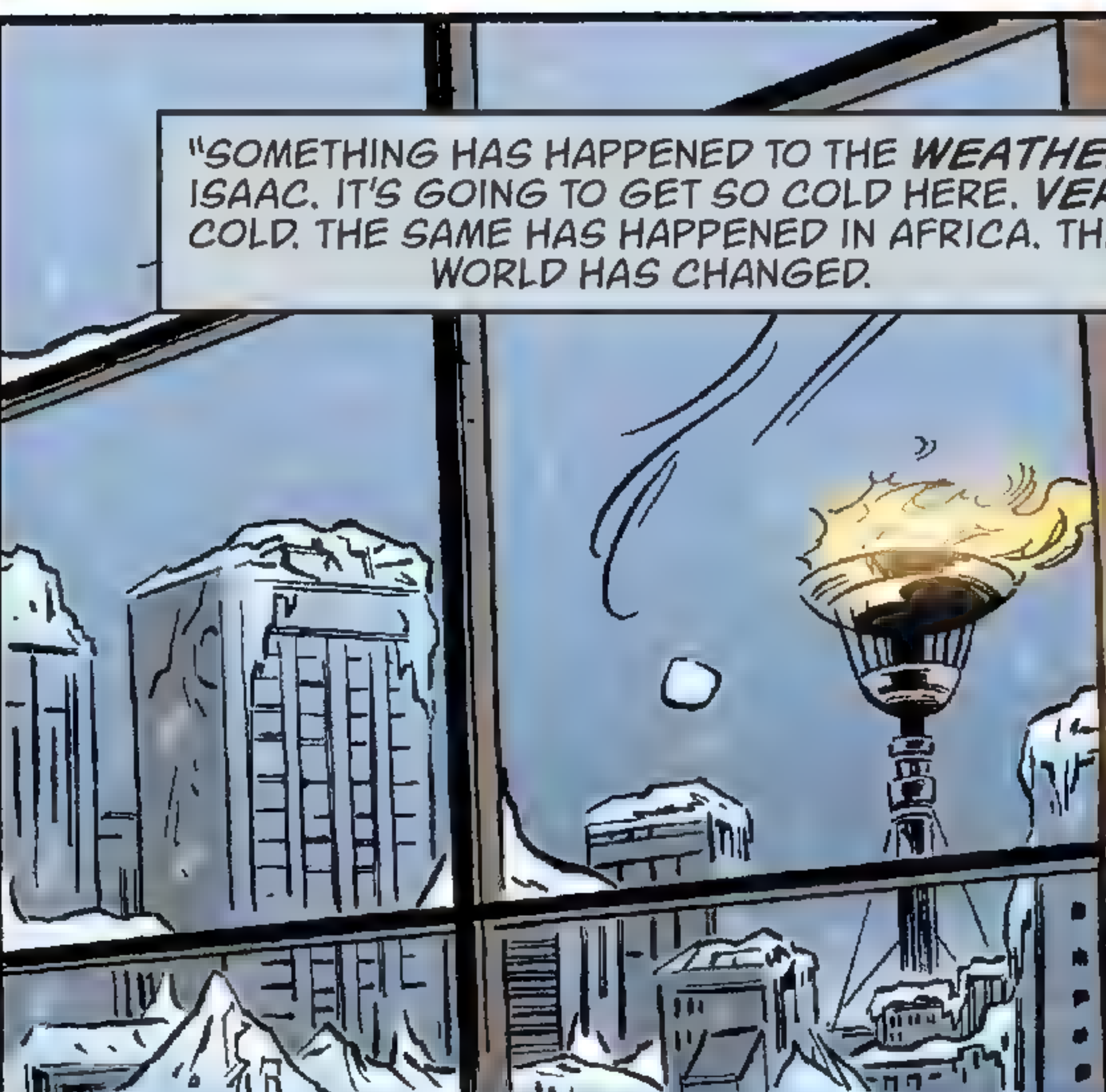
I'M...HE
HAS OPPOSITION TO
THIS PLAN...HE FACES
GREAT NUMBERS...
THEY'RE BEGINNING
TO ORGANIZE...
TO...

A
MOMENT,
KYLE.

LET ME
PREPARE TO
CATALOGUE
YOUR
VISION.



THIS IS,
AFTER ALL, FOR
POSTERITY.



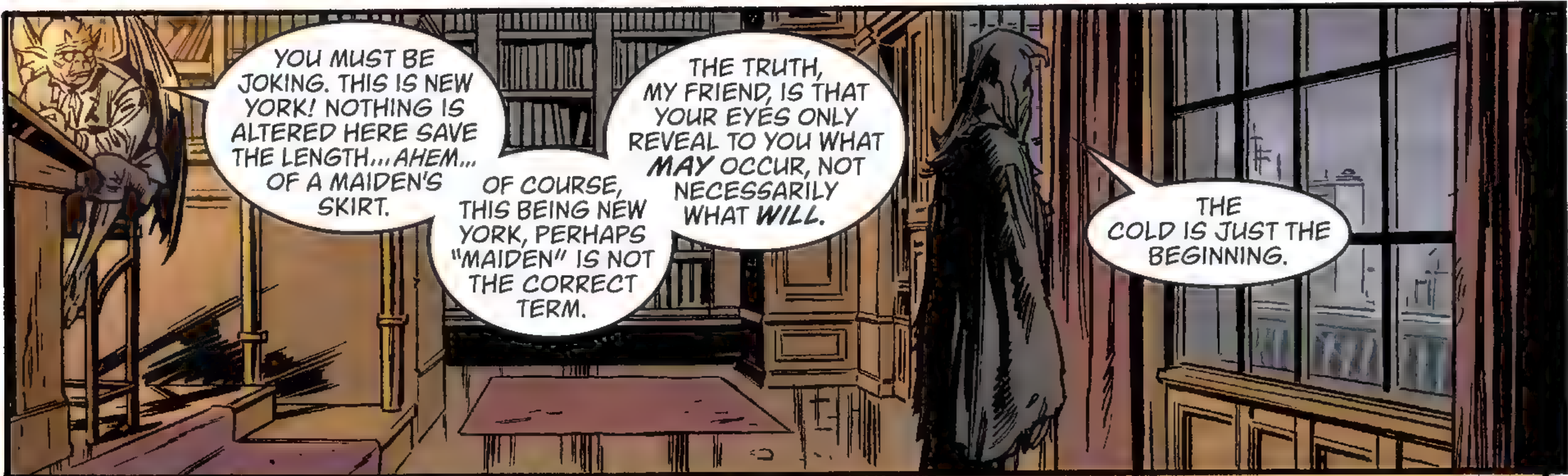
"SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED TO THE *WEATHER*, ISAAC. IT'S GOING TO GET SO COLD HERE. *VERY* COLD. THE SAME HAS HAPPENED IN AFRICA. THE WORLD HAS CHANGED.



"WITHIN A YEAR OF THE LIGHTING OF THE HUMAN TORCHES, NEW YORK FREEZES OVER. AFTER THE COLD KILLS A QUARTER OF THE POPULATION, MANY ARE FORCED TO LEAVE.



"THOSE WHO REMAIN CONGREGATE AROUND THE TORCH FOR ITS HEAT AND LIGHT. EVERYTHING CHANGES."



YOU MUST BE JOKING. THIS IS NEW YORK! NOTHING IS ALTERED HERE SAVE THE LENGTH... AHM... OF A MAIDEN'S SKIRT.

OF COURSE, THIS BEING NEW YORK, PERHAPS "MAIDEN" IS NOT THE CORRECT TERM.

THE TRUTH, MY FRIEND, IS THAT YOUR EYES ONLY REVEAL TO YOU WHAT *MAY* OCCUR, NOT NECESSARILY WHAT *WILL*.

THE COLD IS JUST THE BEGINNING.



IF THE POPULATION OF OUR FAIR METROPOLIS MUST MOVE TO WARMER CLIMATES, THIS IS NOT THE...HOW DO YOU PUT IT... "END OF THE WORLD."

BUT IT *IS*, ISAAC. IT IS THE END.



"THIS IS A FOOLISH NOTION, KYLE. THE CHAMPIONS OF THIS WORLD HAVE VANQUISHED CREATURES OF MYTH. WE HAVE ALL BEEN WITNESSES TO THIS VERY DEED. AND NOW YOU SAY THAT WE WON'T SURVIVE THE COLD? WON'T OUR HEROES SAVE US AGAIN? WHAT ABOUT **REED RICHARDS**?"

REED RICHARDS WILL NEVER BE GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO CELEBRATE HIS VICTORY...OR MOURN THE LOSS OF HIS WIFE. IT'S AS IF HE ISN'T ALLOWED TEARS.

HIS HOME, ONCE DR. DOOM'S CASTLE IN THE EUROPEAN COUNTRY OF LATVERIA, WILL COME UNDER SIEGE WITHIN THE NEXT FEW YEARS. AS WILL EVERY TORCH AROUND THE WORLD.

MUTANTITY LIKES ITS POWER. IT IS NOT WILLING TO **SURRENDER** IT.



WHATEVER FRANKLIN DID TO THE CELESTIAL WHEN HE SAVED THE EARTH, DARLING--WHETHER HE **CONSUMED** IT OR **KILLED** IT--CAUSED A LOSS AND/OR REDISTRIBUTION OF THE WORLD'S **VIBRANIUM**.

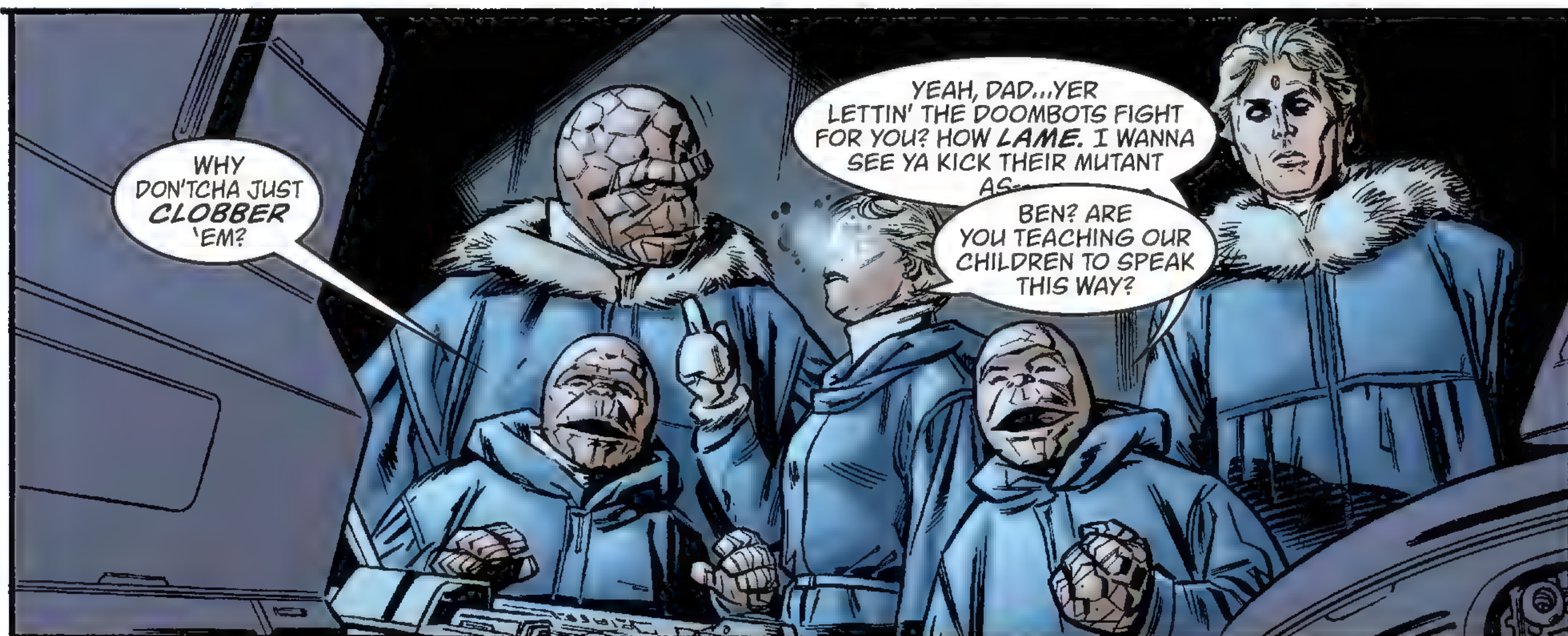
EARTH'S MASS HAS CHANGED. OUR POLARITIES HAVE BEEN AFFECTED.



THE QUESTION IS HOW LONG IT MIGHT TAKE BEFORE OUR **ORBIT** IS AFFECTED AS WELL.

WILL WE BE THROWN OUT OF ORBIT...OR DRAWN CLOSER TO THE **SUN**?

I'M BEING A FOOL, SUE. WE'D NEVER EVEN LIVE THAT LONG. THE MELTING OF THE POLAR ICE CAPS ALONE WILL CAUSE AN ECOLOGICAL SHOCK-WAVE THAT WILL KILL EVERYONE.



WHY
DONTCHA JUST
CLOBBER
'EM?

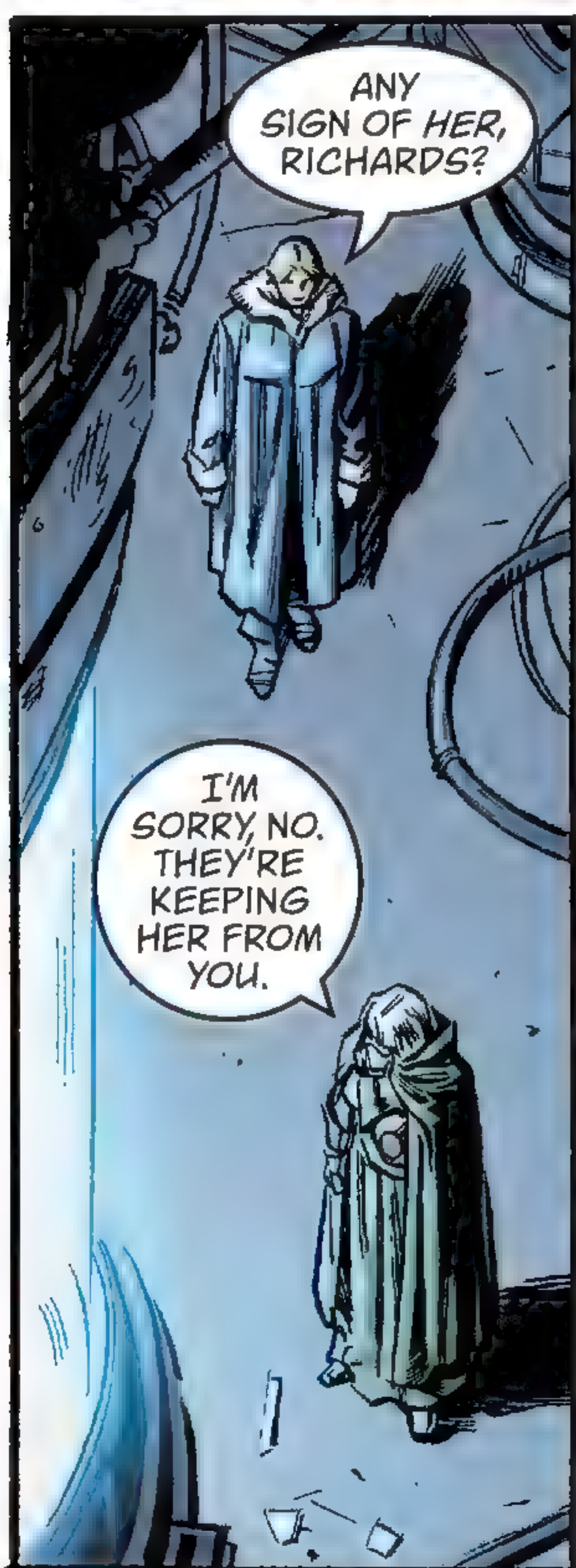
YEAH, DAD...YER
LETTIN' THE DOOMBOTS FIGHT
FOR YOU? HOW **LAME**. I WANNA
SEE YA KICK THEIR MUTANT
AS--

BEN? ARE
YOU TEACHING OUR
CHILDREN TO SPEAK
THIS WAY?



'COURSE NOT, 'LICIA!
YOU DON'T EVEN LET ME **NEAR**
BUZZ AN' CHUCK ANYMORE! SO
DON'T GO GETTIN' BRUCE
BANNER ON MY AS--

BEN!

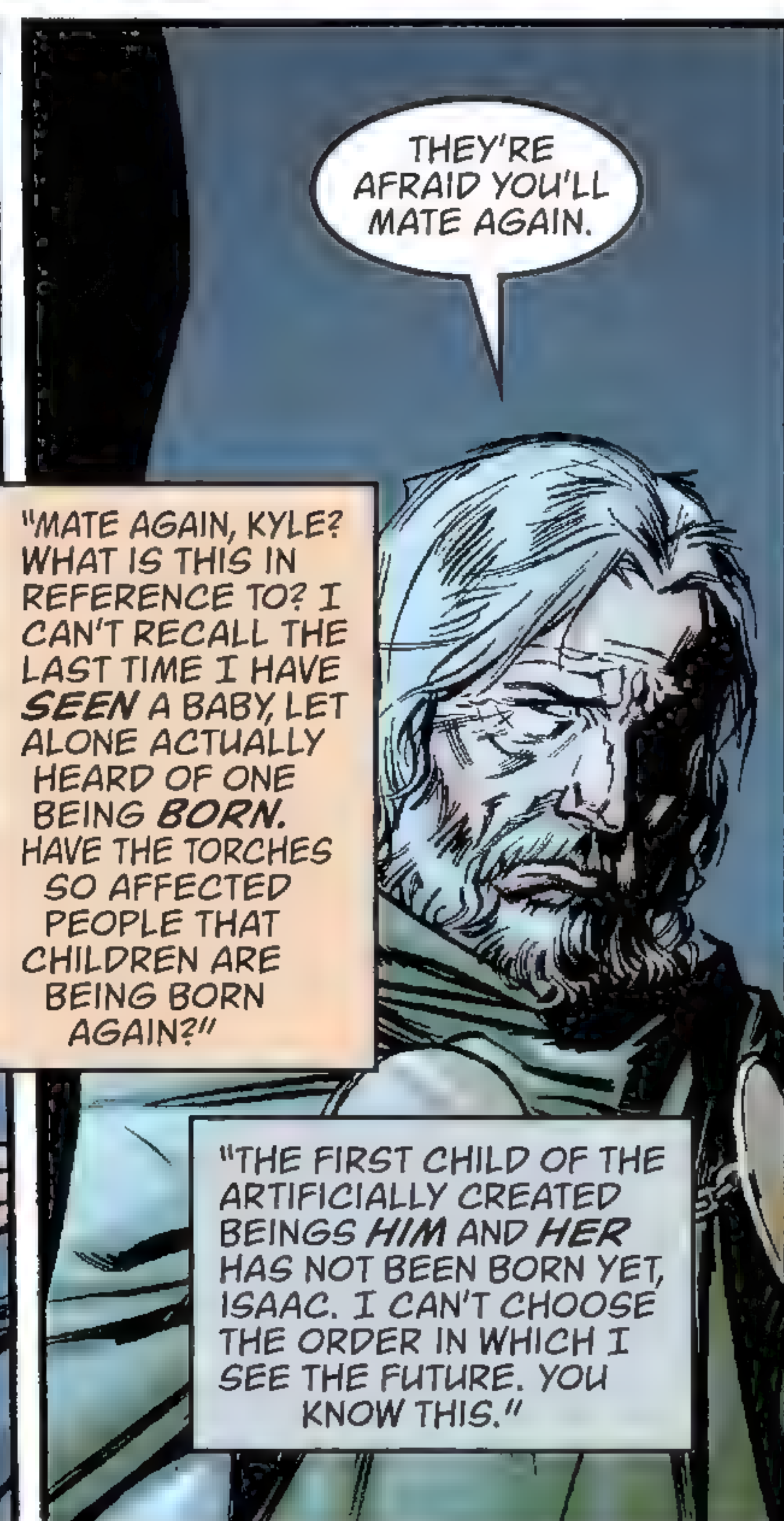


ANY
SIGN OF HER,
RICHARDS?

I'M
SORRY, NO.
THEY'RE
KEEPING
HER FROM
YOU.



BUT
WHY?



THEY'RE
AFRAID YOU'LL
MATE AGAIN.

"MATE AGAIN, KYLE?
WHAT IS THIS IN
REFERENCE TO? I
CAN'T RECALL THE
LAST TIME I HAVE
SEEN A BABY, LET
ALONE ACTUALLY
HEARD OF ONE
BEING **BORN**.
HAVE THE TORCHES
SO AFFECTED
PEOPLE THAT
CHILDREN ARE
BEING BORN
AGAIN?"

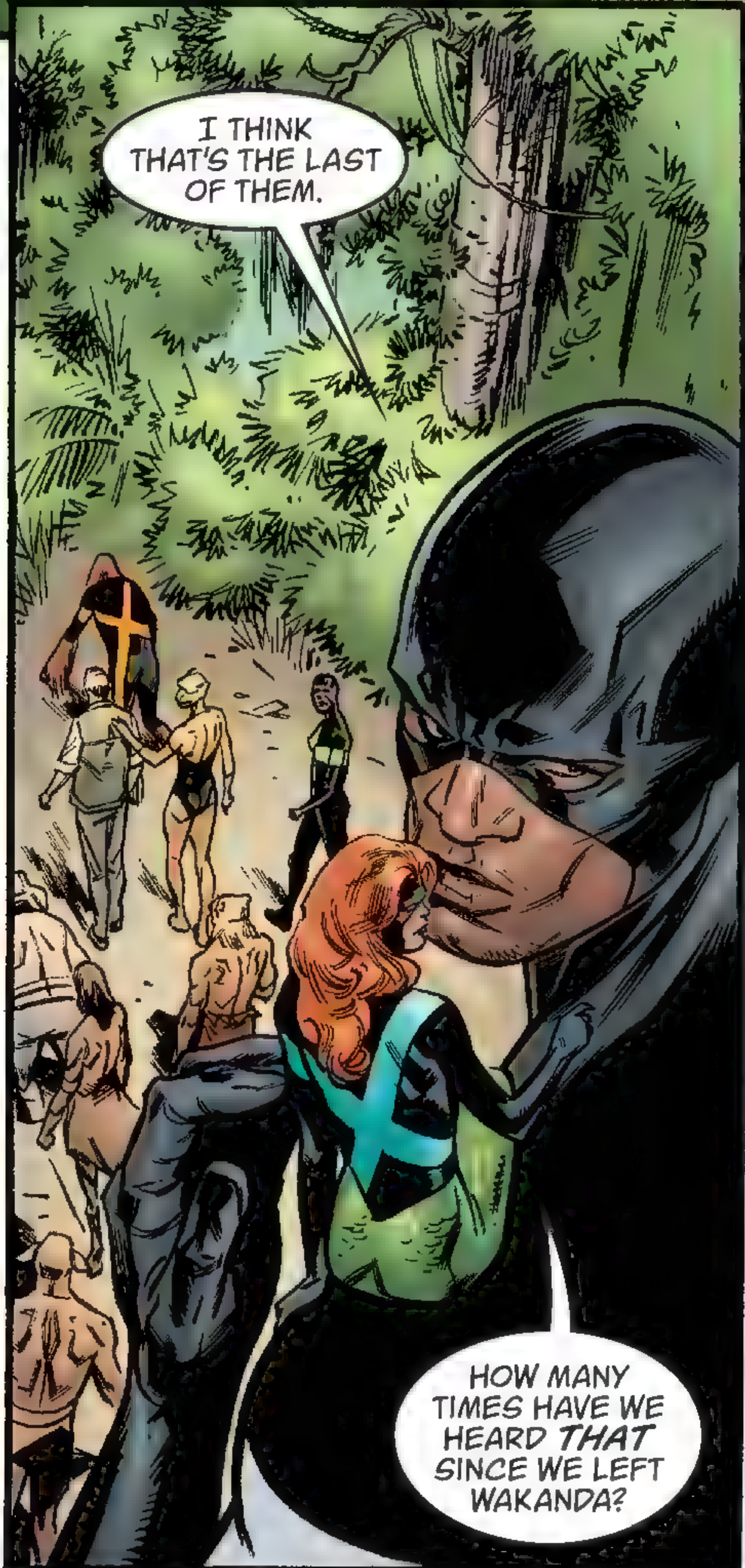
"THE FIRST CHILD OF THE
ARTIFICIALLY CREATED
BEINGS **HIM** AND **HER**
HAS NOT BEEN BORN YET,
ISAAC. I CAN'T CHOOSE
THE ORDER IN WHICH I
SEE THE FUTURE. YOU
KNOW THIS."



"SCOTT SUMMERS AND A NEW TEAM OF X-MEN HAVE HELPED THE ANI-MEN FLEE TO THE SAVAGE LAND IN THE ANTARCTIC."

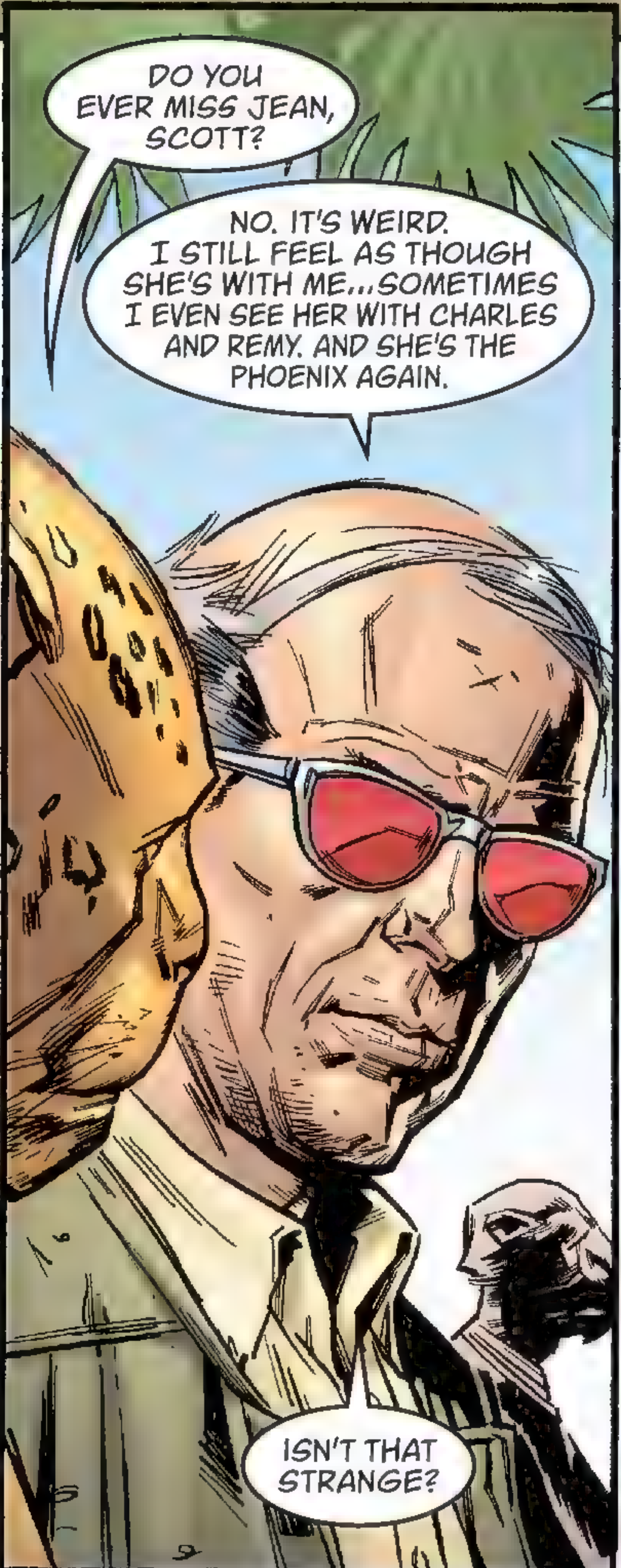
I'M SURPRISED YOU RAN *HERE* OF ALL PLACES, SCOTT. IT'S NOT LIKE IT'S ANY DIFFERENT FROM ANY OTHER PLACE ANYMORE.

KEVIN.



I THINK THAT'S THE LAST OF THEM.

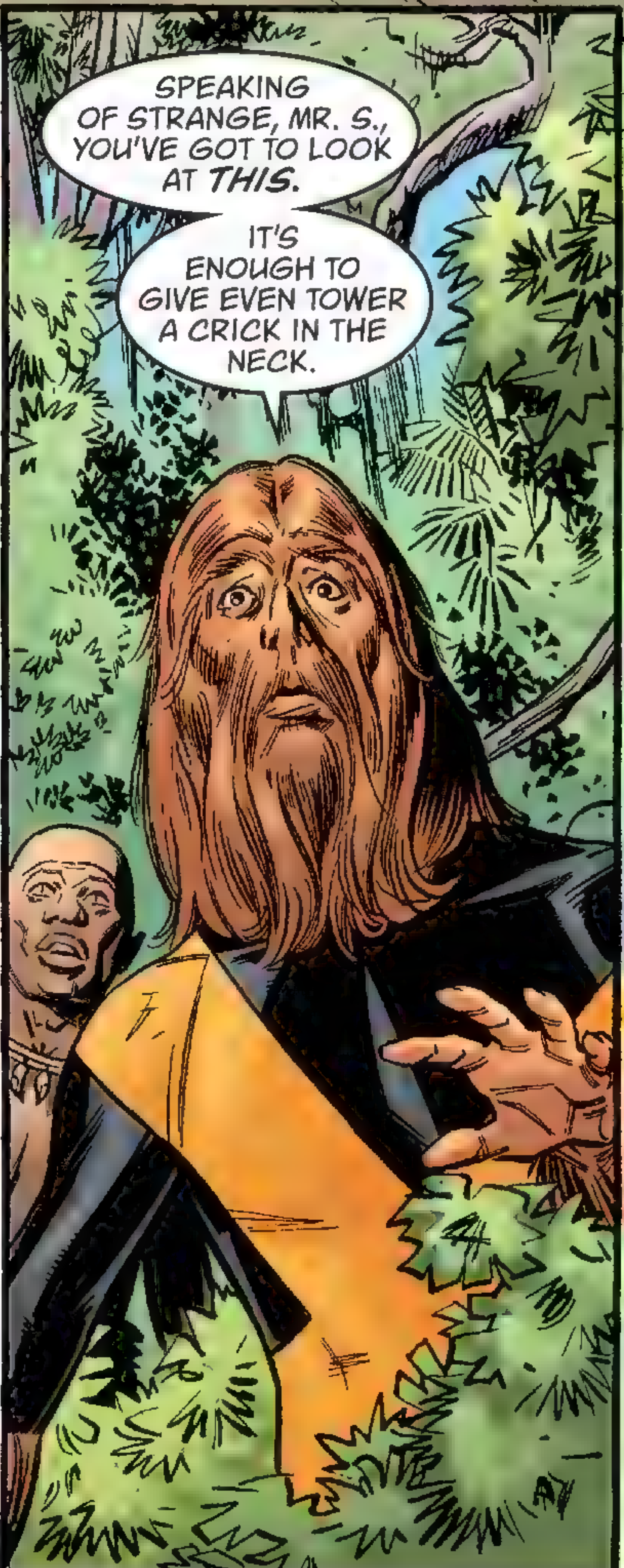
HOW MANY TIMES HAVE WE HEARD *THAT* SINCE WE LEFT WAKANDA?



DO YOU EVER MISS JEAN, SCOTT?

NO. IT'S WEIRD. I STILL FEEL AS THOUGH SHE'S WITH ME...SOMETIMES I EVEN SEE HER WITH CHARLES AND REMY. AND SHE'S THE PHOENIX AGAIN.

ISN'T THAT STRANGE?



SPEAKING OF STRANGE, MR. S., YOU'VE GOT TO LOOK AT *THIS*.

IT'S ENOUGH TO GIVE EVEN TOWER A CRICK IN THE NECK.



"**BOBBY DRAKE** BUILT A WONDERLAND ATOP THE WORLD FOR HIMSELF AND THOSE WHO LIVE IN THE COLDEST REACHES OF THE PLANET.

"THEY'LL BE FORCED TO LEAVE IT BEHIND SOON AND HEAD FOR A COLDER CLIMATE DOWN SOUTH.

"HE AND **WARREN** WILL BE HERE SOON."

"WONDERFUL. I'LL PUT TEA ON..."

"**DAREDEVIL** RETURNS TO HIS ACT AS THE 'MAN WHO CANNOT DIE' BEFORE SOLD-OUT AUDIENCES EVERYWHERE."

"I HAD HEARD THAT HE'D BEEN PLANNING A GOODWILL TOUR AT SOME POINT IN THE FUTURE."

"YEAH. HIS PRESS AGENT SAYS HE'S WILLING TO BE GROUND INTO SAUSAGE FOR THE SAKE OF THE WAKANDA WILDLIFE PRESERVE EFFORT."

"PRESERVE?"

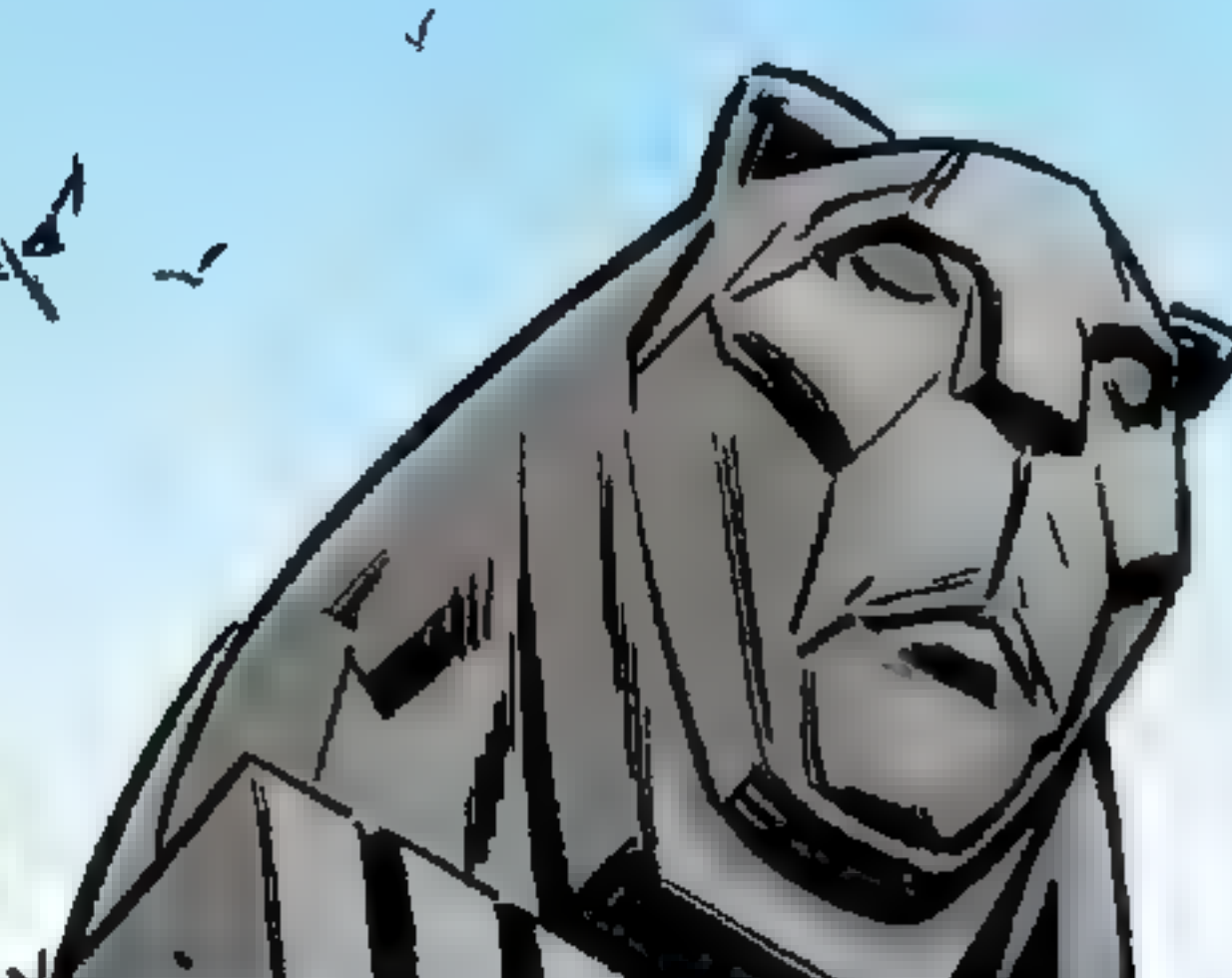


"THE NATION OF WAKANDA HAS BECOME A PRESERVE FOR ANIMAL LIFE. MEAT BEING AS SCARCE AS IT IS TODAY, THE BLACK PANTHER RALLIED HIS PEOPLE AROUND THE IDEA OF A SAFE HAVEN FOR WILDLIFE EVERYWHERE.

"IT IS ONE OF THE FEW PLACES IN WHICH HUMAN TORCHES WERE NOT LIT."

"THIS MUST BE THE VERY PURPOSE FOR WHICH THEY WERE FORCED TO LEAVE THE SAVAGE LAND--THE WEATHER."

"I DON'T THINK THAT'S *EXACTLY* HOW IT HAPPENS."



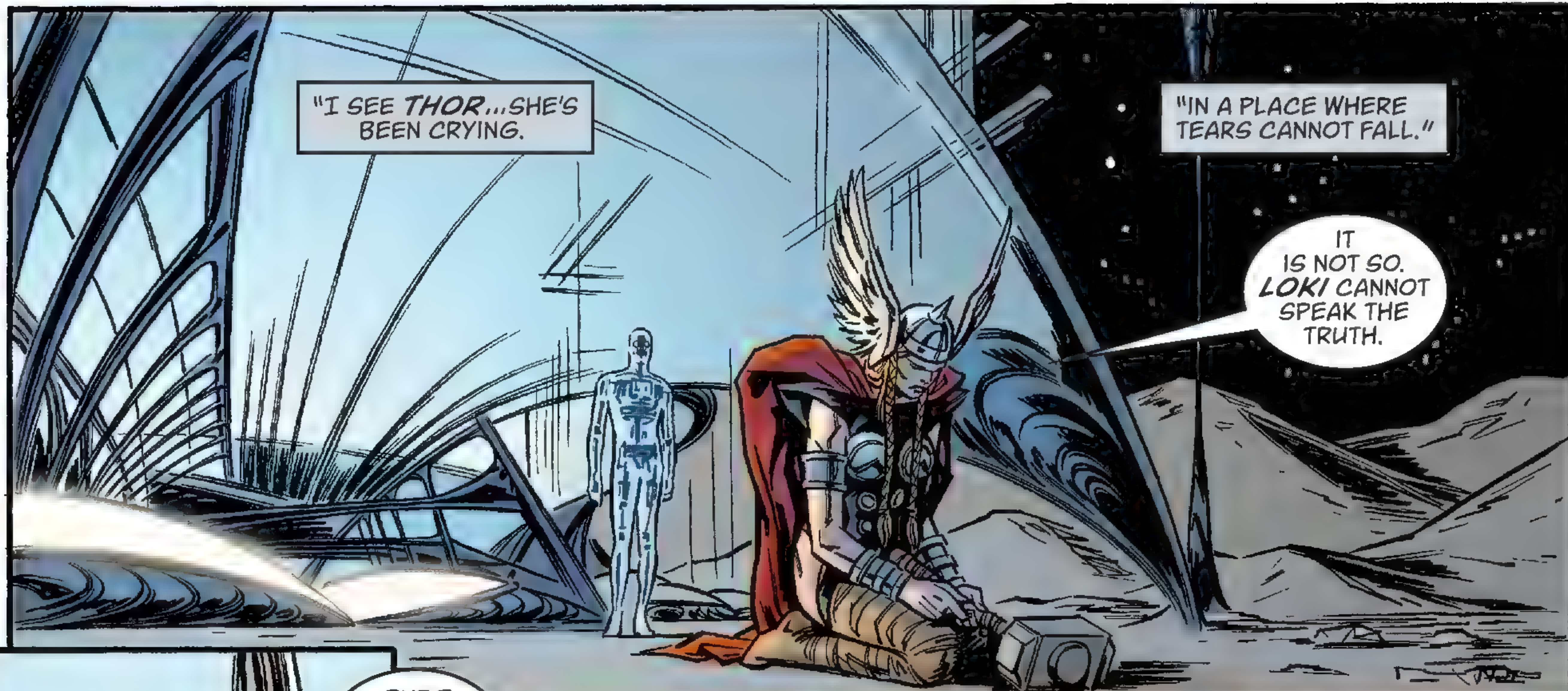
"BANNER AND HULK WILL JOIN HANK MCCOY IN WAKANDA IN AN EFFORT TO KEEP THE WAKANDAN WILDLIFE SANCTUARY FREE FROM THE CONSTANT ATTACKS OF THOSE UNWILLING TO SETTLE FOR THE GRAIN SUPPLIED BY RUSSIA."

"THE PRESERVE IS *UNAFFECTED* BY THE WEATHER, ISAAC."



"I WAS UNDER THE IMPRESSION THAT THE DARK COUNTRY OF AFRICA HAD BECOME A FROZEN WASTELAND. WHAT WILL HAPPEN?"

"I DON'T KNOW. I CAN ONLY GUESS THAT THEY WILL BE FORCED TO LEAVE THEIR NATIVE HOMELAND."



"I SEE *THOR*...SHE'S BEEN CRYING.

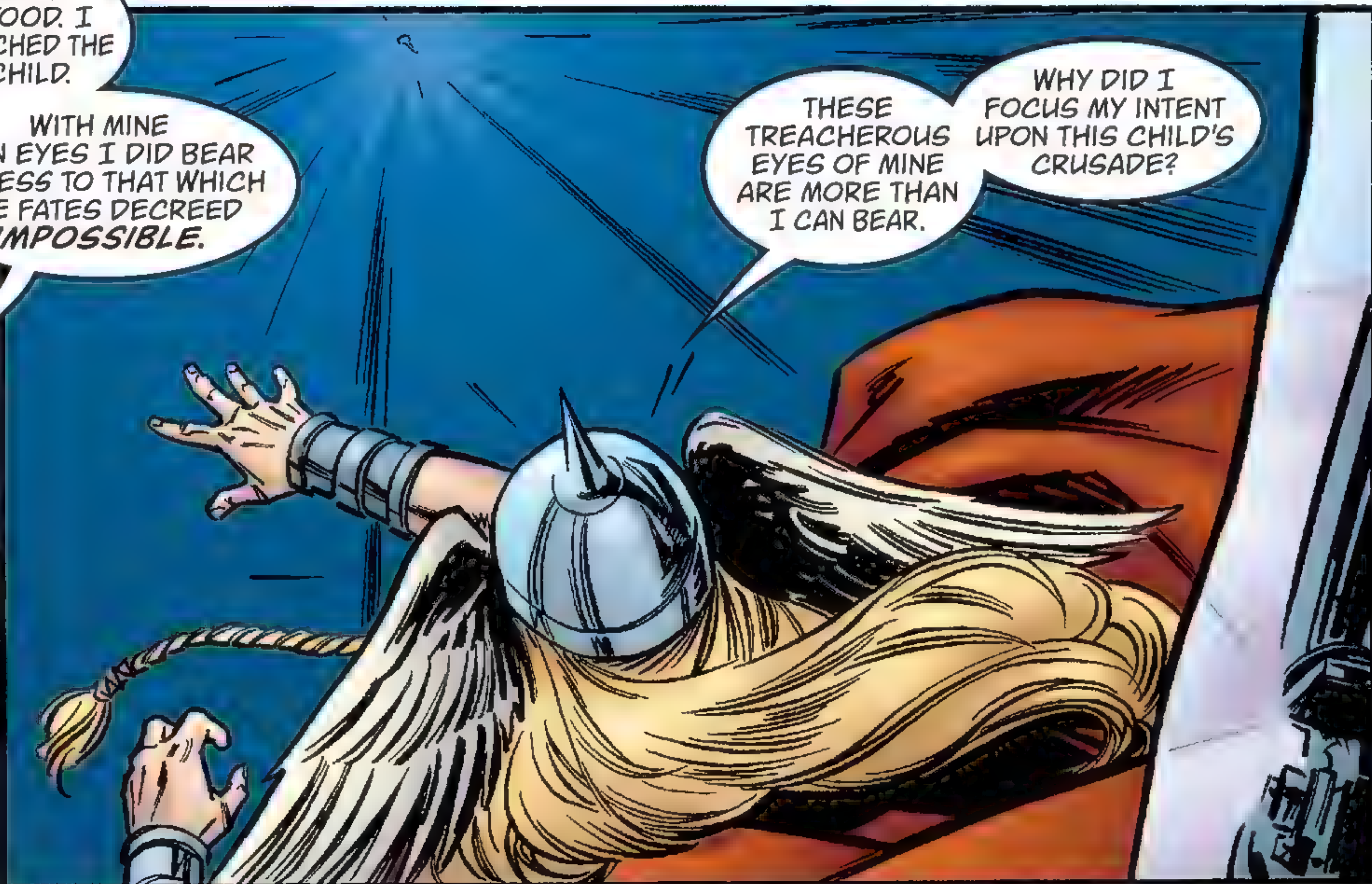
"IN A PLACE WHERE TEARS CANNOT FALL."

IT IS NOT SO. *LOKI* CANNOT SPEAK THE TRUTH.



BUT I STOOD. I WATCHED THE CHILD.

WITH MINE OWN EYES I DID BEAR WITNESS TO THAT WHICH THE FATES DECREED IMPOSSIBLE.

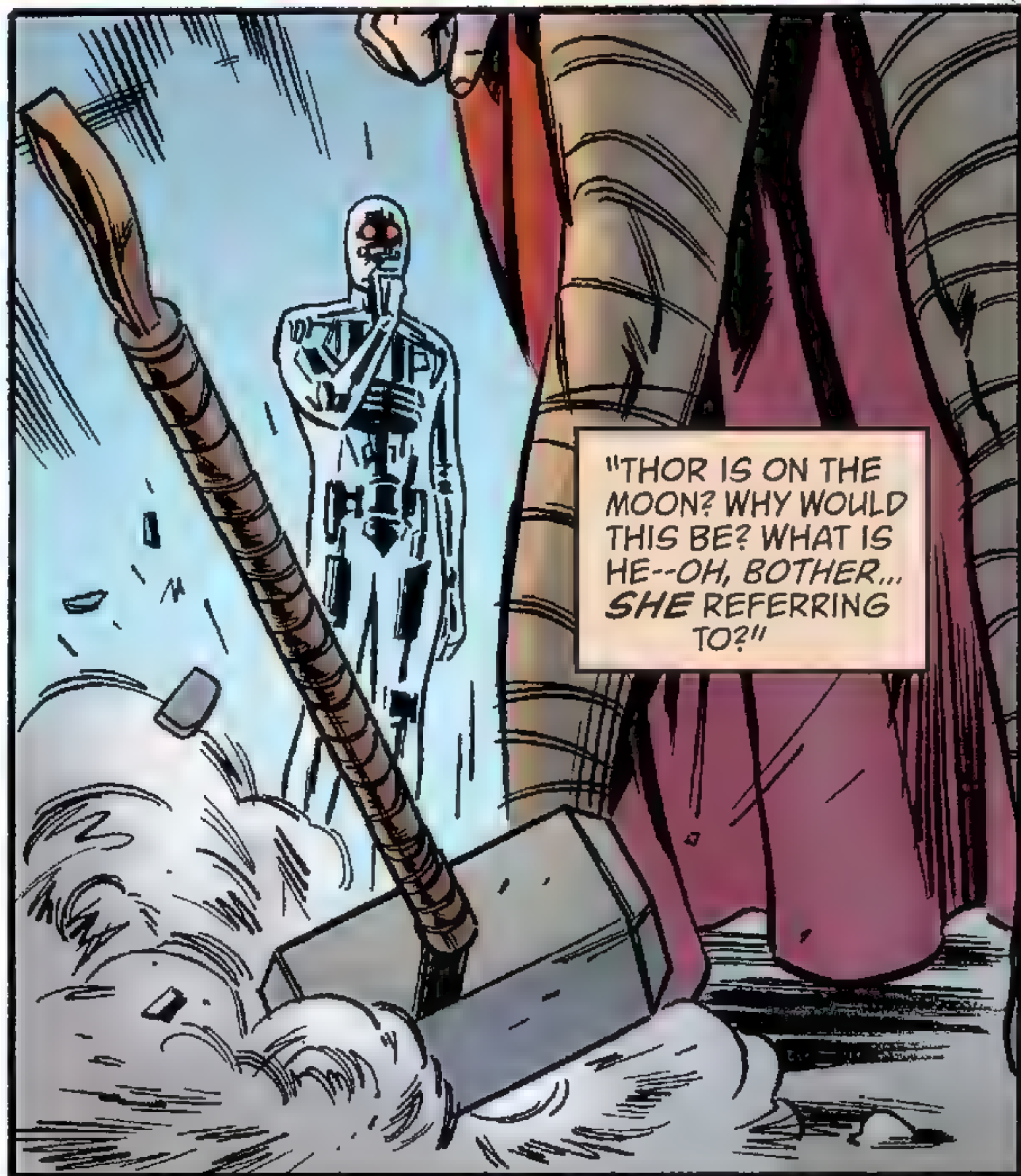


THESE TREACHEROUS EYES OF MINE ARE MORE THAN I CAN BEAR.

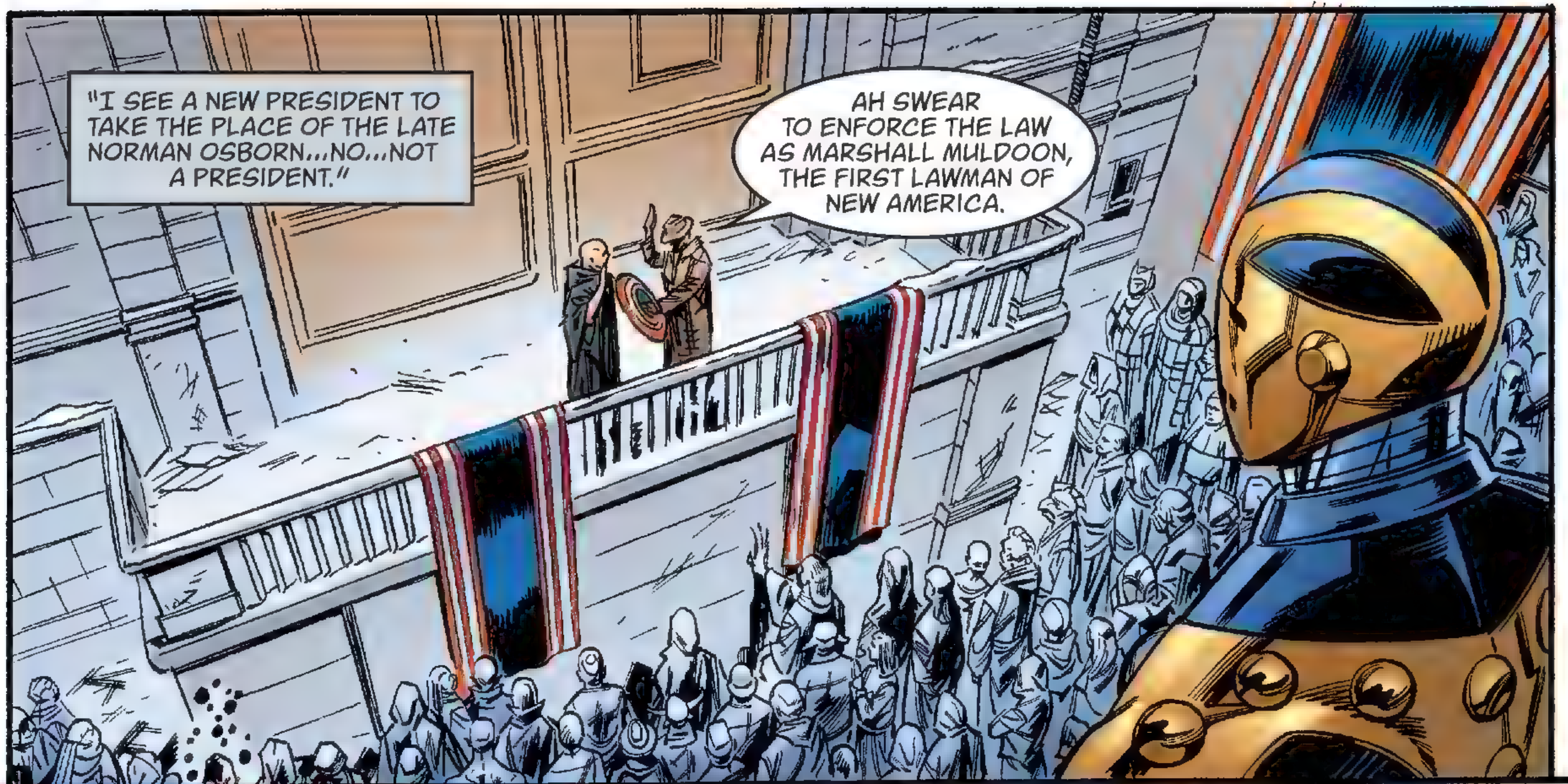
WHY DID I FOCUS MY INTENT UPON THIS CHILD'S CRUSADE?



IF I AM NOT A HERO, WHAT THEN SHALL I BE?

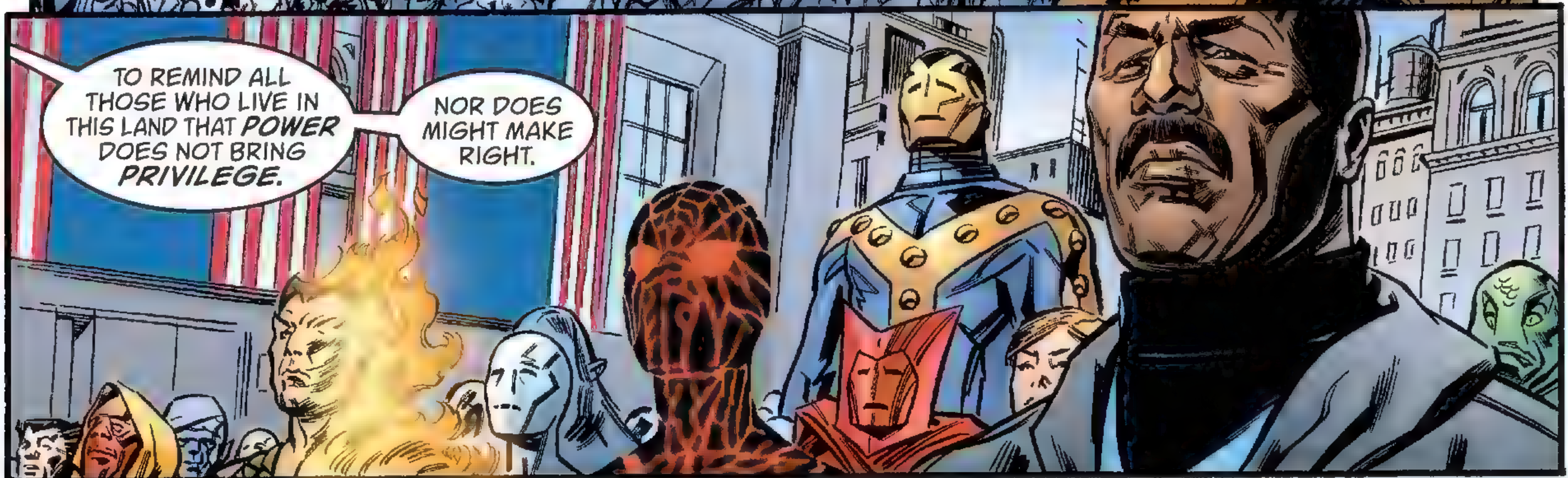


"THOR IS ON THE MOON? WHY WOULD THIS BE? WHAT IS HE--OH, BOTHER... SHE REFERRING TO?"



"I SEE A NEW PRESIDENT TO TAKE THE PLACE OF THE LATE NORMAN OSBORN...NO...NOT A PRESIDENT."

AH SWEAR TO ENFORCE THE LAW AS MARSHALL MULDOON, THE FIRST LAWMAN OF NEW AMERICA.



TO REMIND ALL THOSE WHO LIVE IN THIS LAND THAT **POWER** DOES NOT BRING **PRIVILEGE**.

NOR DOES MIGHT MAKE RIGHT.



IT SHOULD BE YOU UP HERE, STEVE. AH I'M AN OLD MAN.

NOT COMPARED TO ME, JACK.

BESIDES, THE WAR'S OVER.

YOU **SURE** ABOUT THAT, BOY? AH GOT THE FEELIN' IT'S JUST ABOUT TA BEGIN.



NOT NOW, YOUR HOLINESS, BUT SOON. THERE CAN ONLY BE **ONE** WHO LEADS. WE MUST WAIT. AND WATCH.



WAIT AND 'TIK' WATCH.



"IN EGYPT, MARC SPECTOR--
WHO I DO REMEMBER FROM THE
DEFENDERS--HAS BEEN REBORN
SO MANY TIMES FROM THE POWER
OF THE REANIMATOR STONE
KHONSHU THAT HIS SOLE PURPOSE
IN LIFE IS TO PROTECT IT FROM
THOSE WHO ARE FEARFUL OF THE
LOSS OF **DEATH'S** POWER.

"FORCES LIKE THE
SONS OF SET.

"OR THE TONG
OF CREEP."

YOUR
FRIENDS ARE ALL
DEAD, SPECTOR. ALL
WE BRING YOU IS THE
OPPORTUNITY TO
JOIN THEM.



NO
NEED TO
THANK
ME.

"WHY HAS DEATH
LOST POWER?"

"THERE ARE THOSE WHO BELIEVE THAT
DEATH IS MORE THAN AN IDEA OR STATE
OF BEING, BUT A BEING IN AND OF ITSELF.
A *PERSONALITY*."



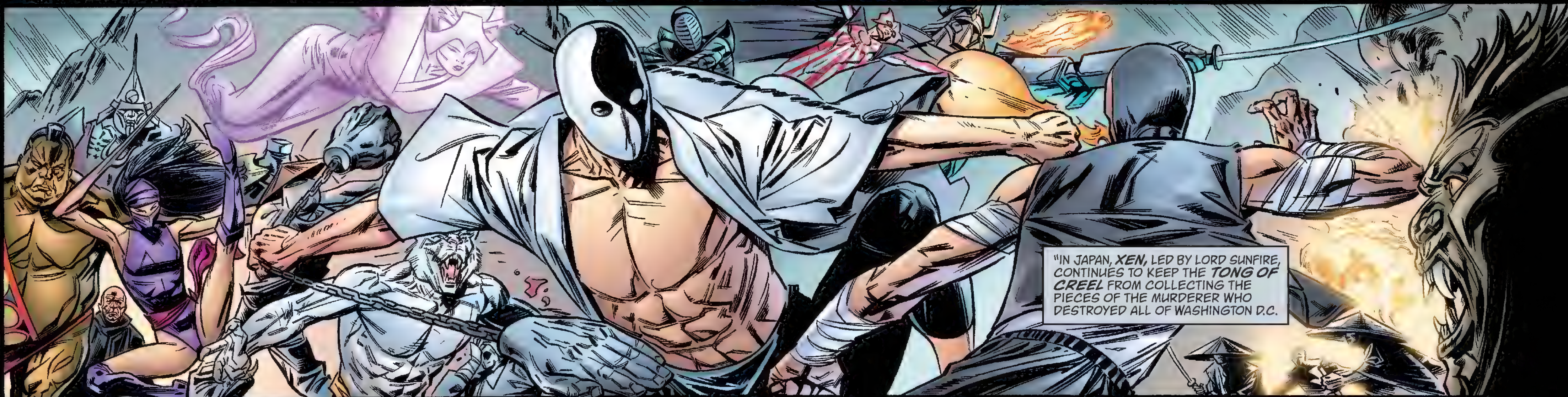
"BUT NO ONE SEEMS TO AGE ANYMORE.
AND SO THIS PERSONALITY HAS LOST
ITS POWER. THE ONLY WAY TO DIE, I
SUPPOSE, IS THROUGH VIOLENCE."



"AND THAT IS WHY THE DEATH
WORSHIPPERS LIKE THE SONS
OF SET EXIST. AND WHY THEY
MUST DESTROY A STONE
CAPABLE OF BRINGING THE
DEAD BACK TO LIFE."

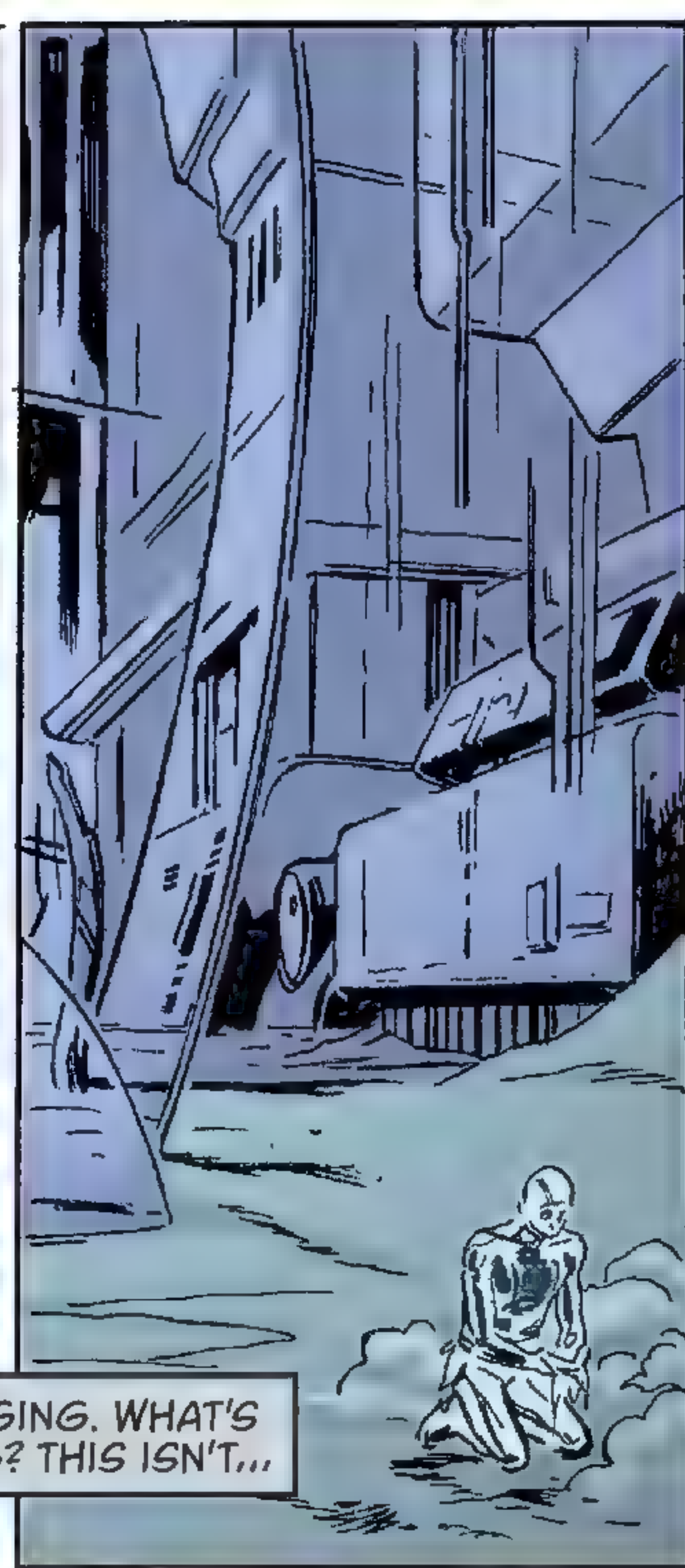
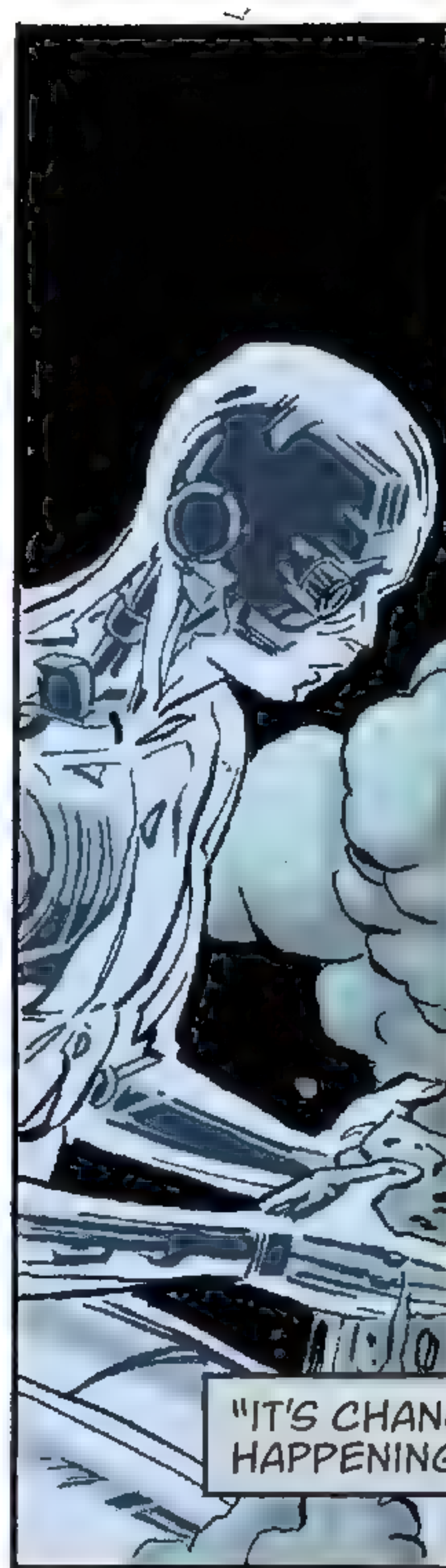


YOU TALK
LIKE I HAVE A
CHOICE IN
THIS.

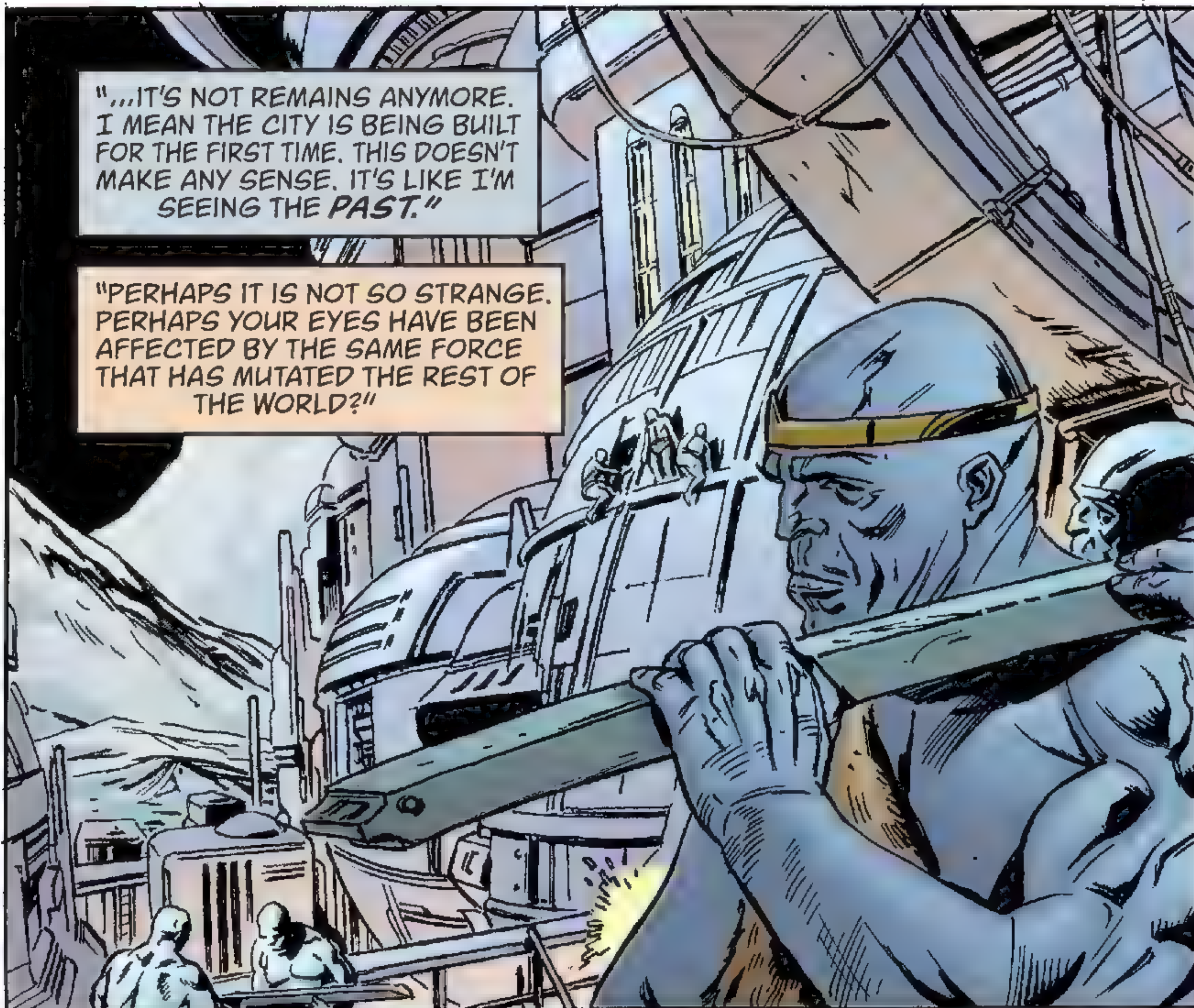




"I'M SEEING SOMEONE THERE, A **ROBOT**, I THINK...HE'S DIGGING IN THE REMAINS OF A CITY ON THE MOON.

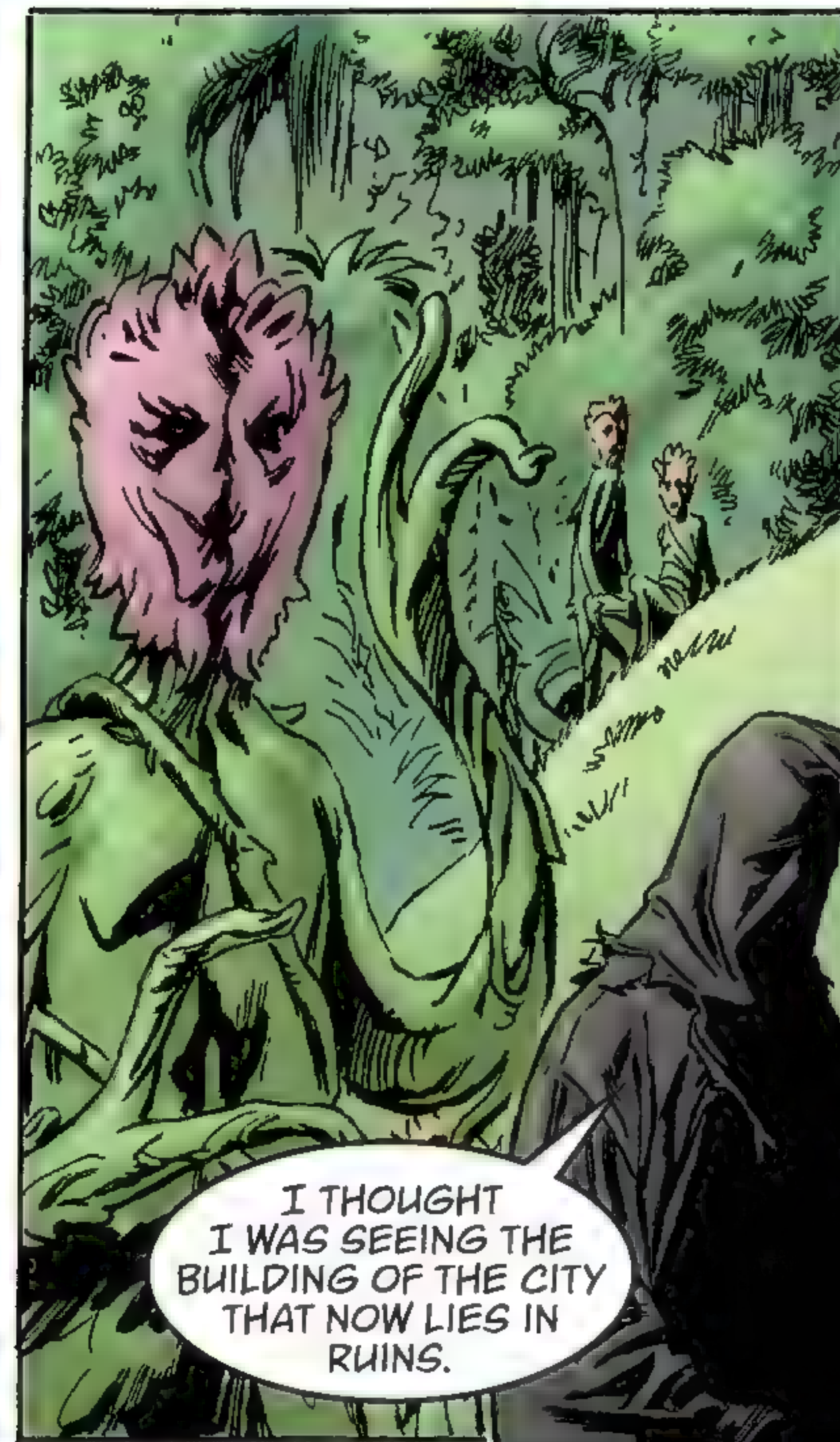


"IT'S CHANGING. WHAT'S HAPPENING? THIS ISN'T..."

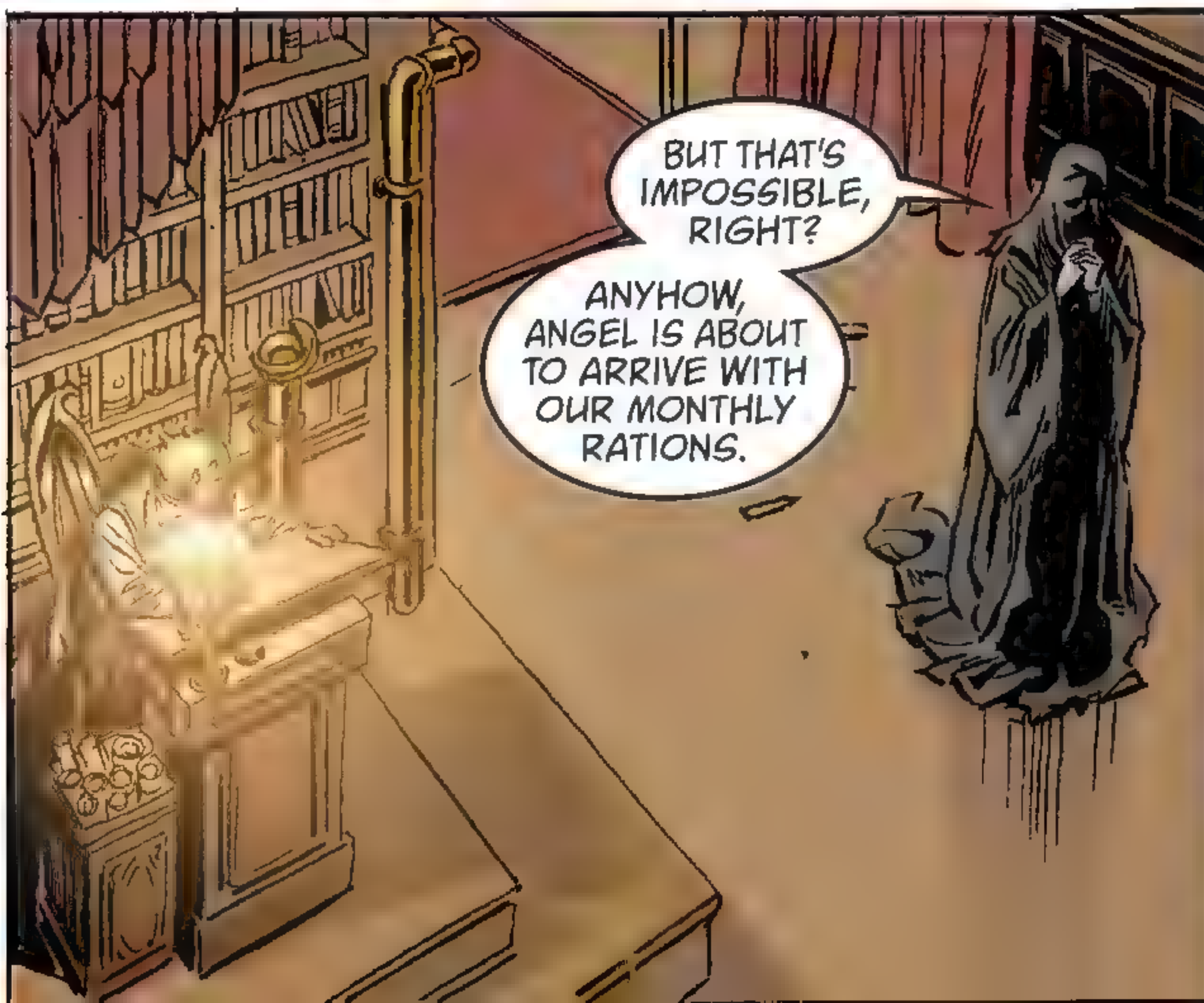


"...IT'S NOT REMAINS ANYMORE. I MEAN THE CITY IS BEING BUILT FOR THE FIRST TIME. THIS DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE. IT'S LIKE I'M SEEING THE **PAST**."

"PERHAPS IT IS NOT SO STRANGE. PERHAPS YOUR EYES HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY THE SAME FORCE THAT HAS MUTATED THE REST OF THE WORLD?"



I THOUGHT I WAS SEEING THE BUILDING OF THE CITY THAT NOW LIES IN RUINS.



BUT THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE, RIGHT?

ANYHOW, ANGEL IS ABOUT TO ARRIVE WITH OUR MONTHLY RATIONS.



I THINK YOU MEAN TO SAY, **YOUR** MONTHLY RATIONS.





ONE OF THE X-MEN, LONG BEFORE THE ENTIRE WORLD HAD MUTATED, CLAIMED TO HAVE HAD AN EXPERIENCE, A *VISION* OF THE FUTURE.

A FUTURE WHERE THE *SENTINELS* HAD KILLED EVERY HERO ON EARTH BECAUSE OF THE DEATH OF A POLITICAL LEADER.

WE X-MEN BECAME *SLAVES* TO THAT RARE GLIMPSE OF THINGS TO COME.

EVERY TIME SOMEONE IN THE PUBLIC EYE WAS ENDANGERED, WE REACTED WITH A SENSE OF THE APOCALYPSE. A CONVICTION THAT *THIS* WAS WHAT THE WARNING WAS FOR, THAT *THIS* WAS THE END.

AS A RESULT, I THINK WE ACTUALLY CAUSED OR AT LEAST AMPLIFIED SOME OF THE PERSECUTION MUTANTS RECEIVED.

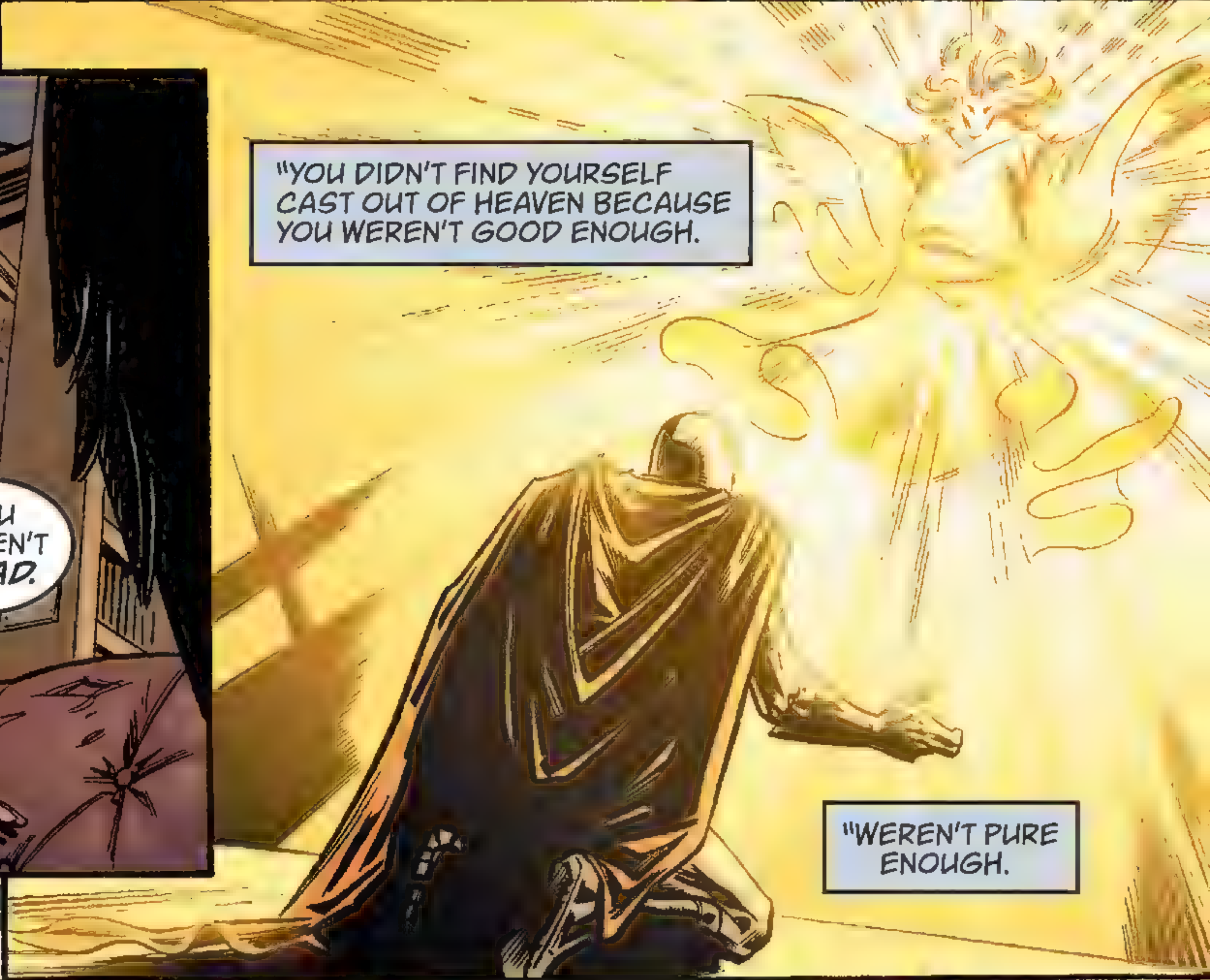
AND LIVING OUR DAYS IN FEARS OF FUTURES NOW PAST IS NO WAY TO LIVE.



YOU'RE
LUCKY,
ANGEL.

YOU DIDN'T
HAVE THE VISION. YOU
DON'T HAVE THE NIGHT-
MARES.

YOU
WEREN'T
DEAD.



"YOU DIDN'T FIND YOURSELF
CAST OUT OF HEAVEN BECAUSE
YOU WEREN'T GOOD ENOUGH.

"WEREN'T PURE
ENOUGH.

"YOU DIDN'T FIND YOURSELF GIVEN A SECOND
CHANCE IN A PAIR OF EYES THAT COULD SEE
THE *FUTURE*.

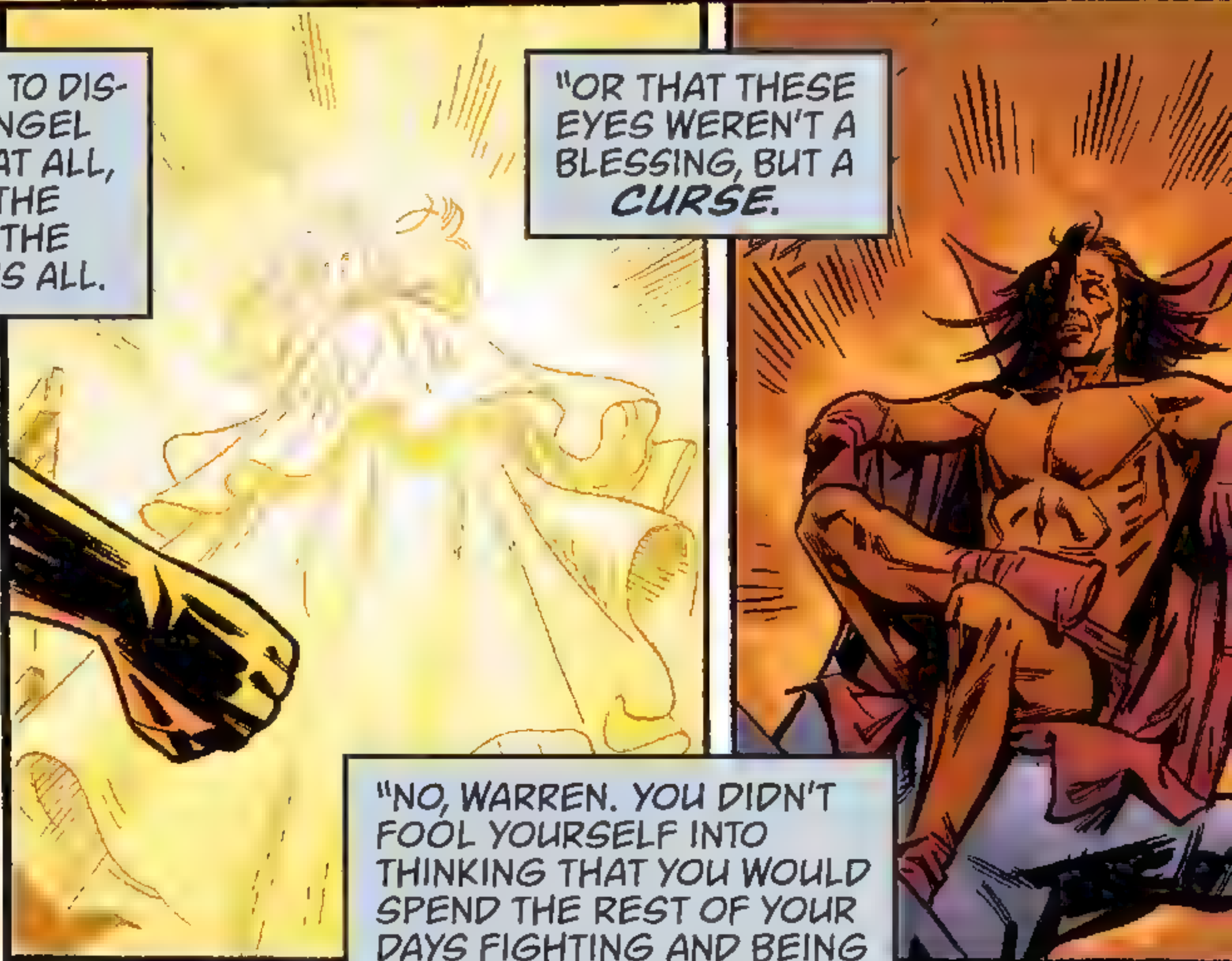
"YOU WEREN'T COMMISSIONED TO PROTECT THE
INNOCENT FROM THE UNFORESEEN LIKE I WAS.



"ONLY TO BE BRANDED A CRIMINAL
FOR ATTACKING THE GUILTY BEFORE
THEY HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO
BECOME THE GUILTY.

"YOU WEREN'T THERE TO DIS-
COVER THAT THE ANGEL
WASN'T AN ANGEL AT ALL,
BUT *MEPHISTO*. THE
MYTH-MADE-REAL. THE
ADVERSARY OF US ALL.

"OR THAT THESE
EYES WEREN'T A
BLESSING, BUT A
CURSE.



"NO, WARREN. YOU DIDN'T
FOOL YOURSELF INTO
THINKING THAT YOU WOULD
SPEND THE REST OF YOUR
DAYS FIGHTING AND BEING
A STEP AHEAD OF THE
DEVIL, ONLY TO DISCOVER..."

...THAT THE
INTENSITY OF THE
VISIONS WAS TOO
GREAT.

THAT YOU
WERE OF NO USE
TO ANYONE AT
ALL.





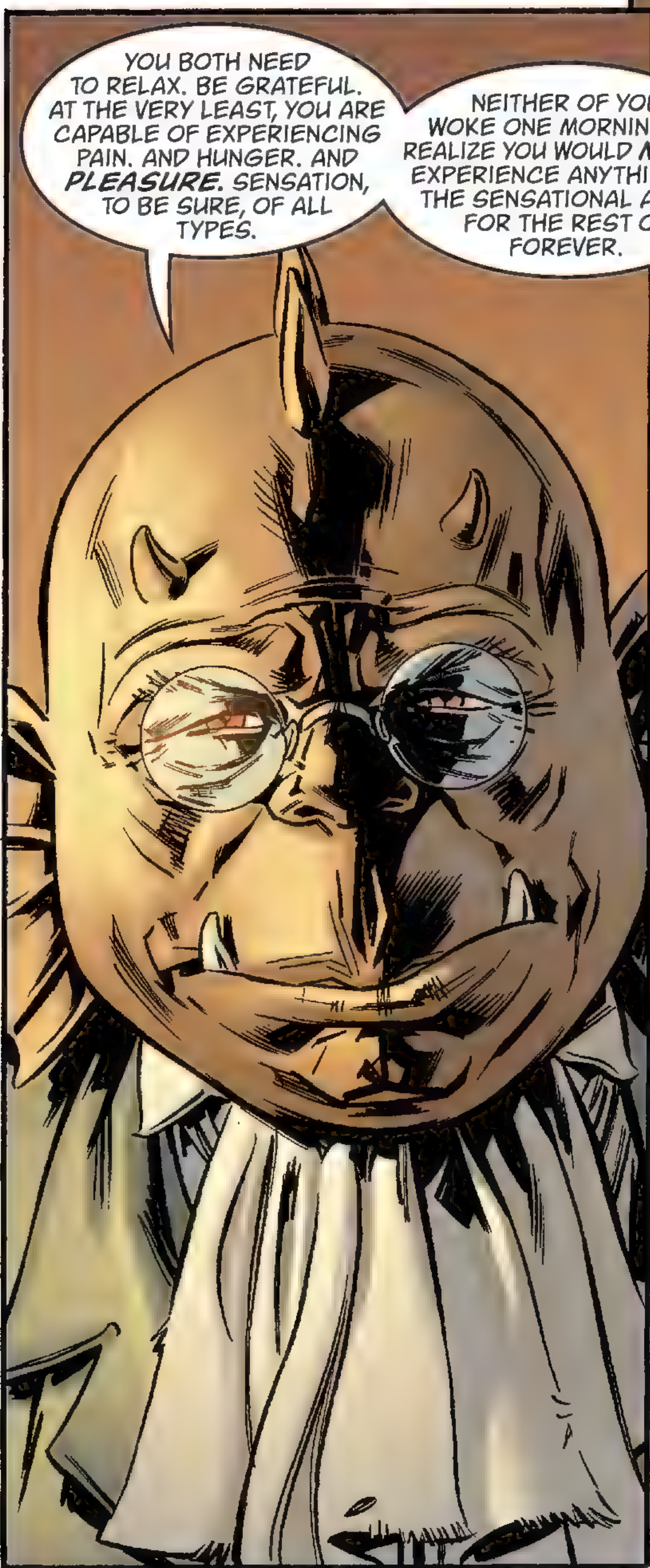
THAT IS, UNTIL I HAPPENED ALONG, AND MADE OBVIOUS TO MR. RICHMOND HOW VERY MUCH **GOOD** HE COULD DO.

WE'RE CHRONICLING HISTORY, WARREN. FUTURE GENERATIONS OF MANKIND WILL HAVE THE GOOD FORTUNE TO KNOW WHAT OCCURRED IN THESE CHAOTIC TIMES.



I'M SORRY, KYLE. IT MUST HAVE BEEN HARD FOR YOU.

IF IT'S ANY CONSOLATION, I WAS DEAD, TOO. I KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO MAKE A DEAL WITH THE DEVIL. I UNDERSTAND HOW LONG IT TAKES TO GET FREE OF THAT.



YOU BOTH NEED TO RELAX. BE GRATEFUL. AT THE VERY LEAST, YOU ARE CAPABLE OF EXPERIENCING PAIN. AND HUNGER. AND **PLEASURE**. SENSATION, TO BE SURE, OF ALL TYPES.

NEITHER OF YOU WOKE ONE MORNING TO REALIZE YOU WOULD **NEVER** EXPERIENCE ANYTHING OF THE SENSATIONAL AGAIN FOR THE REST OF FOREVER.



YOU FAIL TO KNOW HOW OLD YOU ARE UNTIL YOU DISCOVER THAT YOU ARE NEVER GOING TO DIE.



PLEASE...HUMOR AN OLD MAN. I REALIZE I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE ON THIS PLANET WHO MISSES BEING HUMAN.

NOW, KYLE, LET US RETURN TO OUR COMMISSION.

BUT DOESN'T IT KIND OF MAKE YOU WONDER, YOU KNOW? WHERE THEY ALL COME FROM? WHY THEY'RE HERE?

"IT SEEMS LIKE NO MATTER WHAT TEAM YOU WERE A PART OF, WHETHER THE DEFENDERS, FANTASTIC FOUR, AVENGERS, CHAMPIONS, WHATEVER--THERE WERE METAPHYSICAL MONSTROSITIES TRYING TO TAKE YOU DOWN.

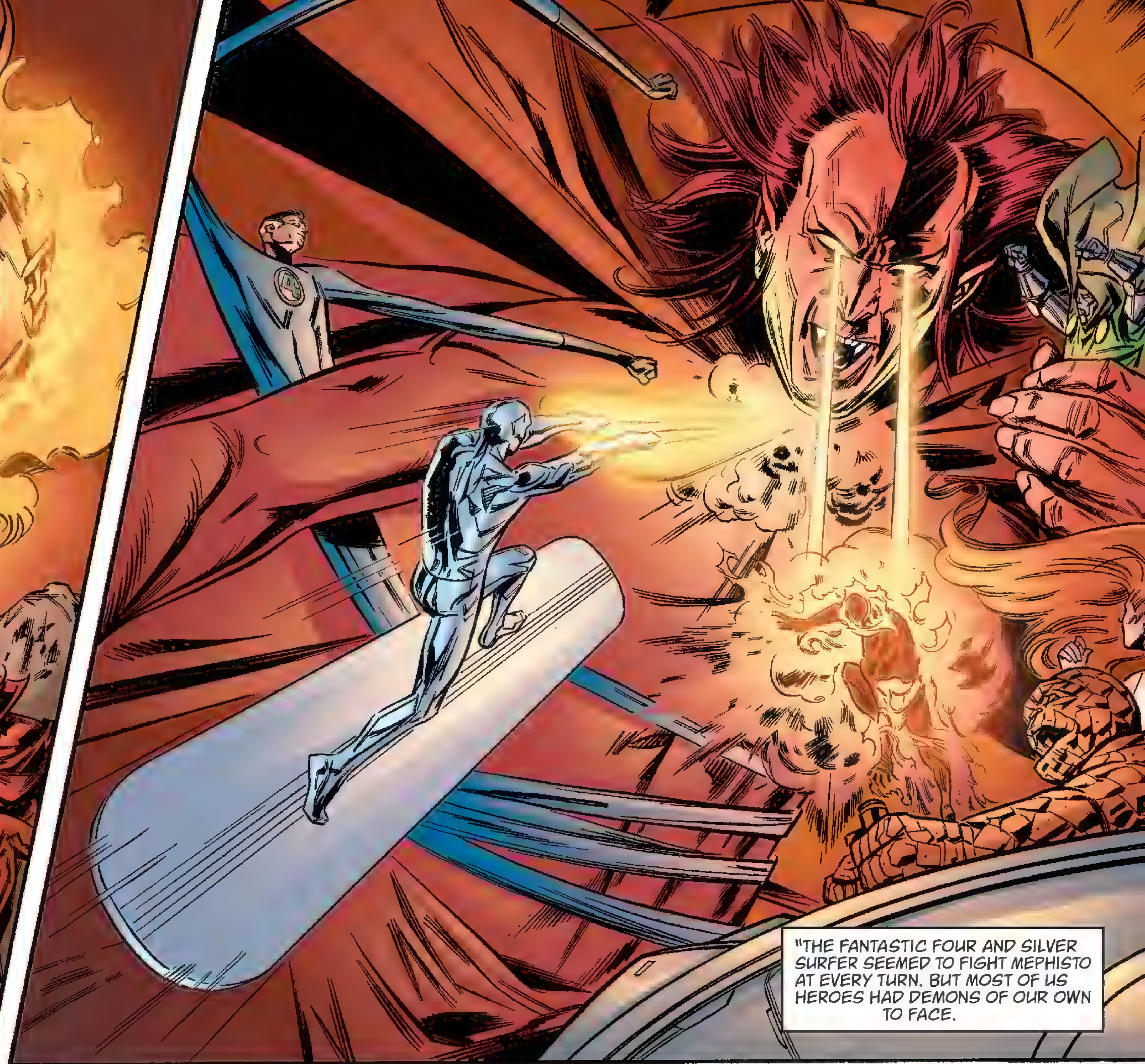
"IT WASN'T FOR POWER, OR PROPERTY, OR OUT OF JEALOUSY, OR FOR REVENGE. NONE OF THE THINGS **WE** FOUGHT FOR.

"IT WAS FOR US. IT WAS FOR **CONTROL** OF US.

"SOMETIMES I THINK THAT IF WE HAD ONLY THOUGHT ABOUT WHAT IT WAS WE WERE FIGHTING, IT MIGHT HAVE CHANGED A LOT.

"THAT WAS XAVIER'S MISTAKE. IF ONLY WE HAD FOCUSED ON AN ENEMY THAT THREATENED BOTH HUMANITY AND MUTANTS. IT WAS A FOOL'S ERRAND TO TRY AND CONVINCE HUMANITY THAT THERE WAS NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN US AND THEM.

"MAYBE I CAN'T BLAME CHARLES EVEN FOR THAT. OUR BATTLES AGAINST THESE COMMON ENEMIES WERE SEGREGATED, TOO. ALMOST AS IF THE ENEMY DIDN'T WANT US UNIFIED.



"THE FANTASTIC FOUR AND SILVER SURFER SEEMED TO FIGHT MEPHISTO AT EVERY TURN. BUT MOST OF US HEROES HAD DEMONS OF OUR OWN TO FACE.



"THE X-MEN HAD **BELASCO**."

"IT WOULD BE EASY TO BLAME DOCTOR STRANGE. OR THE MAN-THING. OR GHOST RIDER."

"WASN'T STRANGE RESPONSIBLE FOR BREAKING DOWN THE WALLS BETWEEN REALITIES? IT DOESN'T MATTER. NOT REALLY."

"BUT I HAVE A HUNCH THAT WE WERE BEING STRUCK AT LONG BEFORE STEPHEN CAME ON THE SCENE."

THANK YOU, WARREN, FOR THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON.

I SEE YOU HAVE CHOSEN TO LIVE UP TO YOUR NAME IN **WORD** AS WELL AS **DEED**.

YOU'RE BEING KINDA HEAVY-HANDED, ISAAC.

WELL, I **AM** MADE OF STONE.

TEA?

YES... THANKS.

KYLE... WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR NECK?

I WAS SHAVING ONE MORNING... AND HAD A VISION.

ISAAC SHAVES ME NOW.



I HAVE COMPLETED ANOTHER PAGE.

WE HAVE THE GOOD FORTUNE OF A BOOKMAKER BELOW US WHO IS ABLE TO BIND OUR VOLUMES.



OH. I SEE.



SHOOOP

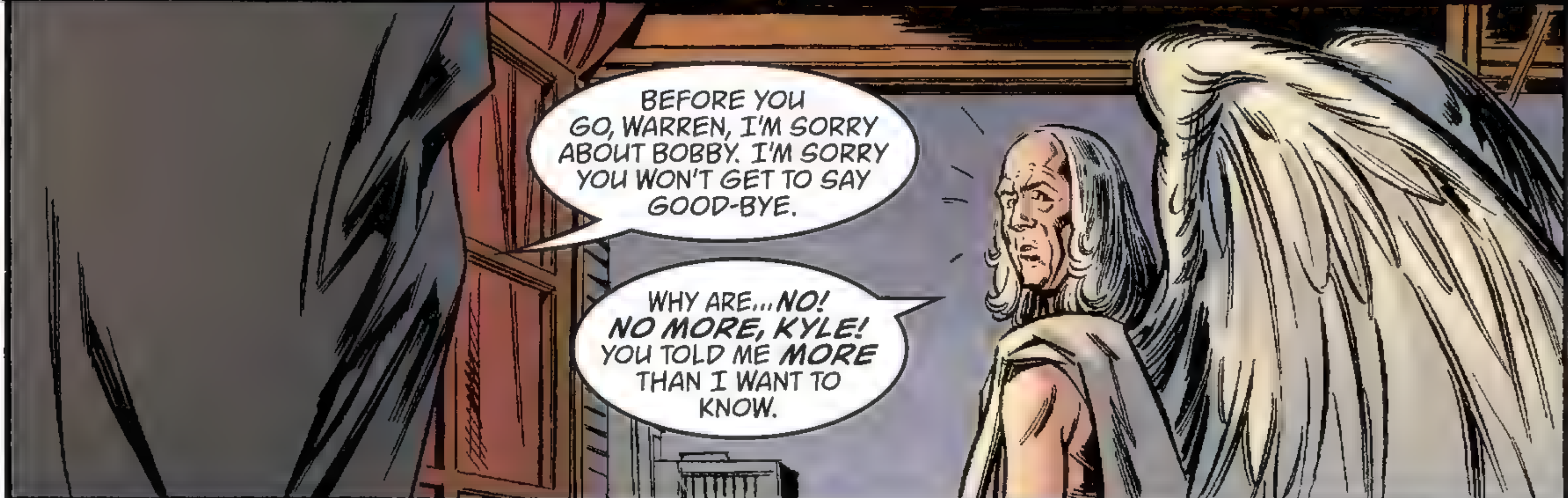


ISAAC...I SEE THE CHILD OF HIM AND HER...I SEE THE BIRTH.

DO CONTINUE.

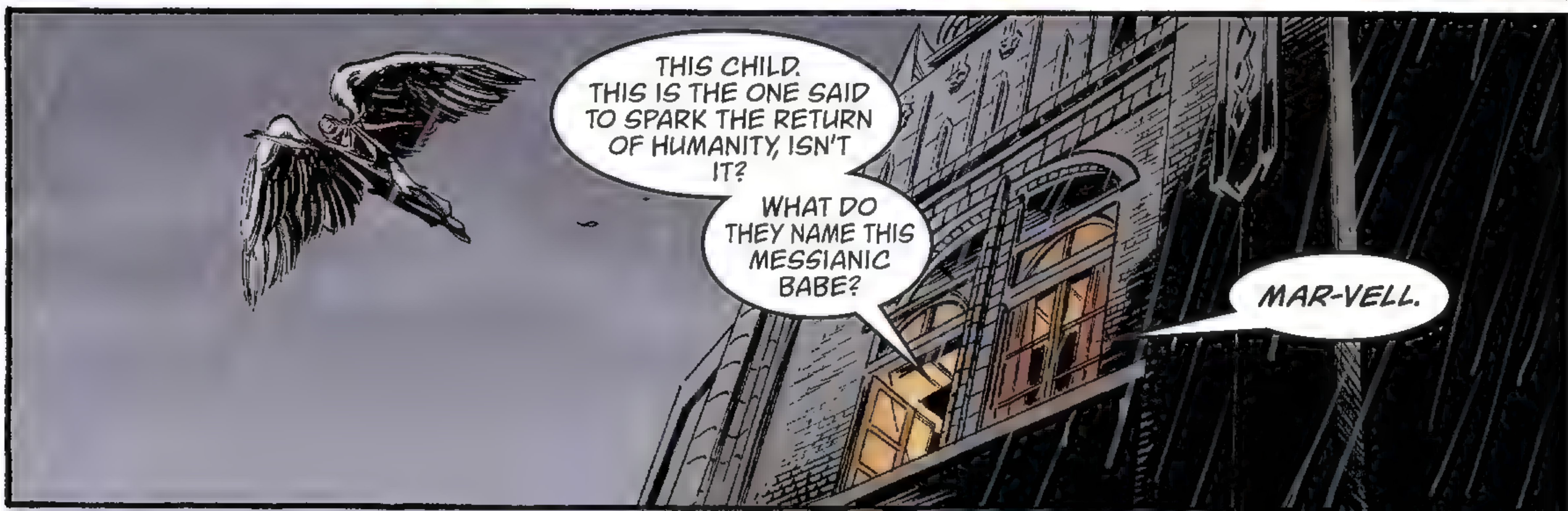


THEN THAT'S IT FOR ME. I DON'T WANT TO KNOW WHAT'S COMING.



BEFORE YOU GO, WARREN, I'M SORRY ABOUT BOBBY. I'M SORRY YOU WON'T GET TO SAY GOOD-BYE.

WHY ARE...NO! NO MORE, KYLE! YOU TOLD ME MORE THAN I WANT TO KNOW.



THIS CHILD. THIS IS THE ONE SAID TO SPARK THE RETURN OF HUMANITY, ISN'T IT?

WHAT DO THEY NAME THIS MESSIANIC BABE?

MAR-VELL.



MAR-VELL?
NOW I AM CERTAIN
WE SHOULD NOT
PLACE OUR FAITH
IN YOUR VISIONS,
KYLE.

MAR-VELL
IS DEAD. I WAS
THERE ON SATURN'S
MOON, *TITAN*, WHEN
HE SURRENDERED TO
THE CANCER.

I KNOW,
ISAAC, I
KNOW.

BUT IF THIS ISN'T MAR-VELL
I'M SEEING RETURN TO EARTH, I
WOULDN'T BE SEEING WHAT I'M
SEEING.



TELL
ME.

IT'S TRUE,
ISAAC. YOU WERE
RIGHT. MY EYES
HAVE CHANGED. I
AM SEEING THE
PAST.

NOT OUR
PAST...BUT *HIS*
PAST. WHAT I'M
SEEING HAPPENED
A LONG TIME AGO.
GENERATIONS, I
THINK, BEFORE
HE WAS EVEN
BORN.

"I SEE THE SAME CREATURES THAT
FOUGHT AND WERE DEFEATED IN NEW
YORK HARBOR BY *GALACTUS*.

"THEY WERE HERE IN PREHISTORIC TIMES.
THEY DID SOMETHING TO EARLY MAN. THEY
CHANGED HIM...*EVOLVED* HIM...GAVE HIM
AMAZING POWERS.

"AS STRANGE AS IT MAY SEEM, ISAAC, MAYBE
THESE BEINGS THEY EVOLVED WERE THE ADAMS
AND EVES OF CIVILIZATION. MAYBE *THEY* ARE
THE REASON OUR POPULATION HAS THE POWER
IT DOES.

"PERHAPS OUR MUTATION
WAS SOME SORT OF *IN-
HERITANCE*...A RITE OF
PASSAGE OF SOME SORT."

"INTERESTING. SINCE IT SEEMS WE ARE
INCAPABLE OF ESCAPING BIBLICAL
METAPHOR, LET ME INTERJECT THAT JUST
ABOUT ANY DINOSAUR CAN TAKE THE
PLACE OF THE SERPENT. NOW, IS THERE
ALSO A CAIN AND ABEL TO YOUR STORY?"

"YES. THEIR NAMES WERE
URANUS AND *CHRONOS*.

"THEY COULD NOT AGREE ON
THE FUTURE THIS NEW CIVILI-
ZATION WOULD BUILD TOWARDS,
AND *CIVIL WAR* BROKE OUT.

"URANUS AND THOSE CLOSEST TO HIM
WERE BANISHED TO *DEEP SPACE*."

"BY A FLAMING
SWORD, NO
DOUBT."



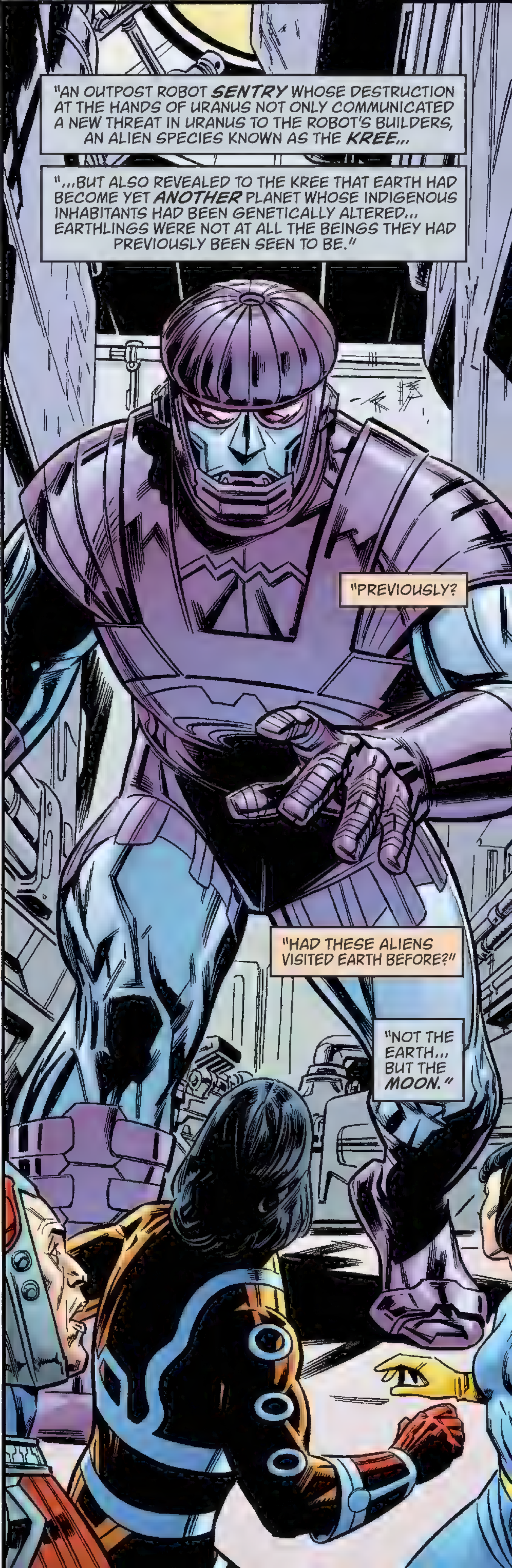
CHRONOS WATCHED
HIS RIVAL AND SOME WHO
HAD BEEN FRIENDS DISAPPEAR
AND SWORE THAT ONE WAY OR
ANOTHER, THERE WOULD
NEVER BE A CIVIL WAR IN
HIS KINGDOM AGAIN.

URANUS
AND HIS EXILED
ALLIES LANDED
ON...

"THEIRANUS?"

YOU
ARE WRITING
THIS DOWN,
RIGHT?

UNKNOWN TO
CHRONOS AND THE
OTHERS WHO HAD
BANISHED THEM HERE,
THERE WAS A SIGN OF
LIFE ON THIS PLANET,
ALTHOUGH IT MIGHT
NOT BE DETECTED
AS ORGANIC.



"AN OUTPOST ROBOT **SENTRY** WHOSE DESTRUCTION
AT THE HANDS OF URANUS NOT ONLY COMMUNICATED
A NEW THREAT IN URANUS TO THE ROBOT'S BUILDERS,
AN ALIEN SPECIES KNOWN AS THE **KREE**..."

"...BUT ALSO REVEALED TO THE KREE THAT EARTH HAD
BECOME YET **ANOTHER** PLANET WHOSE INDIGENOUS
INHABITANTS HAD BEEN GENETICALLY ALTERED...
EARTHLINGS WERE NOT AT ALL THE BEINGS THEY HAD
PREVIOUSLY BEEN SEEN TO BE."

"PREVIOUSLY?"

"HAD THESE ALIENS
VISITED EARTH BEFORE?"

"NOT THE
EARTH...
BUT THE
MOON."

"ONCE, LONG BEFORE THE KREE KNEW ANY OF THE BENEFITS OF TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT, A RACE OF ALIEN SHAPE-SHIFTERS KNOWN AS THE **SKRULLS** VISITED THEMSELVES UPON THE KREE'S HOMEWORLD.

"THE SKRULLS OFFERED SCIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE IN EXCHANGE FOR PEACE AND LOYALTY FROM THIS NEW WORLD'S DOMINANT RACE.

"THE SKRULL COMMANDER SOON DISCOVERED, THOUGH, THAT THERE WERE TWO RACES ON THIS PLANET OF **HALA**. IN ADDITION TO THE KREE, THERE WAS A PLANT RACE KNOWN AS THE **COTATI**.

"THE SKRULLS WERE UNPREPARED TO SHARE THEIR GIFT WITH TWO RACES, AND SO A CONTEST WAS CREATED TO TEST THE ABILITIES OF BOTH RACES.

"A PERCENTAGE OF KREE WERE TRANSPORTED TO EARTH'S MOON ALONG WITH THE EQUIVALENT OF COTATI.

"AFTER ONE YEAR, THE GREATEST ADVANCEMENT OF THESE GROUPS WOULD RESULT IN THE SKRULLS' FAVOR.

"DESPITE THE GRANDEUR OF THE CITY THE KREE BUILT ON THE SURFACE OF THIS PLANET, IT WAS THE COTATI'S ABILITY TO AWAKEN A PART OF THIS MOON'S PAST LIFE THAT WON THE PEACE-LOVING SKRULLS' CONTEST."

"MOON'S PAST LIFE? THE MOON IS JUST ROCK. **STONE**. NOTHING ELSE."

"FORGIVE ME, ISAAC, BUT WHO'S TO SAY THERE WASN'T SOMETHING **ALIVE** THERE LONG BEFORE? SOMETHING THAT MIGHT STILL BE REACHED AND MADE ALIVE AGAIN?"

"SO ENRAGED WERE THE KREE FOR NOT BEING CHOSEN THAT THEY KILLED THIS ENVOY OF SKRULLS.

"AFTER FAMILIARIZING THEMSELVES WITH THE SKRULLS' TECHNOLOGY, THEY ATTACKED THE SKRULL HOMEWORLD UNDER THE GUISE OF THE SKRULLS' *OWN WARSHIPS*.

"A TERRIBLE WAR BROKE OUT BETWEEN THESE TWO RACES... THE LONGEST WAR FOUGHT IN THIS UNIVERSE."

"FROM THE LITTLE YOU HAVE DESCRIBED, THE SKRULLS WERE MUCH MORE ADVANCED THAN THE KREE. HOW COULD THE KREE BECOME SUCH A THREAT SO *QUICKLY*? THERE MUST BE SOME SORT OF ACCOUNT FOR THIS.

"HOW DID SUCH A STUBBORN AND DISAGREEABLE RACE... 'GET THEIR HEADS TOGETHER'?"

"AT THE HEART OF THEIR CULTURE IS A... THING...A *MONSTER*...AS MANIPULATIVE AS ANYTHING YOU CAN IMAGINE.

"IT IS KNOWN AS *SUPREMOR*.

"THE *SUPREME INTELLIGENCE*.

"IT'S BOTH ORGANIC AND MACHINE, MADE UP OF THE GREATEST KREE MINDS IN ALL OF THEIR WORLD'S EXISTENCE.

"THAT IS HOW THEY GOT THEIR HEADS TOGETHER."

"THE SUPREME INTELLIGENCE SAW WITHIN THE KREE CERTAIN **PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS** THAT WOULD RESULT IN THE LOSS OF THE WAR, AND SO CROSS-BREEDING WITH SIMILAR WORLDS WAS ENCOURAGED..."

"...RESULTING IN A **PINK-SKINNED** VARIANT IN THE KREE NATION. AND A CASTE SYSTEM ALONG WITH IT.

"STILL, THE KREE EXPANDED AND MOVED OUT THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSE, ATTEMPTING TO OVERCOME THE SKRULL IN NUMBERS TO MAKE UP FOR THEIR LACK OF POWER.

"AS WAS PART OF THE PLAN OF THE SUPREME INTELLIGENCE."

"WHAT ABOUT THE BANISHED URANUS?"

"URANUS HAD PLANNED TO RETURN TO EARTH... BUT THE SHIP THEY CREATED TO TAKE THEM BACK THERE WAS DESTROYED BY THE KREE WHO HAD DETECTED THEIR SENTRY'S DESTRUCTION.



"THOSE WHO SURVIVED THE ATTACK MADE THEIR HOME ON ONE OF THE MOONS OF SATURN... A PLACE THAT WOULD COME TO BE CALLED **TITAN**.

"YES, ISAAC... THE PLACE WHERE **CAPTAIN MARVEL** DIED."



"HOW DID MAR-VELL COME
TO RESIDE ON TITAN?"

"I SEE...EARTH AS IT WAS
SHORTLY AFTER URANUS
WAS BANISHED.

"CHRONOS CREATED
A CITY THE LIKES OF
WHICH HAS NEVER
BEEN SEEN ON EARTH
SINCE.

"BUT OF ALL HIS
ACCOMPLISHMENTS,
HE WAS MOST PROUD
OF HIS TWO *SONS*.

"AND PERHAPS IT WAS
THEIR NATURAL SIBLING
RIVALRY THAT CONCERNED
CHRONOS SO MUCH. OR
PERHAPS IT WAS ONLY THE
DESIRE TO NEVER SEE
HIS CHILDREN *DIE* THAT
SPURRED HIM ON TO TRY
AND ACCOMPLISH WHAT
HE THOUGHT HE COULD.

"THE DESTRUCTION WROUGHT
BY THE EXPLOSION OF CHRONOS'
EXPERIMENT *DESTROYED* ALL
HE HAD FOUGHT TO BUILD.

"THE PEOPLE MIRACULOUSLY
ALL SURVIVED. AND FOUND
THAT THE EXPLOSION THAT
DESTROYED THEIR HABITAT
ALSO GAVE THEM IMMORTALITY
AND INDESTRUCTIBILITY.

"THESE PEOPLE
ARE KNOWN AS THE
ETERNALS.

"BUT THERE WAS MORE
TO CHRONOS' LEGACY
THAN AGELESSNESS.

"THERE WAS THE
UNI-MIND.

"A STATE OF BEING
IN WHICH EVERY
ETERNAL MAY SHARE
IN THE THOUGHTS
AND ASPIRATIONS
OF HIS FELLOW
ETERNALS.

"THIS WAS CHRONOS' PROMISE:
THAT THE ETERNAL SOCIETY
NEED NEVER BE DIVIDED THE
WAY CHRONOS AND URANUS
ONCE WERE.

"THIS IS HOW CHRONOS
BROUGHT *PEACE* TO
HIS KINGDOM."

"ALARS WAS SO AFFECTED BY THE UNI-MIND, SO OVERWHELMED BY THE THOUGHTS AND ASPIRATIONS OF HIS FELLOW ETERNALS, THAT HE WAS UNWILLING TO STAY BEHIND IN CONTEST WITH HIS BROTHER."

I WILL NOT PROMOTE DISUNITY, ZURAS.

OUR PEOPLE WANT YOU TO BE KING. I CANNOT STAY.

"IS IT MERE COINCIDENCE THAT THE **UNI-MIND** SEEMS SO SIMILAR TO THE **SUPREME INTELLIGENCE**?"

"THEY ARE NOT SO SIMILAR, ISAAC. THE UNI-MIND AVERTED WAR. IF ANYTHING, THE SUPREME INTELLIGENCE **PROMOTED** IT."

"ALARS CAME UPON THE MOON, TITAN, AND FOUND TO HIS SHOCK THAT ALL WHO HAD SETTLED THERE HAD PERISHED--**SAVE ONE**."

"URANUS AND HIS PEOPLE DID NOT RECEIVE THE LEGACY OF CHRONOS. THEY WERE NOT INDESTRUCTIBLE. THEY WERE NOT IMMORTAL."

"I DO REMEMBER THIS. **MENTOR** TOLD ME HOW EVERYONE WAS DEAD WITH THE EXCEPTION OF A THIRD-GENERATION URANIAN KNOWN AS **SUI-SAN**..."

"YES. AND WHEN THE **KREE/SKRULL WAR** WAS FOUGHT ON THE ARTIFICIAL SHORES OF TITAN..."

AH-HA. I BELIEVE, AT LAST, THAT THIS VISION OF YOURS IS **MISTAKEN**. NO ONE SURVIVED APART FROM THE WOMAN BECAUSE HISTORY HAD **REPEATED** ITSELF. THOUGH URANUS AND HIS FOLLOWERS HAD BUILT THIS MOON INTO AN AMAZING UNDERGROUND WORLD, CIVIL WAR AGAIN UNDED THEIR EFFORTS.

SHE WAS THE **ONLY SURVIVOR**. THE **KREE/SKRULL WAR** WAS NOT FOUGHT HERE...

"I DID NOT HEAR MENTOR SPEAK, ISAAC. I WASN'T THERE. I CAN ONLY TELL YOU WHAT I SEE. PERHAPS HE LIED."

"NO. HE DID NOT. I KNOW THE TRUTH WHEN I HEAR IT, RICHMOND...I **KNOW**. KNOWLEDGE IS ALL I HAVE LEFT."

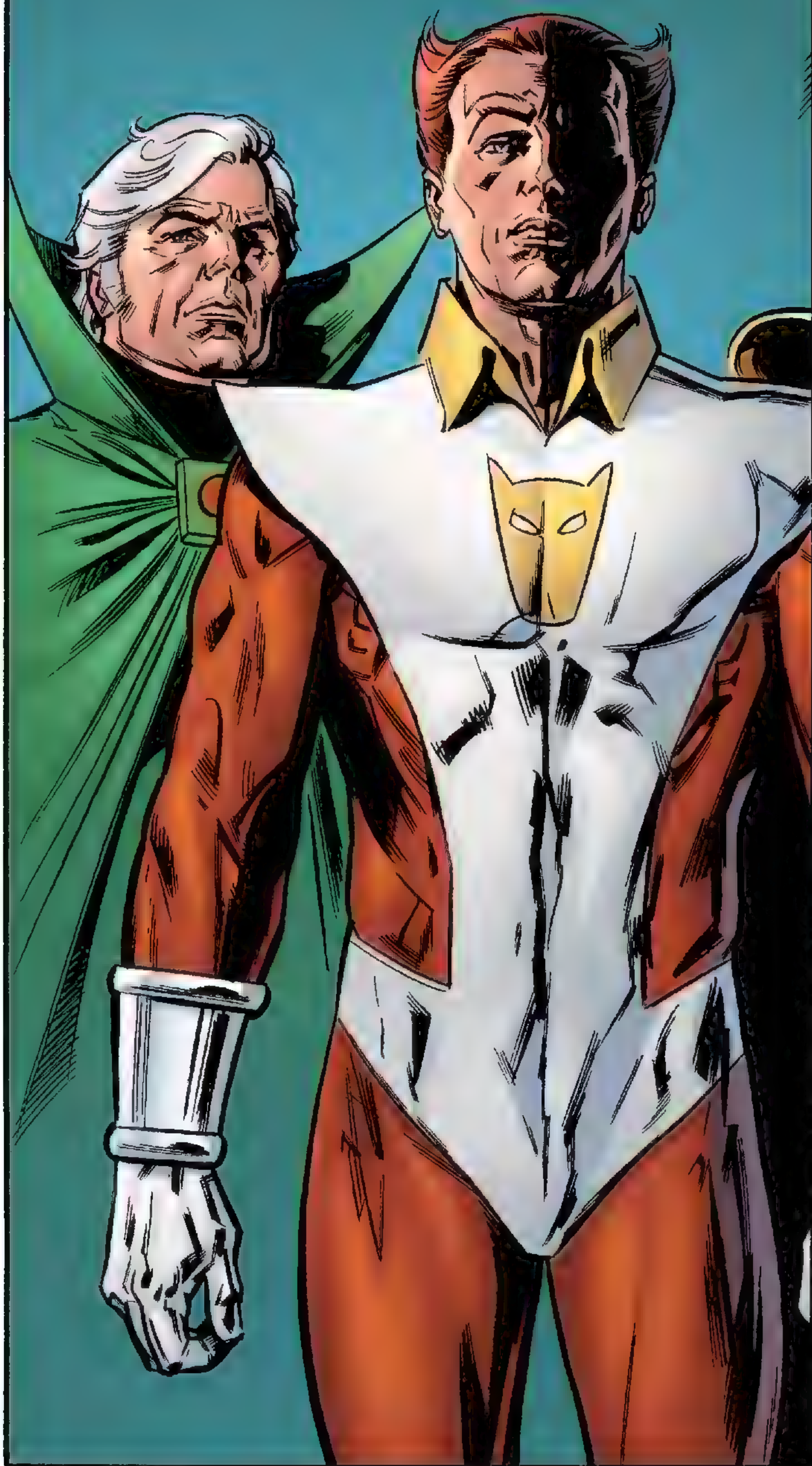
"I'M SORRY, ISAAC. I SHOULDN'T HAVE SUGGESTED ANYTHING."

"ALARS--**MENTOR**, AS YOU CALL HIM--DID FIND HER ALIVE. AND THIS WAS ALL ALARS NEEDED TO BEGIN AGAIN."

"THE TITAN THEY REBUILT WAS *MIRACULOUS*.
THEIR CHILDREN WERE AS VARIED AS ANYONE
COULD IMAGINE.

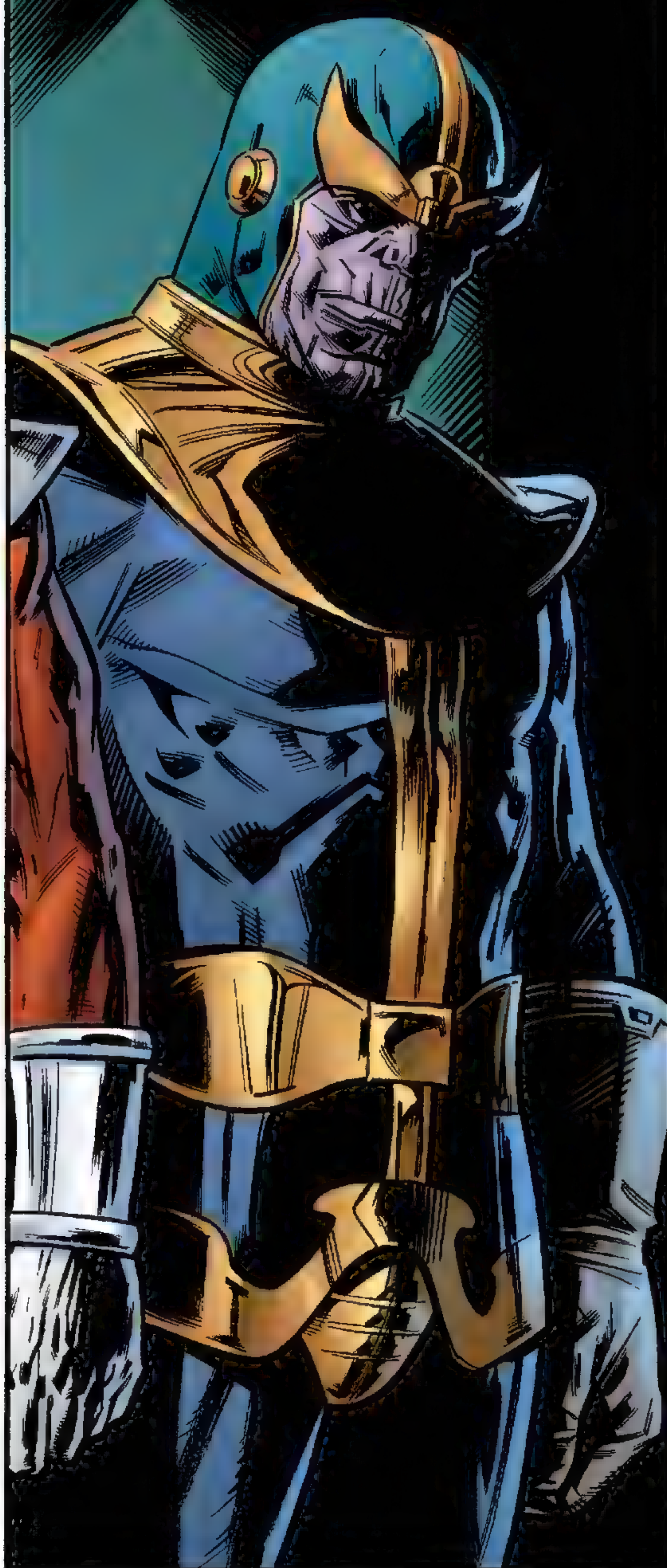
"ONE SON WAS BEAUTIFUL. HE WAS
NAMED *EROS*. HE WAS THE LIGHT
OF HIS FATHER'S EYES.

"THE OTHER ONE, THOUGH,
BROUGHT ONLY DARKNESS
AND REGRET.



"*THANOS*.

"WHAT IS IT THAT CAUSES
BROTHER AND FRIEND TO
CONTINUE TO BETRAY
BROTHER AND FRIEND?
YOU WERE WRONG, OLD
FRIEND, WHEN YOU ASKED
IF THERE WERE A CAIN AND
ABEL. HISTORY IS RIFE
WITH THEM."



"KNOWING NOW OF THE POTENTIAL THAT EXISTED WITHIN MANKIND, AND WANTING TO AIM A SUPER-POWERED BEING AT THE SKRULL, THE KREE VISITED EARTH.

"THEY TOOK AN UNEVOLVED FORM OF MANKIND AND EXPOSED IT TO...THE **TERRIGEN MISTS**."

"BUT THAT IS THE VERY GAS RICHARDS IS BURNING FROM THE AIR IN HOPES OF **RE-ESTABLISHING** HUMANITY. THEN, THE MUTATED POPULACE IS INDEED A RACE OF **INHUMANS**."

"THEN OUR CURRENT STATE IS THE FAULT OF THE **KREE**, IS IT NOT? ARE WE TO BE **AIMED** AT THE SKRULLS AS WELL?"

"I DON'T KNOW. I ALWAYS THOUGHT THE INHUMANS HID THEMSELVES FROM THE KREE... BUT WHAT I'M SEEING SUGGESTS THAT IT WAS THE KREE WHO HID THEMSELVES FROM THE INHUMANS."

"PERHAPS THEY WERE NOT READY TO FACE OFF AGAINST THE SKRULLS SO FAR AWAY FROM THEIR HOME PLANET.

"OR MAYBE THEY WERE AFRAID OF BEING UNABLE TO WIELD THESE NEW WEAPONS THEY'D CREATED.

"APART FROM THE VERY FACT THAT THE INHUMANS WERE HIDDEN UPON THE EARTH, THERE WAS NO SIGN OF THE KREE AGAIN FOR **THOUSANDS** OF YEARS.

"UNTIL A DISTURBANCE LED THE FANTASTIC FOUR TO FACE ONE OF THE SENTRIES LEFT UPON EARTH.

"THE DESTRUCTION OF THIS SENTRY AWAKENED THE SUPREME INTELLIGENCE'S INTEREST IN EARTH. **RONAN THE ACCUSER** WOULD BE THE FINAL TEST OF THE EARTHLINGS' ABILITIES.

"HIS DEFEAT AT THE HANDS OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR CONFIRMED THAT NOW THERE WERE MANY BEINGS ON EARTH, IN ADDITION TO THE INHUMANS, WHO MIGHT BE USEFUL TO THE KREE EFFORT.

"THE SUPREME INTELLIGENCE LAUNCHED A KREE MISSION TO EARTH. **CAPTAIN MAR-VELL** WAS THE YOUNG CAPTAIN SLATED TO BE THE FIRST TO MAKE CONTACT WITH HUMANITY.

"**NURSE UNA** WAS THE LOVE OF MAR-VELL'S LIFE.

"**COMMANDER YON-ROG** HEADED UP THE MISSION...

"...AND OPENLY LUSTED AFTER UNA."

"IF YOU MEASURE MOVEMENT ACCORDING TO THE ABILITY TO EXACT CHANGE IN A GIVEN SITUATION, THE EARTH REALLY DID *STAND STILL* THAT DAY."



"MAR-VELL CAME AS A SPY, BUT FOUND HIMSELF SOON THRUST INTO THE ROLE OF **HERO**."

"HE SAVED THE LIFE OF **CAROL DANVERS** SHORTLY AFTER ARRIVING ON EARTH."

"SHE WAS VERY BEAUTIFUL IF I REMEMBER, WAS SHE NOT? WHEN SHE BECAME A SUPER HEROINE HERSELF, I WAS CONVINCED THAT SHE WAS THE PERFECT MATE FOR MAR-VELL...OR FOR ANYONE, FOR THAT MATTER."

"I'M SORRY?"

"THE EYE CANNOT FORGET WHAT THE BODY IS NO LONGER CAPABLE OF RECOGNIZING, KYLE. SHE WAS A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN. THAT IS ALL."

"MAR-VELL SOON FOUND HIMSELF MEETING MANY OF EARTH'S NATIVE-BORN HEROES AND DISCOVERED THAT ALLIES ARE OFTEN FOUND ON **BOTH** SIDES OF THE ENEMY LINE."

"THE SAME WAS TRUE WITH ENEMIES. COMMANDER YON-ROG'S LOVE FOR UNA FIRST COMPROMISED MAR-VELL'S MISSION ON EARTH...AND LATER LED TO HER DEATH."

"LUSTING AFTER ANOTHER MAN'S LOVE, ISAAC, ANOTHER MAN'S **LIFE**. THAT'S NO WAY TO LIVE. NO WONDER THINGS ENDED AS THEY DID FOR YON-ROG. HE GOT WHAT HE DESERVED."

"HE...WHAT HAPPENED?"

"HE WAS KILLED...BUT THIS WAS AFTER THE SUPREME INTELLIGENCE HONORED MAR-VELL WITH NEW POWERS AND A NEW COSTUME."



"IT WAS SHORTLY AFTER THIS THAT MAR-VELL FOUND HIMSELF TRAPPED IN AN ANTI-MATTER UNIVERSE ONLY RECENTLY DISCOVERED BY REED RICHARDS KNOWN AS THE **NEGATIVE ZONE**."



"THE SUPREME INTELLIGENCE ESTABLISHED A TELEPATHIC LINK BETWEEN MAR-VELL AND A TEENAGER NAMED **RICK JONES**, WHO HAD PREVIOUSLY ALLIED HIMSELF WITH BOTH CAPTAIN AMERICA AND THE HULK."

"HE NEXT LED JONES TO A PLACE WHERE THE ARTIFACTS KNOWN AS THE **NEGA BANDS** HAD BEEN HIDDEN SINCE THE KREE FIRST CREATED THE INHUMANS."



"UPON STRIKING THE TWO BANDS TOGETHER, JONES FOUND HIMSELF DRIFTING THROUGH THE NEGATIVE ZONE. HE WAS TOTALLY DISPLACED WITH MAR-VELL."

"AND CAPTAIN MARVEL, AS HE WAS NOW REFERRED TO, WAS FREE TO FIGHT THE CLIMAX OF THE KREE/SKRULL WAR."



"I AM CONFUSED ONCE AGAIN. TO MY UNDERSTANDING, MAR-VELL HAD ALWAYS COMPLAINED OF THE SUPREME INTELLIGENCE'S MANIPULATION. YOU SPEAK OF HONORS AND MEDALS. THIS, AGAIN, IS CONTRARY TO WHAT I'VE KNOWN."

"THE SUPREME INTELLIGENCE **WAS** MANIPULATING MAR-VELL, ISAAC."

"THE STRENGTH MAR-VELL RECEIVED FROM THE GOD, **ZO**, WAS ANOTHER MANIPULATION OF THE SUPREME INTELLIGENCE."

"AS WAS THE ABILITY TO TRAVEL THROUGH HYPERSPACE, AS WAS MAR-VELL'S BEING LOST IN THE NEGATIVE ZONE AND THE USE OF JONES' LATENT TELEPATHIC ABILITIES TO WIN THE WAR."

"THE PROPOSED HOSTILITY BETWEEN THE SUPREME INTELLIGENCE AND RONAN THE ACCUSER WAS YET ANOTHER RUSE. IT WAS ALL MANIPULATION UPON MANIPULATION."

"AND THOUGH MAR-VELL SUSPECTED THIS TO BE TRUE, HE WOULDN'T KNOW FOR CERTAIN UNTIL HE FOUGHT **THANOS**."

"THANOS HAD KILLED MOST ON TITAN BY THIS POINT. HIS OWN *MOTHER* WAS AMONG THE CASUALTIES.

"HE DID IT FOR *LOVE*, HE SAID. BECAUSE THE WOMAN HE LOVED WAS *DEATH*.

"BUT DEATH WASN'T HAPPY WITH FLOWERS OR CANDY. SHE WANTED MORE. SHE WANTED THE POWER OF *CREATION*. AND FOR THAT, THANOS SOUGHT THE *COSMIC CUBE*.

"THE CUBE WAS A DEVICE CAPABLE OF RECREATING REALITY ACCORDING TO THE BEARER'S IMAGINATION.

"THANOS'S IMAGINATION WAS SUCH THAT HE WANTED TO PRESENT, AS A GIFT TO DEATH, AN ENTIRE UNIVERSE WHOSE INHABITANTS WERE COMPLETELY *LIFELESS*.

"AND THOUGH MAR-VELL HAD MANY ALLIES TO ATTACK THANOS'S FORCES, NONE WERE PREPARED FOR THANOS'S POWER.

"BUT IN ALL OF THANOS'S TIME, HE NEVER ANTICIPATED THAT HIS DEFEAT WOULD COME AS A RESULT OF ONE WHO WAS *BEYOND DEATH*."





"FOR MAR-VELL WAS ABOUT TO BE EMPOWERED BY A BEING WHO HAD BEEN WAITING FOR HIM FOR **EIGHT BILLION YEARS**. A BEING WHO HAD BEEN CREATED BY CHRONOS, THE FIRST ETERNAL."

"WHAT?"

"CHRONOS FORESAW THANOS' RISE TO POWER AND CREATED A BEING CALLED **EON** WHOSE SOLE PURPOSE WOULD BE TO CARRY CHRONOS' CONSCIOUSNESS ITSELF."

"EON EMPOWERED MAR-VELL WITH A KNOWLEDGE OF THE UNIVERSE GREATER THAN EVEN THANOS' IMAGINATION."

"THE COSMIC CUBE WAS DESTROYED AND MAR-VELL BECAME THE PROTECTOR OF THE UNIVERSE."

"AND THOUGH THE UNIVERSE WAS SAVED COUNTLESS TIMES OVER, MAR-VELL ULTIMATELY SUCCUMBED TO CANCER."

"WE WERE BOTH THERE, ISAAC."

"WE BOTH SAW HIM DIE."

"AND THOUGH MAR-VELL EMBRACED DEATH, THANOS WAS SPURNED BY HER FOR HIS FAILURE.

"DESPERATE TO FIND A WAY BACK INTO DEATH'S FAVOR, THANOS DISCOVERED *SIX GEMS* THAT, WHEN BROUGHT TOGETHER, CREATED A *DOOR-WAY* INTO DEATH'S REALM.

"BUT THIS TIME, THE UNIVERSE WOULD HAVE TO FACE THANOS WITH DIFFERENT CHAMPIONS.

"THE *SILVER SURFER*.

"ONCE THE HERALD OF GALACTUS, HIS IS THE POWER COSMIC ITSELF.

"*MS. MARVEL*.

"CAROL DANVERS, WHO HAD BEEN SAVED BY MAR-VELL, BECAME PSIONICALLY EMPOWERED BY THE SUPREME INTELLIGENCE:

"*NOVA*.

"RICHARD RYDER WAS EMPOWERED TO FIGHT THE SKRULLS ON BEHALF OF AN ALIEN RACE.

"*STAR LORD*.

"A STARWALKER WHOSE MOTHER WAS HUMAN AND WHOSE FATHER STILL FOUGHT AGAINST A GALACTIC TYRANNY.

"*CAPTAIN UNIVERSE*.

"ANYONE WHO, IN A STATE OF PANIC, IS IMBUED WITH THE MYSTERIOUS POWER KNOWN AS THE *ENIGMA FORCE*.

"*HER*.

"THE MATE INTENDED FOR *HIM* WOULD HAVE TO WAIT FOR WARLOCK'S RESURRECTION TO BE JOINED WITH HIM."



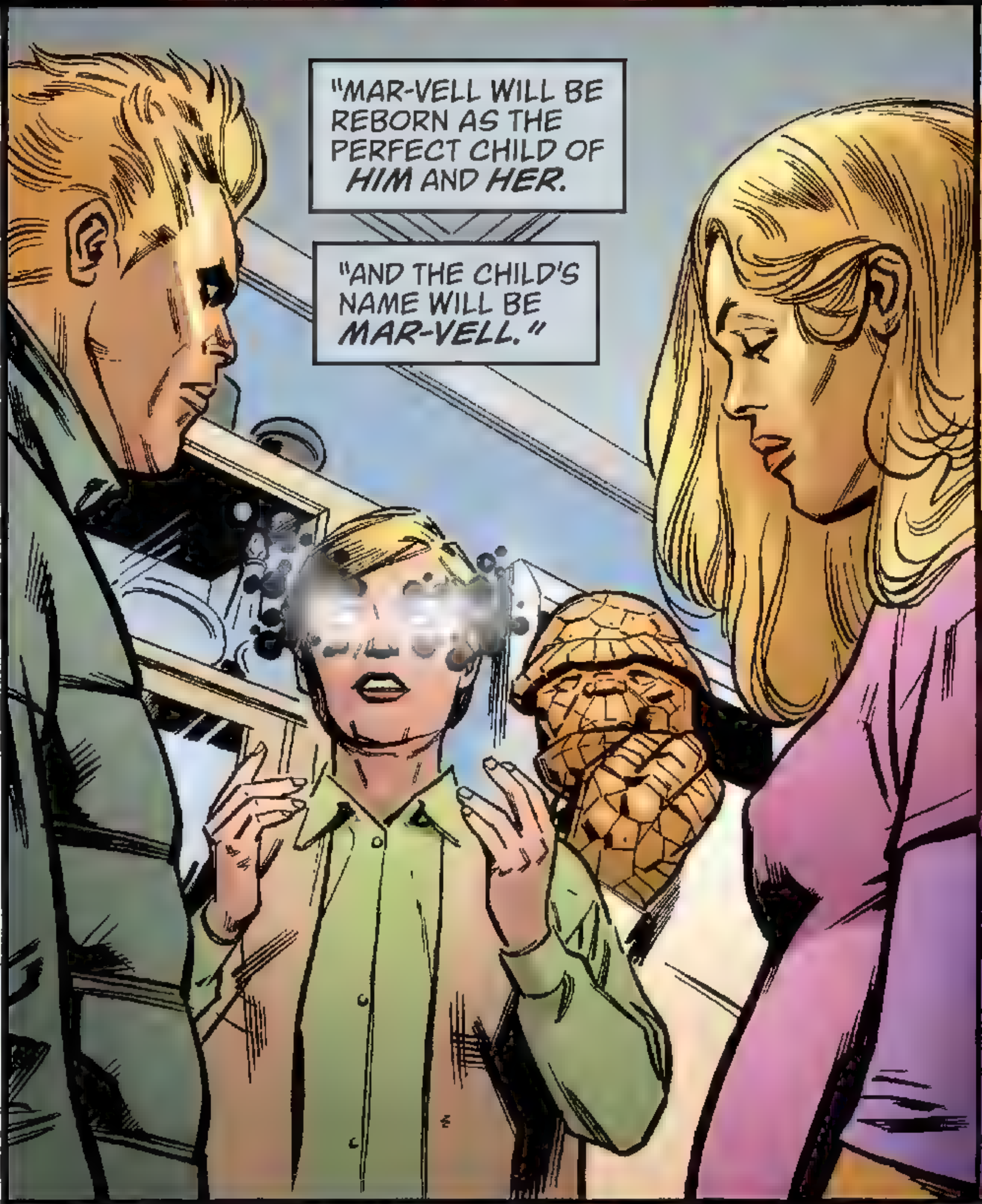
"THANOS WAS RESURRECTED AND DEFEATED OVER AND OVER AGAIN. UPON ONE SUCH INSTANCE, THE SILVER SURFER FOUND HIMSELF ALLIED WITH MAR-VELL IN THE REALM OF THE DEAD.

"IRONICALLY, MAR-VELL SEEMED THE ONLY INHABITANT THERE AWARE OF HIS OWN DEATH.



"UNTIL, THAT IS, HE VISITED REED RICHARDS IN A DREAM AND TOLD HIM OF HIS RETURN.

"A RETURN THAT WOULD RESULT IN HUMANITY'S RETURN.

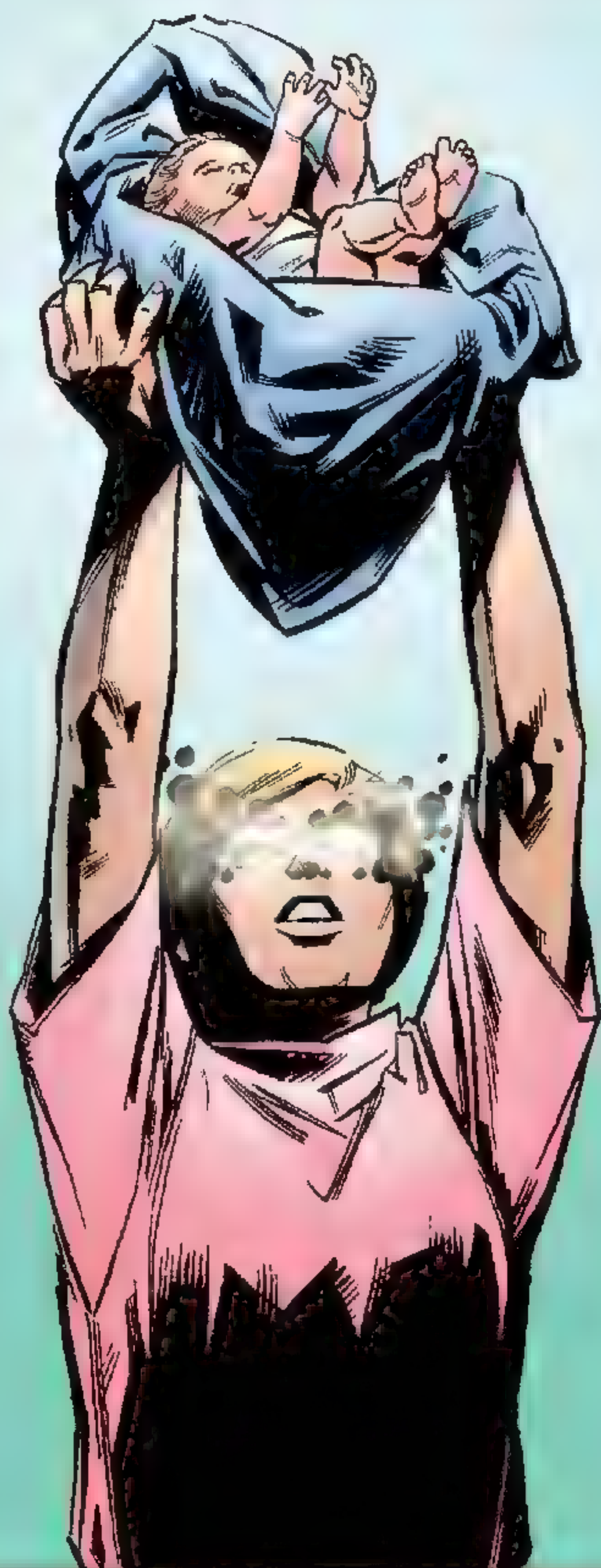


"MAR-VELL WILL BE REBORN AS THE PERFECT CHILD OF HIM AND HER.

"AND THE CHILD'S NAME WILL BE MAR-VELL."

"THE CHILD, WHEN BORN, IS IMMEDIATELY THE OBJECT OF SCORN AND ATTACK."

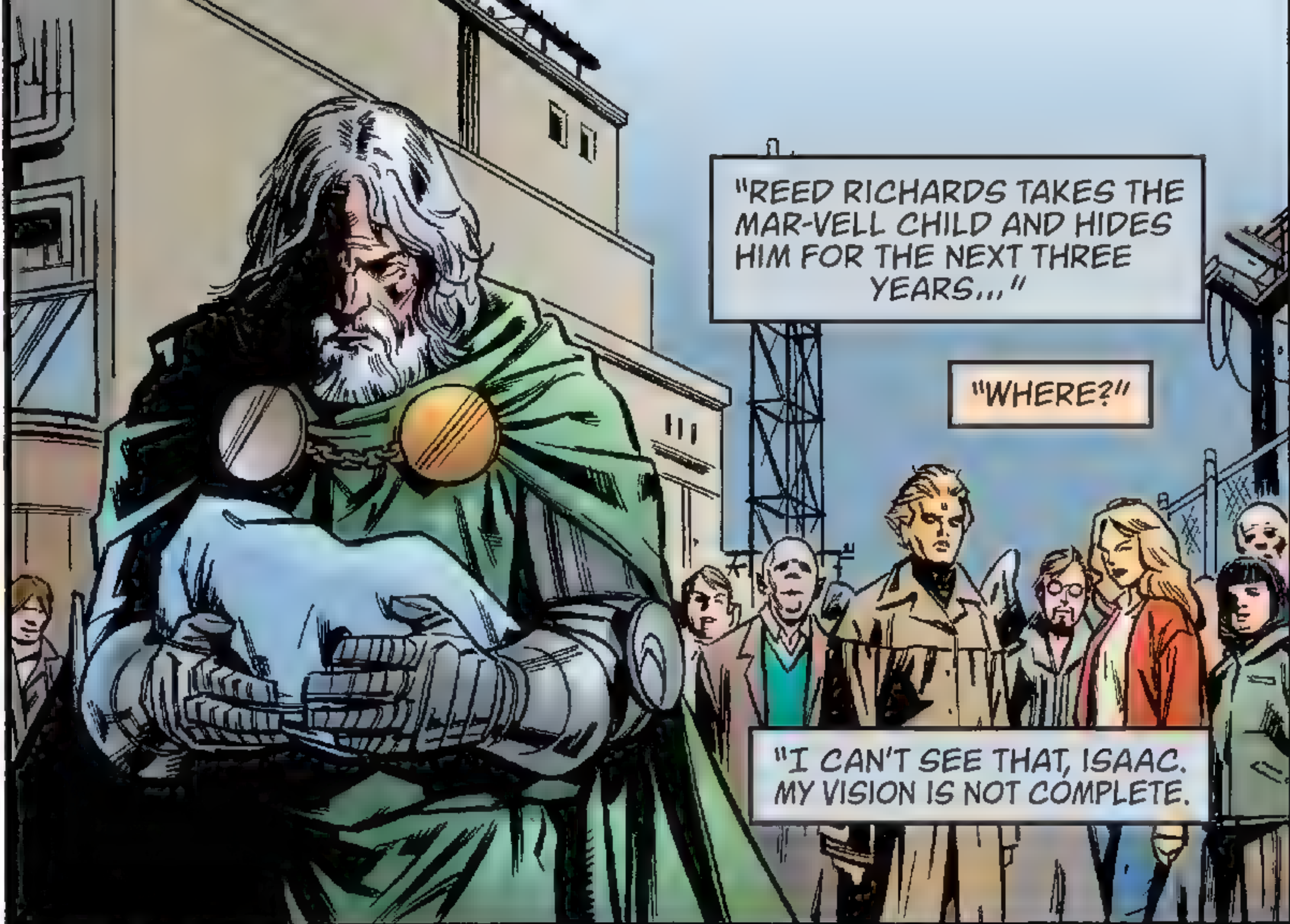
"NOW I'M CONFUSED, ISAAC. HOW DO SO MANY EVEN KNOW ABOUT THE CHILD? HOW DOES ANYONE EVEN KNOW ABOUT THE CHILD?"



"REED RICHARDS TAKES THE MAR-VELL CHILD AND HIDES HIM FOR THE NEXT THREE YEARS..."

"WHERE?"

"I CAN'T SEE THAT, ISAAC. MY VISION IS NOT COMPLETE."



"BUT I SEE *HER* BEING DRAGGED AWAY FROM HER HUSBAND BY THE CROWD."

"WHY DO THEY FEAR THE CHILD SO?"



IT IS TRUE THAT THE MUTATED PEOPLE OF OUR WORLD CAN PRETTY MUCH PLAN ON LIVING FOREVER NOW. EXCEPT IN A CASE OF SEVERE VIOLENCE, I SUPPOSE, THEN...WELL...

IF THE MAR-VELL CHILD SPARKS THE RETURN OF HUMANITY, IT STANDS TO REASON THAT HE ALSO BRINGS WITH HIM THE RETURN OF MORTALITY.



WHEN THE CHILD COMES OUT OF HIDING AFTER THREE YEARS, WHO IS HIS GUARDIAN? WHO WILL MAKE CERTAIN THE CHILD IS PROTECTED?



"CAPTAIN
AMERICA."

"HE LIT THE TORCH, JUST LIKE
YOU SAID, ISAAC. THE TORCH
TO REESTABLISH HUMANITY ON
EARTH."

"HE LIT THE TORCH. AND
NOW HE HAS TO CARRY
THE *FLAME*."





WHY DO YOU BELIEVE YOU ARE SEEING THE PAST, KYLE? WHY DO YOU THINK YOU SAW SO MUCH?

BECAUSE I THINK IT HAS EVERYTHING TO DO WITH WHAT'S COMING NEXT.



ISAAC...SOMEONE'S ABOUT TO RETURN FROM THE DEAD. IT'S IMPOSSIBLE...HOW CAN HE DO THIS? HE'S CHANGING EVERYTHING.

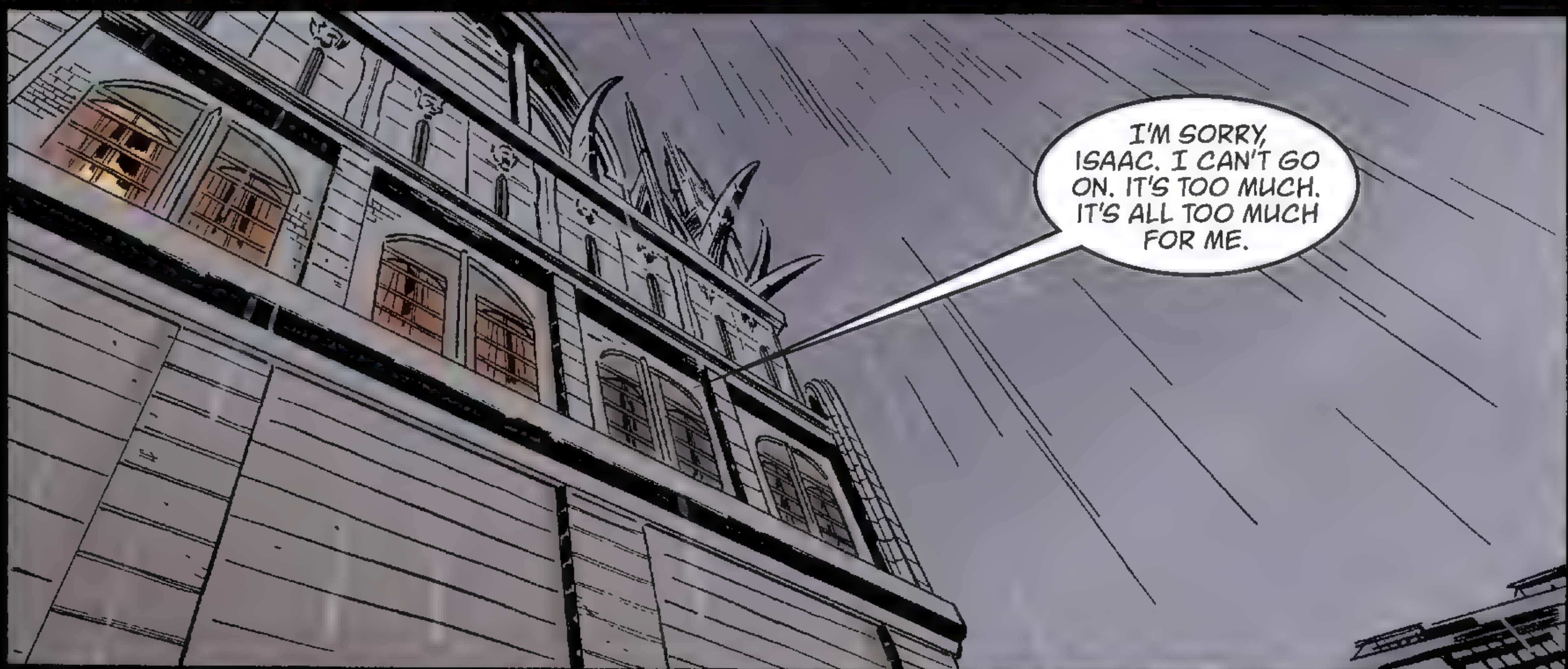
ARE YOU SPEAKING OF MAR-VELL?



NO. NOT MAR-VELL. SOMEONE *ELSE*. I CAN'T BELIEVE IT. WE...WE MUST TELL RICHARDS. MUST TELL HIM...

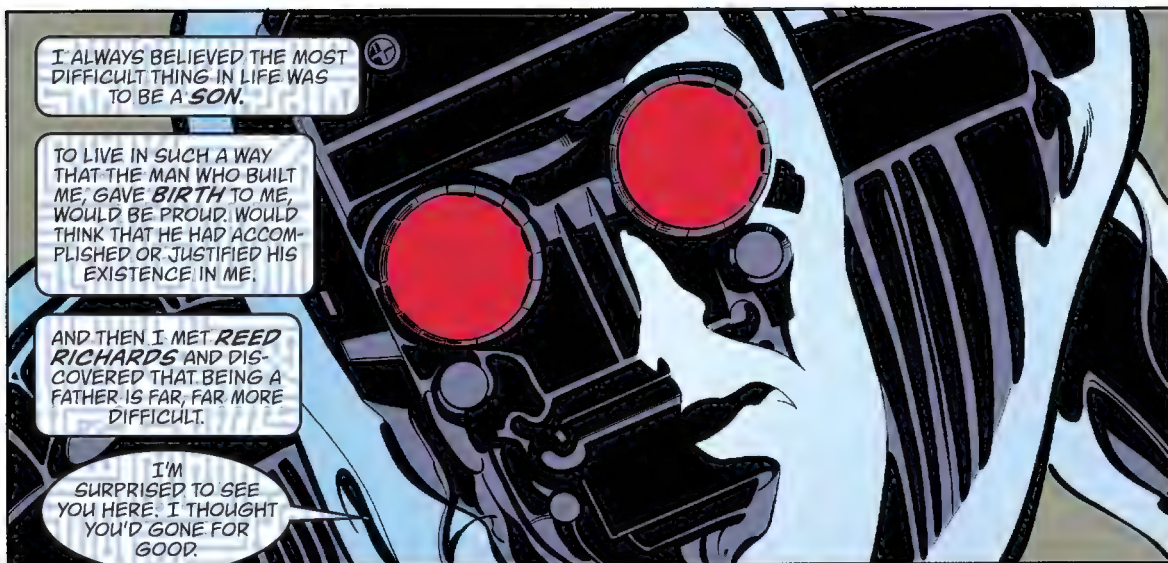


WHO IS COMING BACK, KYLE? PLEASE. TELL ME.



I'M SORRY, ISAAC. I CAN'T GO ON. IT'S TOO MUCH. IT'S ALL TOO MUCH FOR ME.



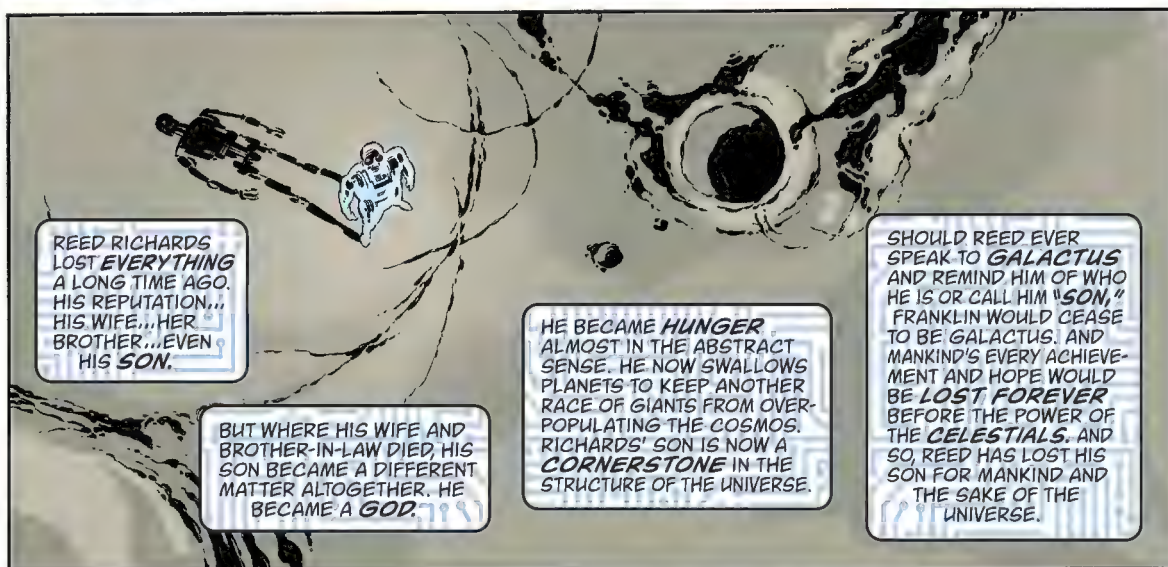


I ALWAYS BELIEVED THE MOST DIFFICULT THING IN LIFE WAS TO BE A **SON**.

TO LIVE IN SUCH A WAY THAT THE MAN WHO BUILT ME, GAVE **BIRTH** TO ME, WOULD BE PROUD. WOULD THINK THAT HE HAD ACCOMPLISHED OR JUSTIFIED HIS EXISTENCE IN ME.

AND THEN I MET **REED RICHARDS** AND DISCOVERED THAT BEING A FATHER IS FAR, FAR MORE DIFFICULT.

I'M SURPRISED TO SEE YOU HERE. I THOUGHT YOU'D GONE FOR GOOD.



REED RICHARDS LOST **EVERYTHING** A LONG TIME AGO. HIS REPUTATION... HIS WIFE... HER BROTHER... EVEN HIS **SON**.

BUT WHERE HIS WIFE AND BROTHER-IN-LAW DIED, HIS SON BECAME A DIFFERENT MATTER ALTOGETHER. HE BECAME A **GOD**.

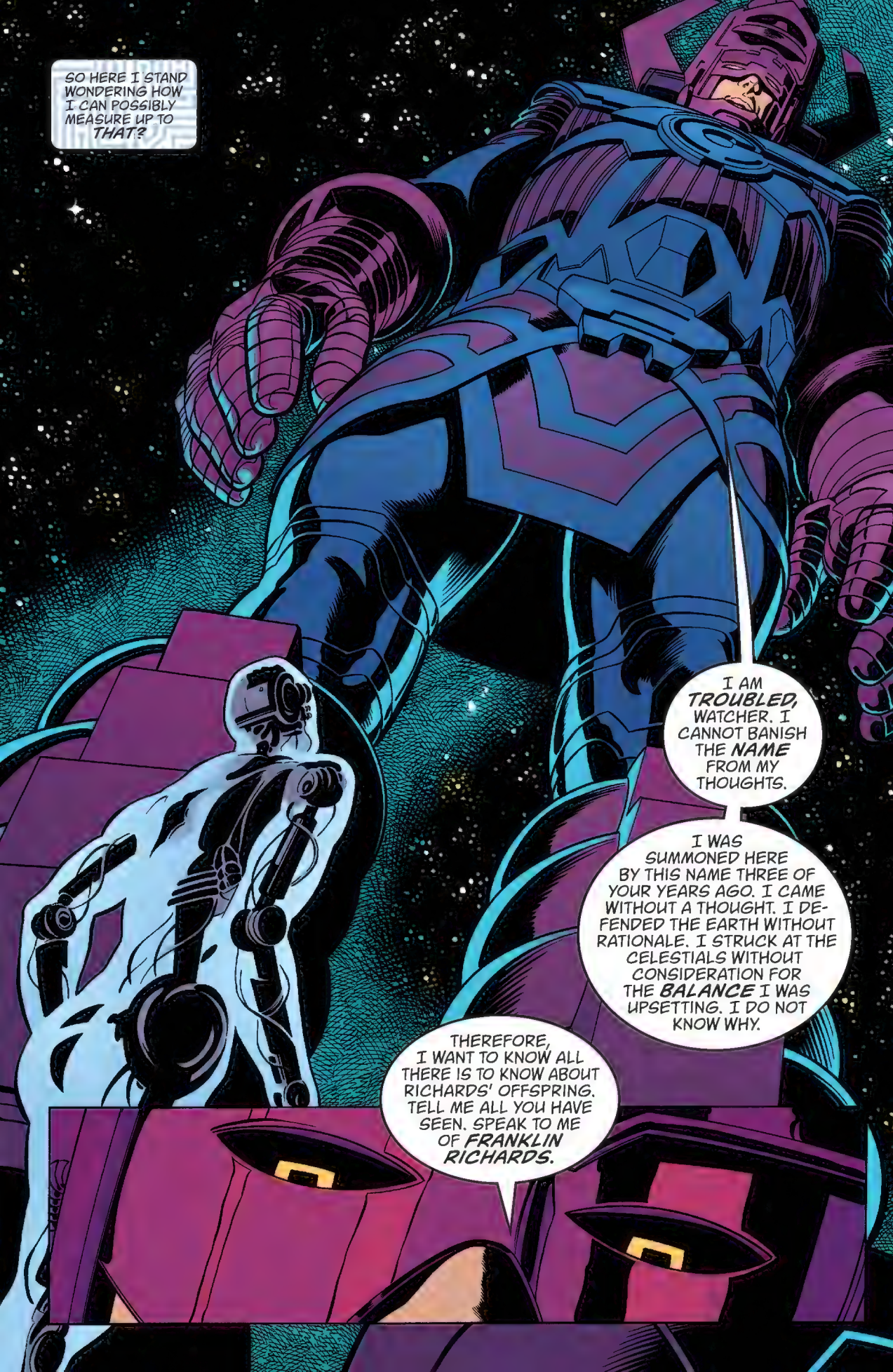
HE BECAME **HUNGER** ALMOST IN THE ABSTRACT SENSE. HE NOW SWALLOWS PLANETS TO KEEP ANOTHER RACE OF GIANTS FROM OVERPOPULATING THE COSMOS. RICHARDS' SON IS NOW A **CORNERSTONE** IN THE STRUCTURE OF THE UNIVERSE.

SHOULD REED EVER SPEAK TO **GALACTUS** AND REMIND HIM OF WHO HE IS OR CALL HIM "**SON**," FRANKLIN WOULD CEASE TO BE GALACTUS. AND MANKIND'S EVERY ACHIEVEMENT AND HOPE WOULD BE **LOST FOREVER** BEFORE THE POWER OF THE **CELESTIALS**. AND SO, REED HAS LOST HIS SON FOR MANKIND AND THE SAKE OF THE UNIVERSE.



THE DECISION WAS REED'S. IT WAS A DECISION ONLY A **FATHER** COULD MAKE.

WHY ARE YOU HERE?



SO HERE I STAND
WONDERING HOW
I CAN POSSIBLY
MEASURE UP TO
THAT?

I AM
TROUBLED,
WATCHER. I
CANNOT BANISH
THE **NAME**
FROM MY
THOUGHTS.

I WAS
SUMMONED HERE
BY THIS NAME THREE OF
YOUR YEARS AGO. I CAME
WITHOUT A THOUGHT. I DE-
FENDED THE EARTH WITHOUT
RATIONALE. I STRUCK AT THE
CELESTIALS WITHOUT
CONSIDERATION FOR
THE **BALANCE** I WAS
UPSETTING. I DO NOT
KNOW WHY.

THEREFORE,
I WANT TO KNOW ALL
THERE IS TO KNOW ABOUT
RICHARDS' OFFSPRING.
TELL ME ALL YOU HAVE
SEEN. SPEAK TO ME
OF **FRANKLIN**
RICHARDS.



I...YES,
GALACTUS.

BEFORE YOU WERE
BO--BEFORE YOU CAME TO
EARTH AND BEFORE FRANKLIN
RICHARDS WAS BORN, A NON-
APPROVED **SPACE FLIGHT**
WAS LAUNCHED.

THE FLIGHT CREW
CONSISTED OF **REED
RICHARDS, SUSAN STORM,
JOHNNY STORM AND
BENJAMIN GRIMM.**

THIS FLIGHT WOULD
END WITH THE **MUTATION** OF ALL
ABOARD, THOUGH NONE, SAVE
GRIMM, SUSPECTED THE DANGERS
OF **COSMIC RAYS.**

"MY PREDECESSOR SUGGESTED THAT RICHARDS
KNEW OF THE DANGERS AND LIKELIHOOD OF MU-
TATION AND CONTINUED THE MISSION, NOT IN SPIRE
OF THE POSSIBILITY, BUT **BECAUSE** OF IT.

MR. RICHARDS, I'M TAKING
THIS RING WE'RE FLYING AROUND THE
WORLD AS A SURROGATE ENGAGEMENT
RING UNTIL YOU CAN AFFORD A **REAL**
ONE. YOU AND I **BETTER** BE SPEND-
ING THE REST OF OUR LIVES
TOGETHER.

"I LIKE TO BELIEVE, THOUGH, THAT REED
HAD **OTHER THINGS** ON HIS MIND."

TILL **DEATH**
DO US PART, SUSAN...
AND THEN SOME.

HEY IT'S IN BOTH
A' YER BEST INTERESTS
NOT TA MAKE ME BARF.
WE'RE ABOUT TA LOSE
GRAVITY.

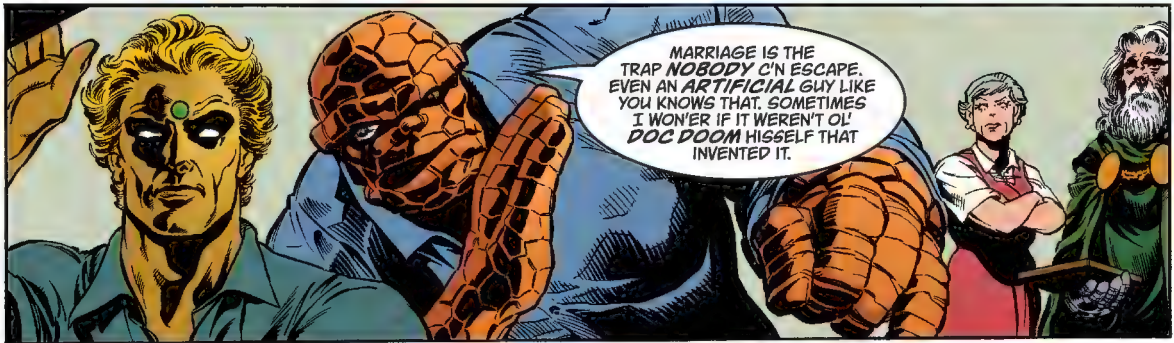
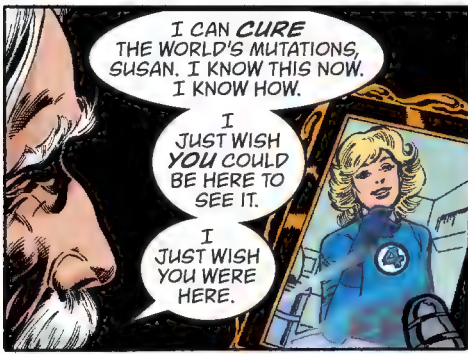
"THE FRANKLIN CHILD IS A
MUTANT THEN, THE SPAWN
OF THEIR MATING?"

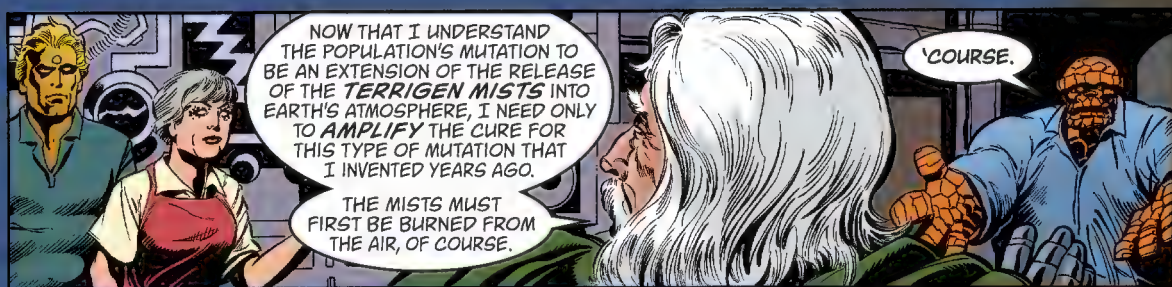
"YES. BUT IT WOULD BE
SOME TIME AFTER THIS
FLIGHT AND CRASH LAND-
ING ON EARTH BEFORE
FRANKLIN CAME ALONG.

"FIRST IT WAS THE
FANTASTIC FOUR
THAT WOULD NEED
TO BE BORN."

WE'RE
ALIVE.

OF COURSE WE
ARE, DARLING. IT'S MY
RIGHT, DON'T YOU KNOW?
I GET TO SEE YOU
GROW OLD.

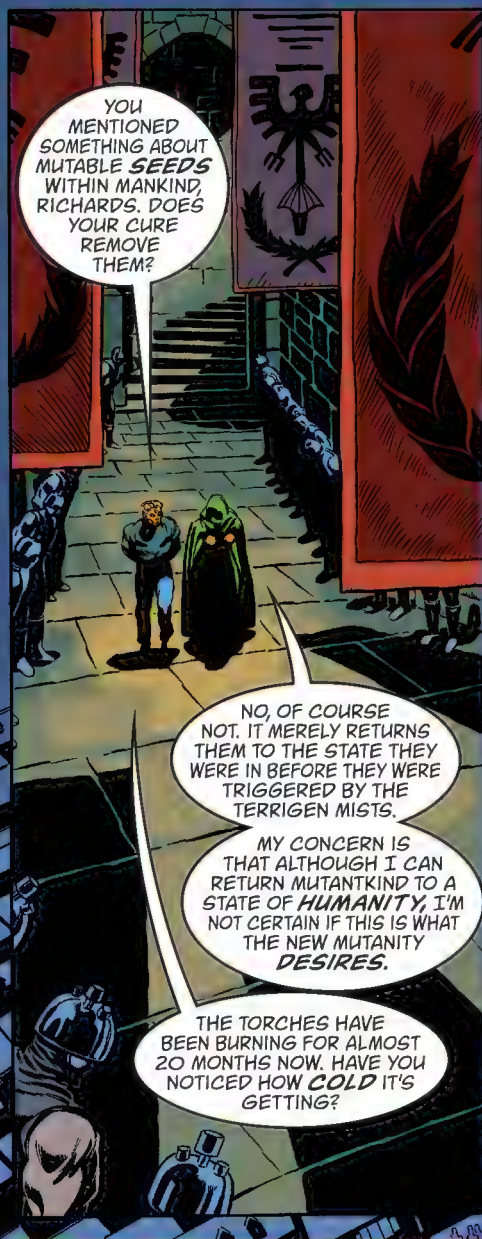




NOW THAT I UNDERSTAND THE POPULATION'S MUTATION TO BE AN EXTENSION OF THE RELEASE OF THE **TERRIGEN MISTS** INTO EARTH'S ATMOSPHERE, I NEED ONLY TO **AMPLIFY** THE CURE FOR THIS TYPE OF MUTATION THAT I INVENTED YEARS AGO.

THE MISTS MUST FIRST BE BURNED FROM THE AIR, OF COURSE.

COURSE.



YOU MENTIONED SOMETHING ABOUT MUTABLE **SEEDS** WITHIN MANKIND, RICHARDS. DOES YOUR CURE REMOVE THEM?

NO, OF COURSE NOT. IT MERELY RETURNS THEM TO THE STATE THEY WERE IN BEFORE THEY WERE TRIGGERED BY THE TERRIGEN MISTS.

MY CONCERN IS THAT ALTHOUGH I CAN RETURN MUTANTKIND TO A STATE OF **HUMANITY**, I'M NOT CERTAIN IF THIS IS WHAT THE NEW MUTANITY **DESIRES**.

THE TORCHES HAVE BEEN BURNING FOR ALMOST 20 MONTHS NOW. HAVE YOU NOTICED HOW **COLD** IT'S GETTING?

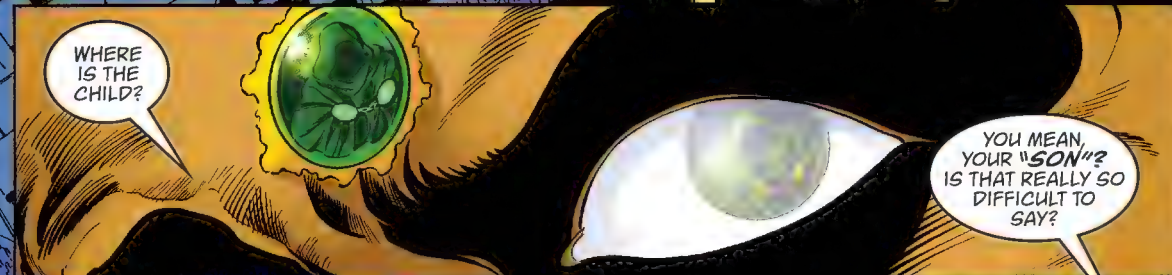


I HAVE MY SUSPICIONS AS TO WHY THE WEATHER IS CHANGING, WARLOCK...BUT I THINK IT WILL BE BLAMED ON THE **TORCHES** I DESIGNED TO BURN THE TERRIGEN MISTS FROM THE AIR.

OF COURSE, THAT IS AN EXCUSE TO COVER UP THE FACT THAT OUR FELLOW MAN IS **DRUNK** ON HIS NEW POWER...

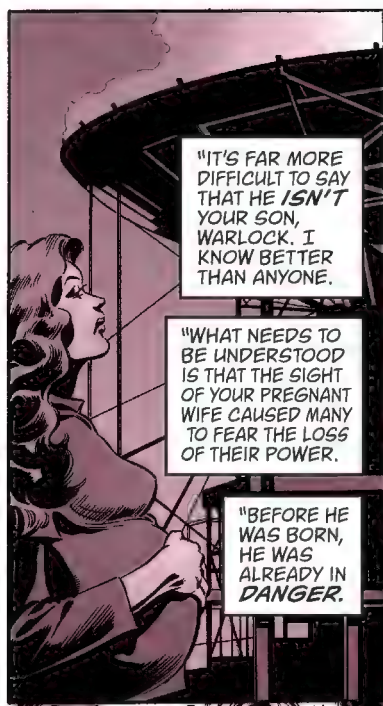
...AND WILL STOP AT **NOTHING** TO GUARANTEE THAT HE NOT LOSE THESE NEW ABILITIES...INCLUDING STRIKING AT YOU AND **HER**.

AND YOUR **CHILD**.



WHERE IS THE CHILD?

YOU MEAN, YOUR "**SON**"? IS THAT REALLY SO DIFFICULT TO SAY?



"IT'S FAR MORE DIFFICULT TO SAY THAT HE *ISN'T* YOUR SON, WARLOCK. I KNOW BETTER THAN ANYONE.

"WHAT NEEDS TO BE UNDERSTOOD IS THAT THE SIGHT OF YOUR PREGNANT WIFE CAUSED MANY TO FEAR THE LOSS OF THEIR POWER.

"BEFORE HE WAS BORN, HE WAS ALREADY IN DANGER.



"HIS BIRTH WAS DIFFICULT. BUT MANY BELIEVE THAT IF EVEN *ONE CHILD* WAS ALLOWED TO BE BORN AND GROW, IT WOULD SIGNAL *MORE*."



"RICHARDS, EVEN AFTER WE GAVE YOU THE CHILD TO HIDE, THEY STRUCK AT US. THEY TOOK MY WIFE. MY CONCERN IS AS TO *WHY?*"



"DON'T YOU SEE? THEY'RE AFRAID YOU'LL *BREED* AGAIN."

"BUT THIS IS THE *ENTIRE WORLD*, RICHARDS. HOW CAN YOU HIDE A CHILD FROM EVERYONE FOR *THAT LONG? WHERE IS HE?*"



HE WAS HIDDEN WITH THE PERSON I WOULD *LEAST* LIKELY BE THOUGHT TO ALLY WITH.

I PUT HIM IN THE ONLY PLACE PEOPLE WOULD *NEVER* THINK TO LOOK.

I GAVE HIM TO THE MAN WHO *KILLED* SUSAN'S BROTHER.

I GAVE HIM TO THE MAN WHO *KILLED* SUSAN'S BROTHER.

THE ONE LIVING BEING PEOPLE WOULD EXPECT ME MOST TO HATE.

I GAVE YOUR SON TO *NAMOR*, THE KING OF ATLANTIS. AND HID HIM *FAR* BENEATH THE EYES OF MAN.



I WISH WE COULD LEAVE HIM THERE A WHILE LONGER. BUT WE *CAN'T*.

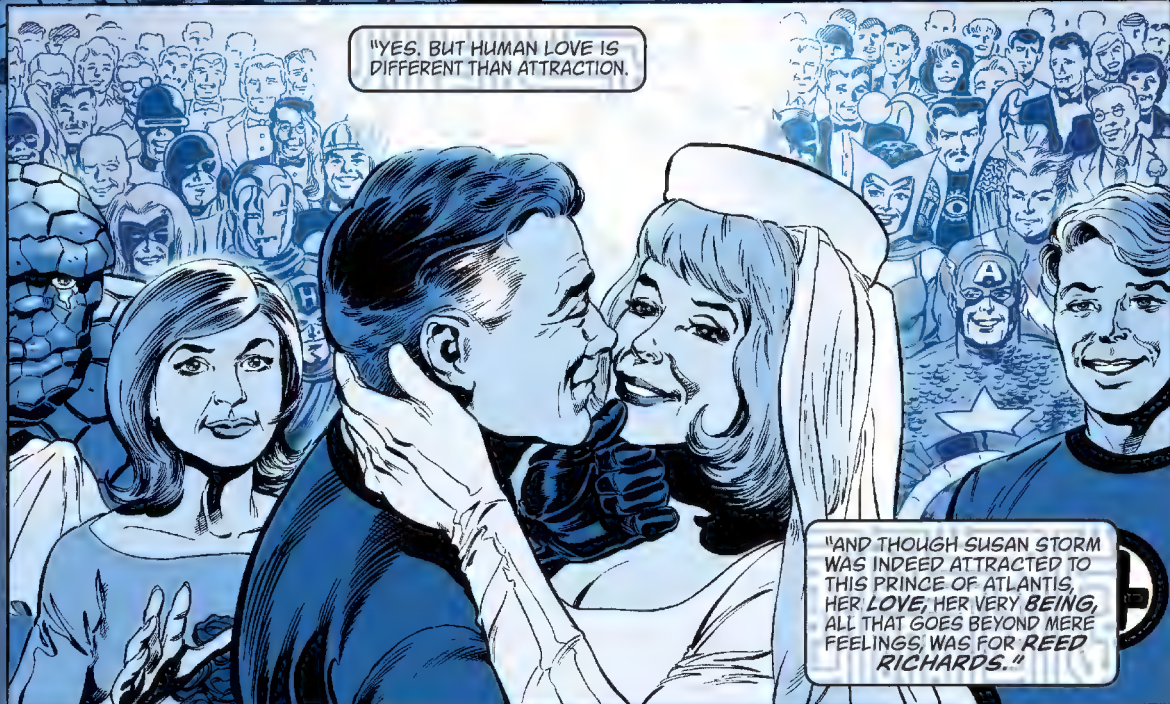
WHY NOT?

HE TOLD ME IN A DREAM TO COME AND GET HIM.



UPON NAMOR'S
RECALLING HIS IDENTITY
AND MEMORY, HIS ATTACK
ON NEW YORK WAS QUELLED
ONLY BY THE STIRRING OF
HIS OWN **AFFECTIONS**
FOR RICHARDS'
FIANCEE.

DID THE
STORM WOMAN
RECIPROCATE
HIS AFFEC-
TIONS?



"YES, BUT HUMAN LOVE IS
DIFFERENT THAN ATTRACTION.

"AND THOUGH SUSAN STORM
WAS INDEED ATTRACTED TO
THIS PRINCE OF ATLANTIS,
HER **LOVE**, HER VERY **BEING**,
ALL THAT GOES BEYOND MERE
FEELINGS, WAS FOR **REED**
RICHARDS."

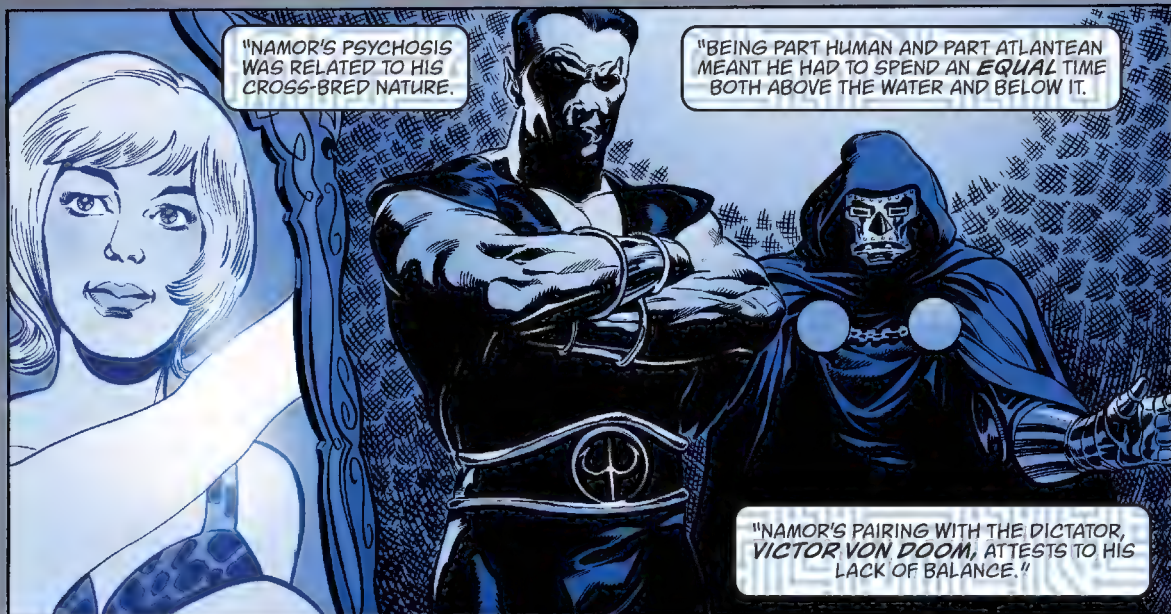


WHAT HAS THIS TO DO WITH FRANKLIN RICHARDS? I AM TROUBLED BY THESE IMAGES.

"AS WAS PRINCE NAMOR, IMAGINE GROWING UP IN AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE YOU HAD EVERYTHING, WHERE YOU WERE PREPARED TO BE **KING** AND NO ONE COULD DENY YOU ANYTHING...AND NOW THE THING YOU WANTED MOST WAS **DENIED** YOU.

"SOME BELIEVE THAT THE DENIAL OF SUSAN RICHARDS WAS THE EVENT IN NAMOR'S LIFE WHICH DROVE HIM **MAD**.

"BUT THERE WAS FAR MORE BEHIND THE SEA KING'S DEMENTIA THAN A **BROKEN HEART**.



"NAMOR'S PSYCHOSIS WAS RELATED TO HIS **CROSS-BRED NATURE**.

"BEING PART HUMAN AND PART ATLANTEAN MEANT HE HAD TO SPEND AN **EQUAL** TIME BOTH ABOVE THE WATER AND BELOW IT.

"NAMOR'S PAIRING WITH THE DICTATOR, **VICTOR VON DOOM**, ATTESTS TO HIS LACK OF BALANCE."

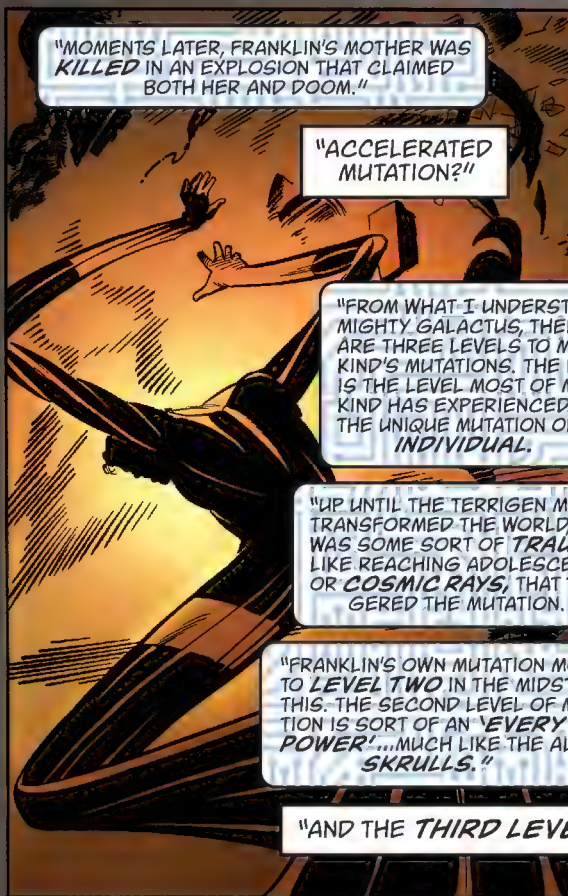


"WITH THE LAST PAIRING OF DOOM AND NAMOR, **JOHNNY STORM**, SUSAN'S BROTHER, BECAME A VICTIM OF NAMOR'S DEMENTIA.



NOOOO!

"JOHNNY STORM'S DEATH WAS *TOO MUCH* FOR FRANKLIN TO HANDLE. THE TRAUMA ACCELERATED HIS MUTATION. HE STRUCK AT NAMOR AND CURSED HIM TO *BURN FOREVER*.



"MOMENTS LATER, FRANKLIN'S MOTHER WAS **KILLED** IN AN EXPLOSION THAT CLAIMED BOTH HER AND DOOM."

"ACCELERATED MUTATION?"

"FROM WHAT I UNDERSTAND MIGHTY GALACTUS, THERE ARE THREE LEVELS TO MANKIND'S MUTATIONS. THE FIRST IS THE LEVEL MOST OF MANKIND HAS EXPERIENCED. IT IS THE UNIQUE MUTATION OF THE *INDIVIDUAL*.

"UP UNTIL THE TERRIGEN MISTS TRANSFORMED THE WORLD, IT WAS SOME SORT OF **TRAUMA**, LIKE REACHING ADOLESCENCE, OR **COSMIC RAYS**, THAT TRIGGERED THE MUTATION.

"FRANKLIN'S OWN MUTATION MOVED TO **LEVEL TWO** IN THE MIDST OF THIS. THE SECOND LEVEL OF MUTATION IS SORT OF AN '**EVERY POWER**'...MUCH LIKE THE ALIEN **SKRULLS**."

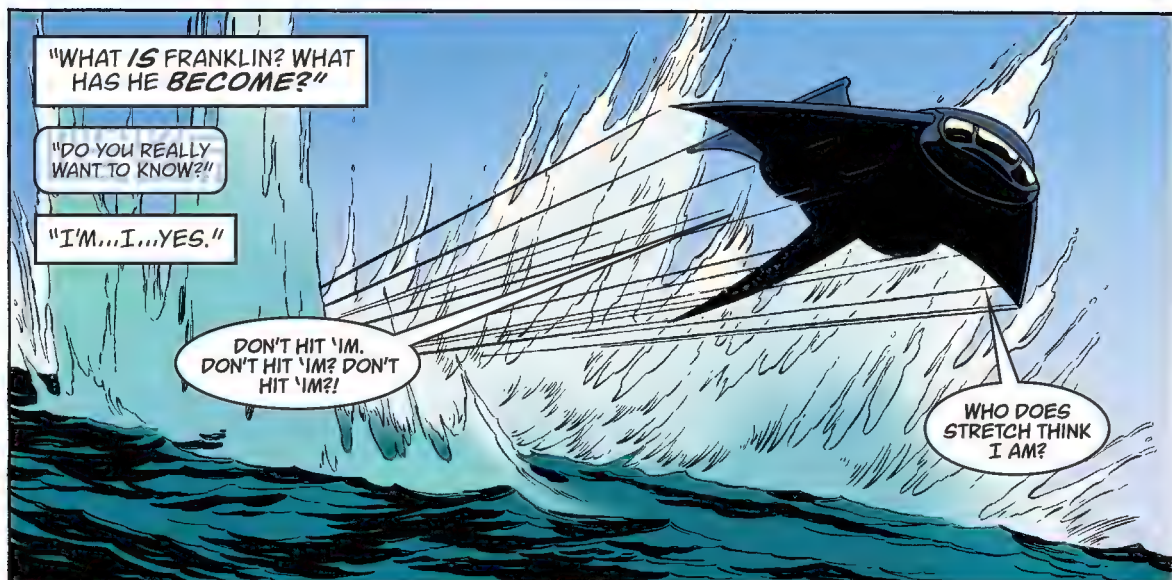
"AND THE **THIRD LEVEL**?"



THE THIRD LEVEL IS A MUTATION THAT REDUCES THE BEARER OF THIS POWER TO THE WHIM AND DEFINITION OF HIS ENVIRONMENT. THE THIRD LEVEL IS A **DEATH** OF SORTS. IT'S THE DEATH OF SELF-DEFINITION AND DETERMINATION. ONE BECOMES WHAT OTHERS *WISH* HIM TO BECOME.

I SEE. COULD FRANKLIN NOT **REMOVE** THE CURSE FROM NAMOR THEN, IF OTHERS LIKE YOURSELF WISHED HIM TO?

YES. BUT TO ASK FRANKLIN TO UNDO THE CURSE WOULD AFFECT HIS CURRENT IDENTITY. AND THAT WOULD BE **FAR MORE DESTRUCTIVE** THAN ALLOWING NAMOR TO LIVE AS CURSED.



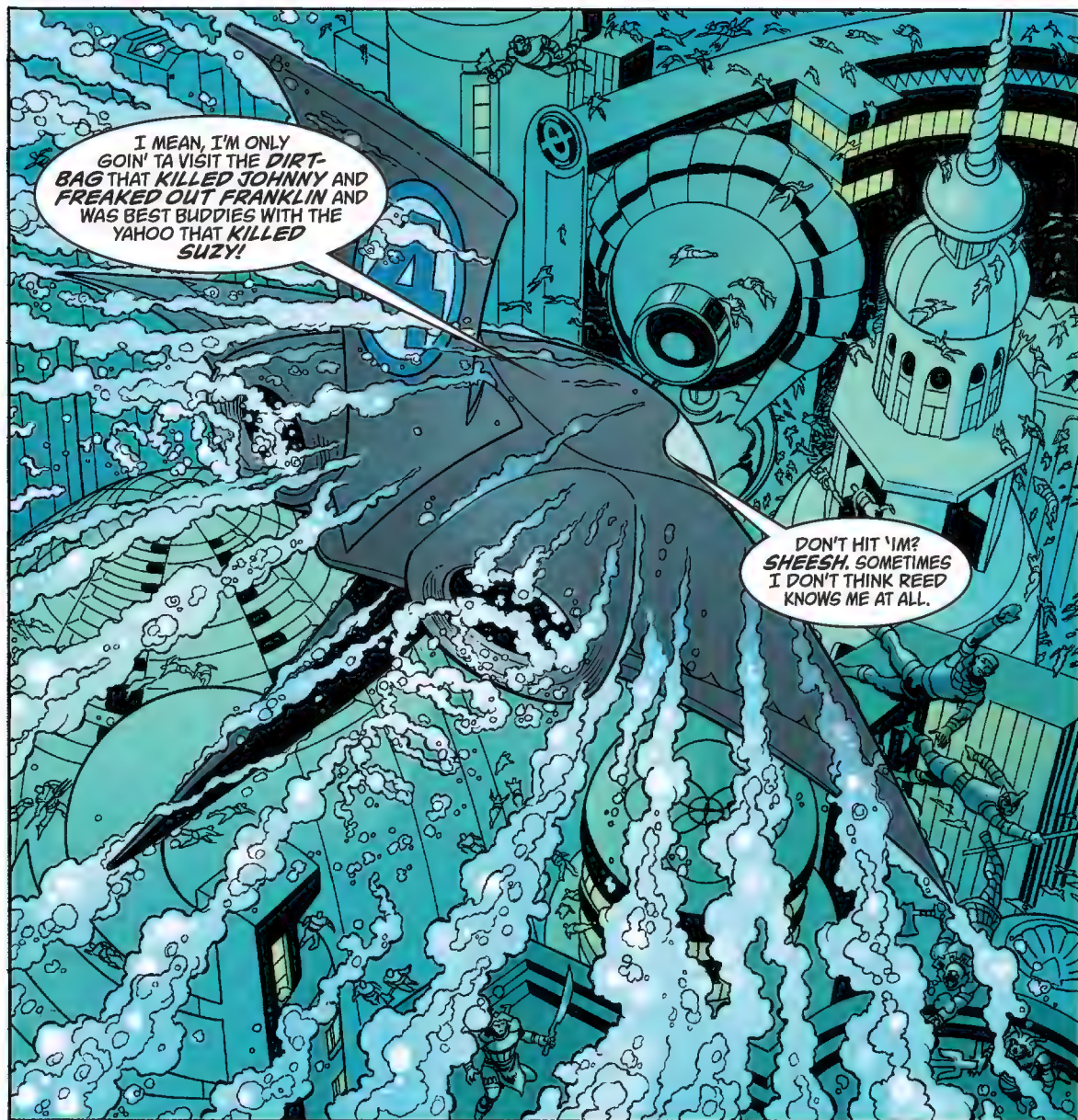
"WHAT *IS* FRANKLIN? WHAT HAS HE *BECOME*?"

"DO YOU REALLY WANT TO KNOW?"

"I'M...I...YES."

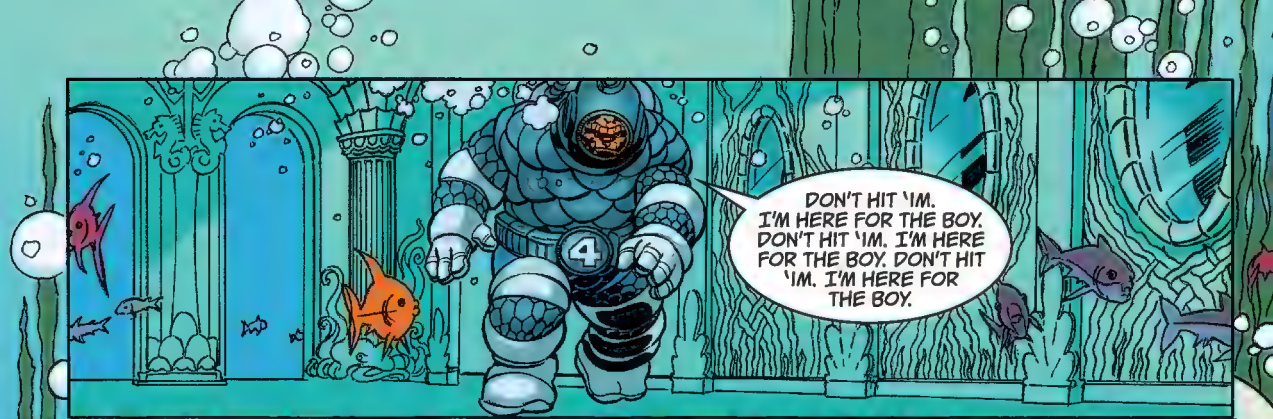
DON'T HIT 'IM.
DON'T HIT 'IM? DON'T
HIT 'IM?!

WHO DOES
STRETCH THINK
I AM?

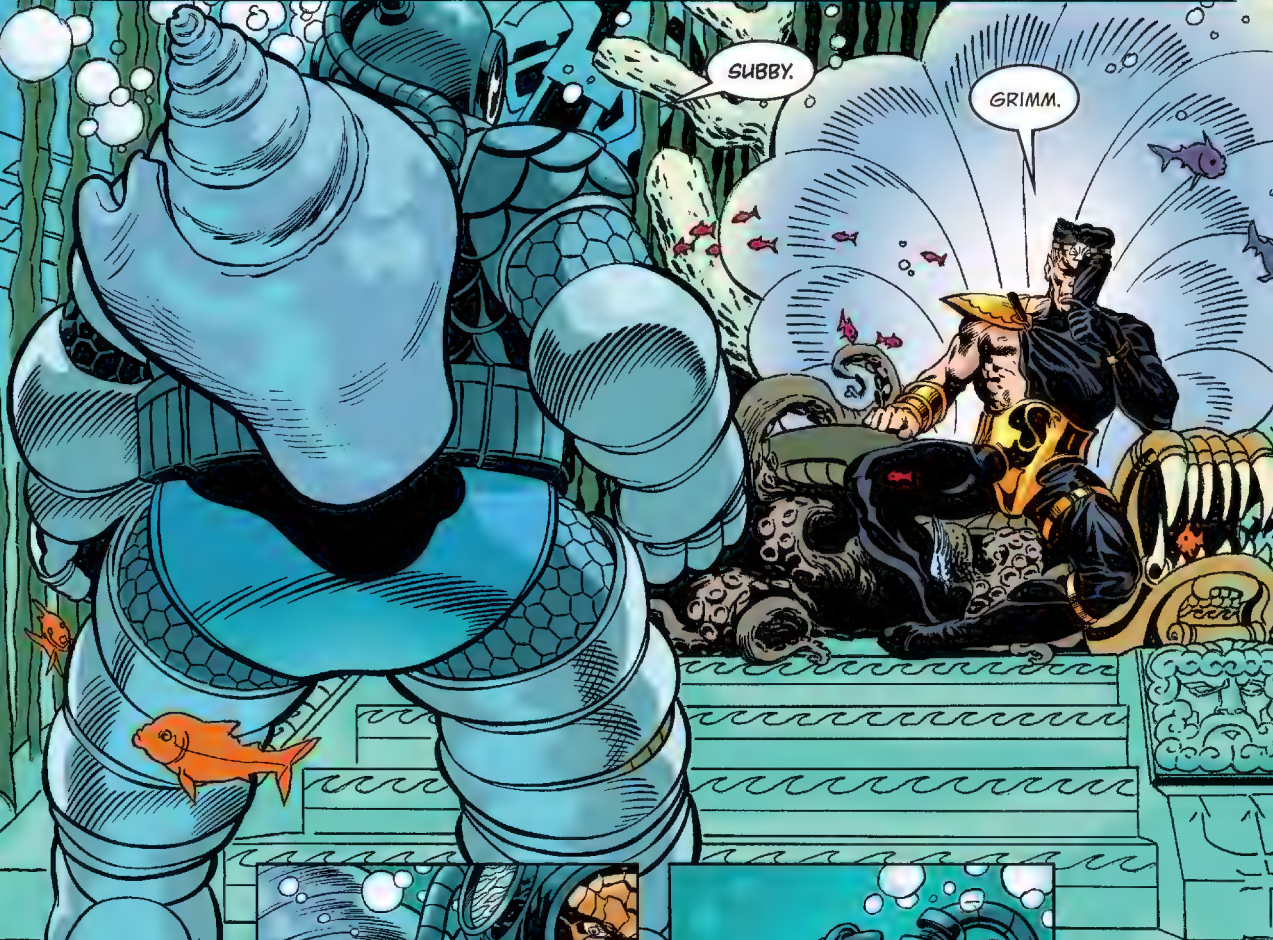


I MEAN, I'M ONLY
GOIN' TA VISIT THE *DIRT-
BAG* THAT *KILLED JOHNNY* AND
FREAKED OUT FRANKLIN AND
WAS BEST BUDDIES WITH THE
YAHOO THAT *KILLED SUZY*!

DON'T HIT 'IM?
SHEESH. SOMETIMES
I DON'T THINK REED
KNOWS ME AT ALL.



DON'T HIT 'IM.
I'M HERE FOR THE BOY.
DON'T HIT 'IM. I'M HERE
FOR THE BOY. DON'T HIT
'IM. I'M HERE FOR
THE BOY.



SUBBY.

GRIMM.

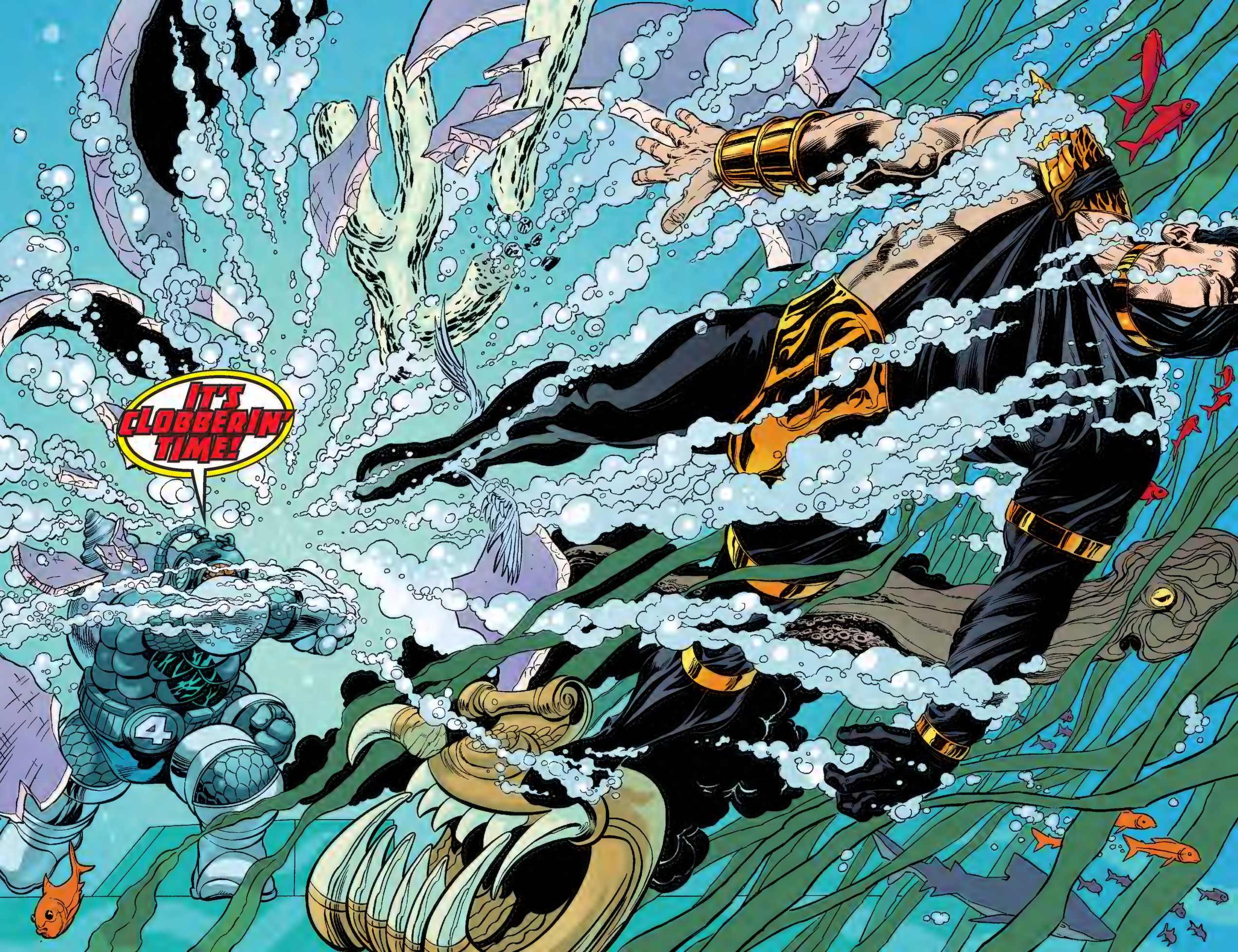


SORRY,
STRETCH. BUT
HE *DID* KILL
JOHNNY.



DON'T WORRY.
I AIN'T GONNA HIT YA.
I AIN'T GONNA...

THE
HELL I
AIN'T.



IT'S
CLOBBERIN'
TIME!



AND ONE DAY, MIGHTY GALACTUS, YOU CAME TO EARTH. AND YOU SWORE TO CONSUME IT.

OF COURSE, NO ONE REALIZED THIS WAS BECAUSE OF THE **CELESTIAL EMBRYO** GROWING WITHIN THE CORE.

NO ONE KNEW OF YOUR **PURPOSE** IN THE COSMOS.

"NO ONE BUT **UATU**, THE **OLD WATCHER**."

"HE GAVE REED RICHARDS A WEAPON THAT COULD DESTROY EVEN ONE SUCH AS YOURSELF."

"A DEVICE KNOWN AS THE **ULTIMATE NULLIFIER**."

"EARTH WOULD HAVE BEEN **DESTROYED** HAD RICHARDS USED THE DEVICE. INSTEAD, YOU **SURRENDERED** FOR THE FIRST TIME."

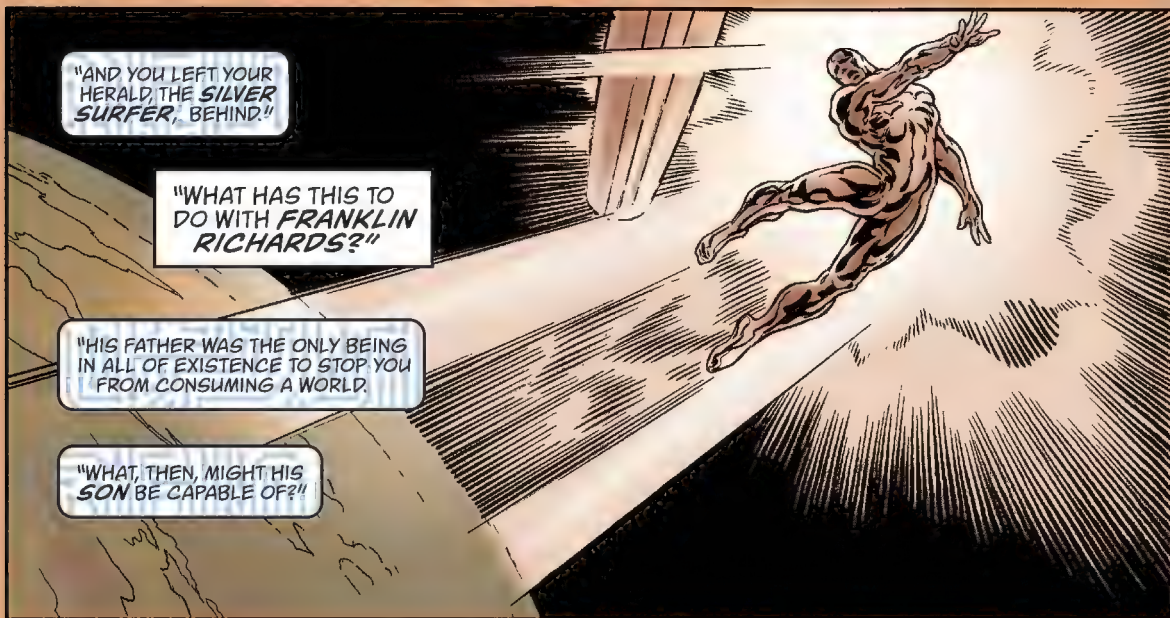


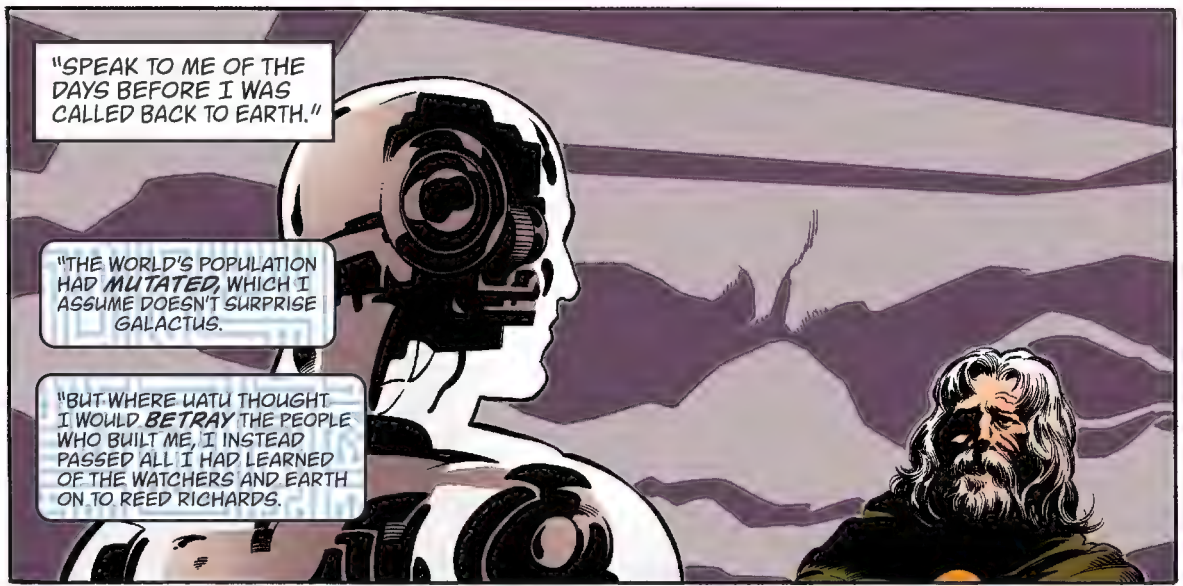
"AND YOU LEFT YOUR **HERALD**, THE **SILVER SURFER**, BEHIND."

"WHAT HAS THIS TO DO WITH **FRANKLIN RICHARDS**?"

"HIS FATHER WAS THE ONLY BEING IN ALL OF EXISTENCE TO STOP YOU FROM CONSUMING A WORLD."

"WHAT, THEN, MIGHT HIS **SON** BE CAPABLE OF?"

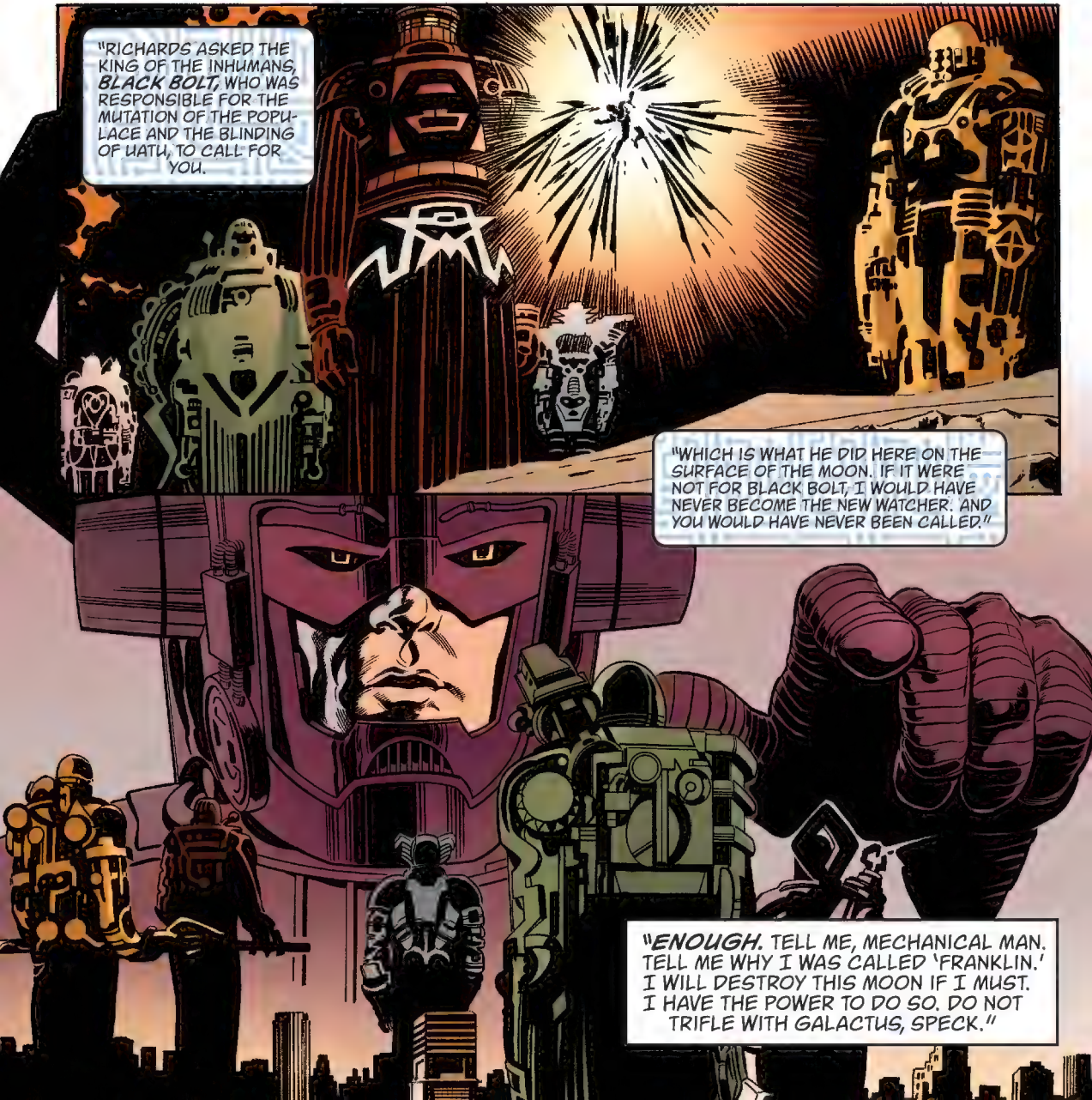




"SPEAK TO ME OF THE DAYS BEFORE I WAS CALLED BACK TO EARTH."

"THE WORLD'S POPULATION HAD **MUTATED**, WHICH I ASSUME DOESN'T SURPRISE GALACTUS."

"BUT WHERE UATU THOUGHT I WOULD **BETRAY** THE PEOPLE WHO BUILT ME, I INSTEAD PASSED ALL I HAD LEARNED OF THE WATCHERS AND EARTH ON TO REED RICHARDS."



"RICHARDS ASKED THE KING OF THE INHUMANS, **BLACK BOLT**, WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MUTATION OF THE POPULACE AND THE BLINDING OF UATU, TO CALL FOR YOU."

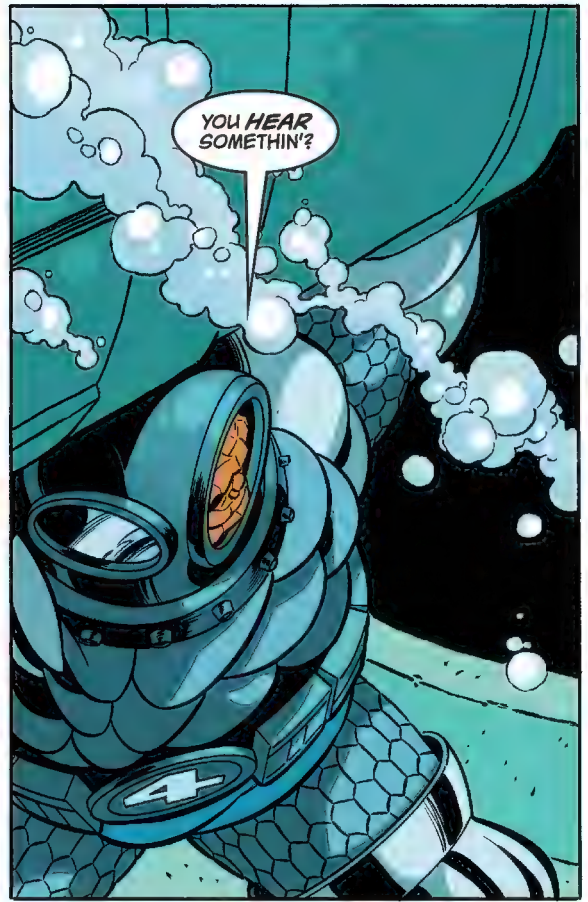
"WHICH IS WHAT HE DID HERE ON THE SURFACE OF THE MOON. IF IT WERE NOT FOR BLACK BOLT, I WOULD HAVE NEVER BECOME THE NEW WATCHER. AND YOU WOULD HAVE NEVER BEEN CALLED."

"**ENOUGH.** TELL ME, MECHANICAL MAN. TELL ME WHY I WAS CALLED 'FRANKLIN.' I WILL DESTROY THIS MOON IF I MUST. I HAVE THE POWER TO DO SO. DO NOT TRIFLE WITH GALACTUS, SPECK."



THIS'S FER
JOHNNY, YA TWO-
FACED FIN-FOOTED
GALOOT!

NO,
GRIMM!
DON'T!



YOU HEAR
SOMETHIN'?



CRIPES.

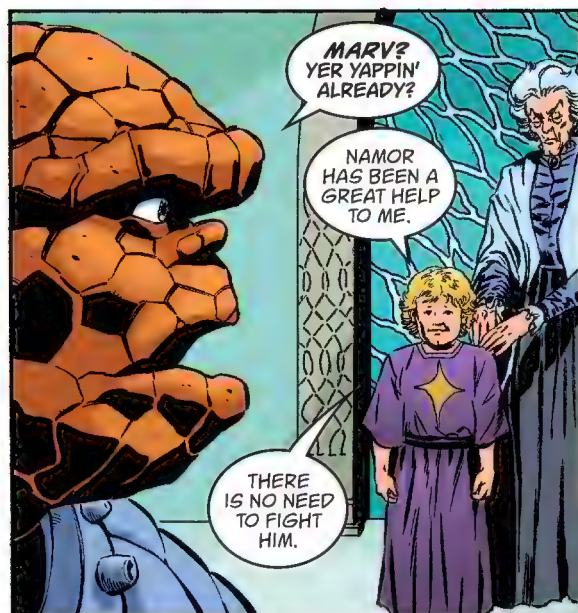
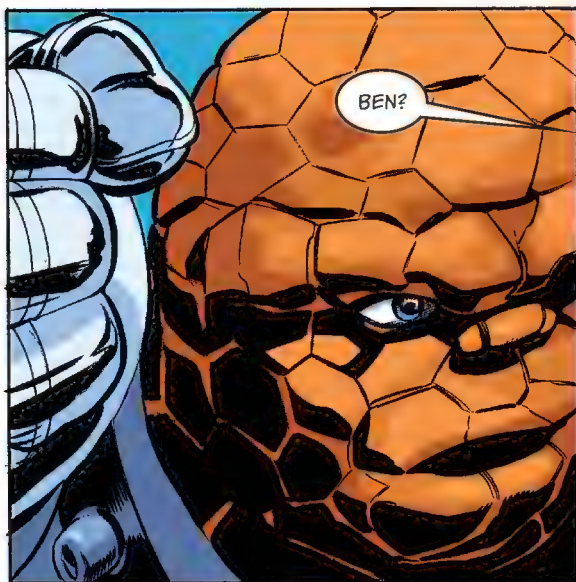
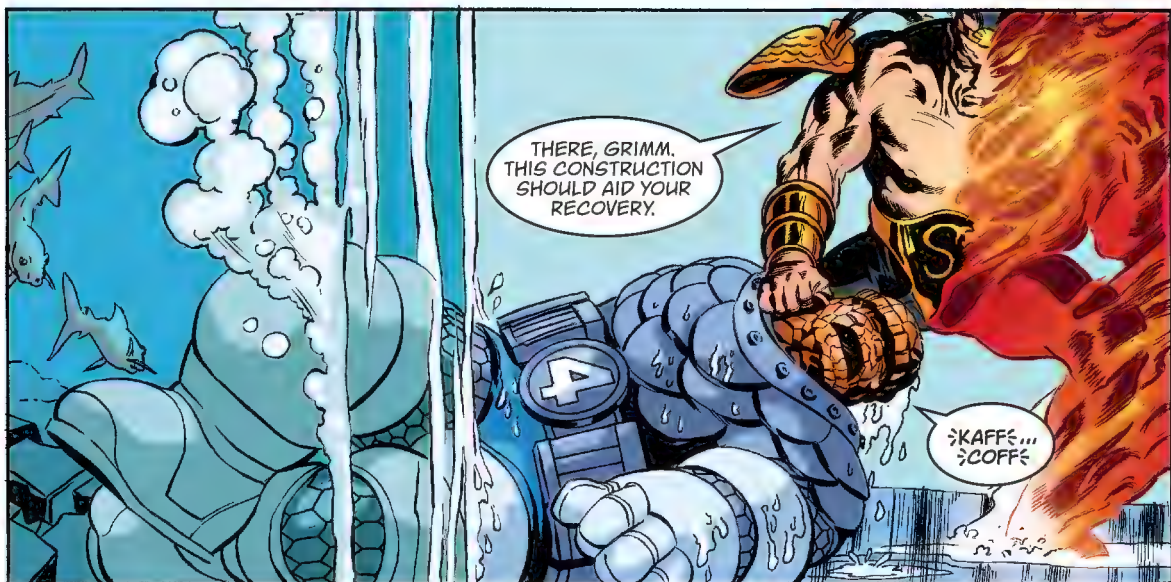
YOU'RE
A FOOL,
GRIMM.

I WILL **NOT**
BE RESPONSIBLE FOR
ANOTHER OF YOUR
FAMILY'S DEATHS.



YEAH? WELL, I GOTTA
TELL YA, SUBBY I'VE YET TA FIND
A PAIR A TEETH THAT CAN CAUSE
MY HIDE ANY HARM.





"THERE IS A *PLACE*, BEN, WHERE HEROES GO WHEN THEY DIE. IT'S NOT HEAVEN...IT'S KIND OF THE *OPPOSITE*..."

"SUZY WENT TO *HELL*? IS THAT WHAT YER TRYIN' TA TELL ME?"

"YOU MISUNDERSTAND ME, BEN. IT'S A RESTING PLACE FOR HEROES. IF ANYTHING, EVERY CONFLICT ON EARTH HAS BEEN A TESTING GROUND FOR THE CONFLICT TO COME THERE."

"AND BEN, THEY DON'T EVEN *KNOW* THEY'RE DEAD. THEY THINK *YOU* AND *REED* ARE."

"HOW DA YA KNOW ALL THIS?"

"BECAUSE I AM THERE *NOW*, BEN."

HAS HE MADE *CONTACT* YET, MAR-VELL?

YES.

THEN IT BEGINS JUST AS YOU SAID IT WOULD.





I STILL DON'T
KNOW HOW YOU'RE
GOING TO CONVINCE
ANYONE THAT THEY
ARE, INDEED,
DEAD.

ONLY THOSE
WILLING TO BELIEVE
WILL, STEPHEN. SURELY
YOU KNOW THIS FROM YOUR
YEARS AS A DOCTOR. NOT
ALL PATIENTS **DESIRE**
TO BE WELL.



YOU WORRY
TOO MUCH, STEVE.
LOOK AT THEM
ALL.

DO YOU REALLY
THINK THEY'RE GOING TO
CHOOSE BEATING THE CRUD
OUT OF EACH OTHER FOR
THE REST OF ETERNITY
OVER WHAT WE'VE GOT
PLANNED?



I DON'T KNOW,
COMMANDER RANN. I
DON'T KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT
CAPTAIN UNIVERSE TO
TELL IF IT'S GIVEN MAR-VELL
WHAT WE NEED.

COME DOWN
OFF IT, STEVE. YOU'RE
JUST MAKING EXCUSES.
I KNOW YOU'D BE A LOT
MORE POWERFUL IF YOUR
BODY WEREN'T **STILL**
ALIVE. BUT THAT'S
THE WAY IT IS.



OR ARE
YOU JUST SORE
THAT I DIDN'T GIVE
THE **ENIGMA FORCE**
TO YOU WHEN I
"DIED"?

YOU DON'T
EVEN HAVE A
BODY FOR IT
TO INHABIT.

BESIDES, THE
"MARVEL UNIVERSE"
DOES HAVE A KIND
OF **RING** TO IT,
DOESN'T IT?

"I THINK I KNOW WHY RICHARDS HAD BLACK BOLT CALL YOU 'FRANKLIN.'"

"SPEAK."

"WHEN REED RICHARDS FIRST ENCOUNTERED UATU HERE ON THE MOON, THE WATCHER DID NOT PRETEND, AS HE DID IN LATER YEARS, TO BE A FRIEND OF HUMANITY."

"RICHARDS REMEMBERED THIS. HE REMEMBERED THIS EVEN WHEN UATU HANDED HIM THE ULTIMATE NULLIFIER. HE HAS THE KIND OF BRAIN THAT SEES RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THINGS EVEN ON THE PERIPHERY."

"WHEN THE FANTASTIC FOUR FOUND THEMSELVES TRAPPED IN ANCIENT EGYPT BY A TIME TRAVELER WHO WOULD BECOME BOTH KANG AND IMMORTUS IN THE FUTURE, REED KNEW HE WAS BEING WATCHED BY UATU."

"WHEN HE DISCOVERED AND MET THE INHUMANS FOR THE FIRST TIME, HE KNEW THAT TO UATU, THERE WAS NO SUCH PLACE AS A HIDDEN LAND."

"UATU KNEW OF THE ORIGINS OF VIBRANIUM, THOUGH T'CHALLA AND HIS FELLOW WAKANDANS DID NOT."

"WHEN SENTIENT LIFE WAS CREATED BY MAN UPON EARTH FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE REMOTE LABORATORIES KNOWN AS THE BEEHIVE, UATU WAS WATCHING THE BIRTH OF HIM. WATCHING REED'S EVERY MOVE."

"IT'S NOT PARANOIA IF YOU KNOW SOMEONE IS WATCHING YOU."

"PERHAPS THIS IS THE REASON RICHARDS BEGAN TO SEARCH FOR A REALM HIDDEN FROM UATU'S EYES."

"PERHAPS THIS IS WHAT LED TO HIS DISCOVERY OF THE MICRO-VERSE, A WORLD WHICH EXISTS BETWEEN THE ATOMS OF OUR OWN."

"A PLACE PROTECTED BY A STRANGE WALL OF BEINGS LINKED BY SOMETHING I'VE HEARD CALLED THE ENIGMA FORCE."

"THE SAME APPLIES TO THE NEGATIVE ZONE, WHICH--"

"ARE YOU SAYING THAT BLACK BOLT CALLED OUT THE NAME FRANKLIN INSTEAD OF GALACTUS BECAUSE HE KNEW HE WAS BEING WATCHED? AND HE BELIEVED I WOULD COME ANYWAY?"

"THAT DOESN'T QUITE WORK, DOES IT? HOW ABOUT THIS... THE CELESTIALS HAVE BEEN CONCERNED THAT FRANKLIN'S POWER MIGHT ONE DAY THREATEN THEM, SO REED THOUGHT THAT BY CRYING FRANKLIN'S NAME, THEY MIGHT BE FRIGHTENED, AND--"

"NO MORE TRICKS, ROBOT. WHERE IS FRANKLIN NOW? TELL ME OR I WILL DESTROY THE EARTH."



I KNOW WHAT YOU SAID, STEPHEN, BUT I BELIEVE WE CAN DO THIS **WITHOUT** SUSAN RICHARDS.

YOU'RE NOT GOING TO TELL HER, THEN?

"I'M GOING TO TELL HER, STEPHEN. BUT THIS WAR WE ARE ABOUT TO FIGHT IS NOT FOR HER.

"THIS PLACE IS NOT FOR HER. NOT WITHOUT REED RICHARDS."



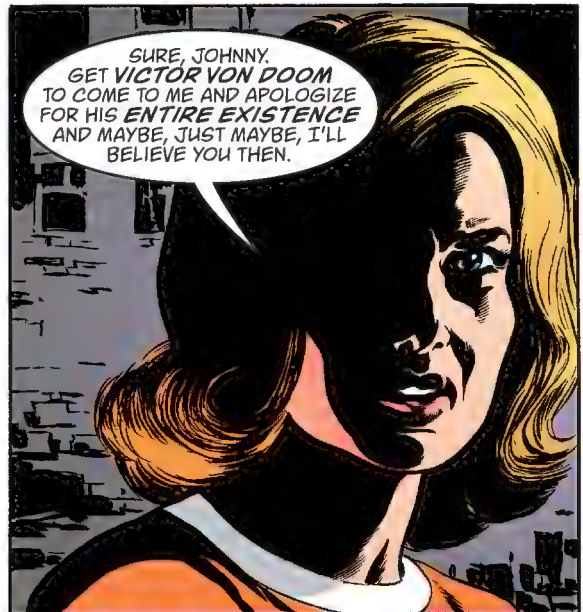
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?

I'M GOING TO **REUNITE** HER WITH HER HUSBAND.

YOU CAN'T BE **SERIOUS!** I WON'T LET YOU KILL REED!

I'M NOT PLANNING ON IT.

BRING ME **JOHNNY STORM**. I BELIEVE HE'S THE ONLY ONE SHE'LL LISTEN TO.



"I'M SORRY, GALACTUS, I AM NOT ATTEMPTING TO TRY YOUR PATIENCE, I AM ONLY TRYING TO GIVE YOU **PERSPECTIVE.**"

"IT IS DIFFICULT TO SAY. PARTS OF HIS CHILDHOOD WERE SPENT IN AN ADULT BODY. OTHERS OCCURRED IN THE FAR FUTURE. ANOTHER PART OF THAT CHILDHOOD WAS SPENT AS A TEENAGER."

"I BELIEVE THIS WAS BECAUSE EVEN THEN, HE WAS IN THE PROCESS OF ENTERING THE **SECOND TIER** OF MUTATION."

"EXCEPT FOR THE CELESTIALS. THEY CAME BACK TO DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT FRANKLIN WOULD BE A **THREAT** TO THEM OR THEIR PLANS FOR EARTH."

"AND WAS HE A THREAT?"

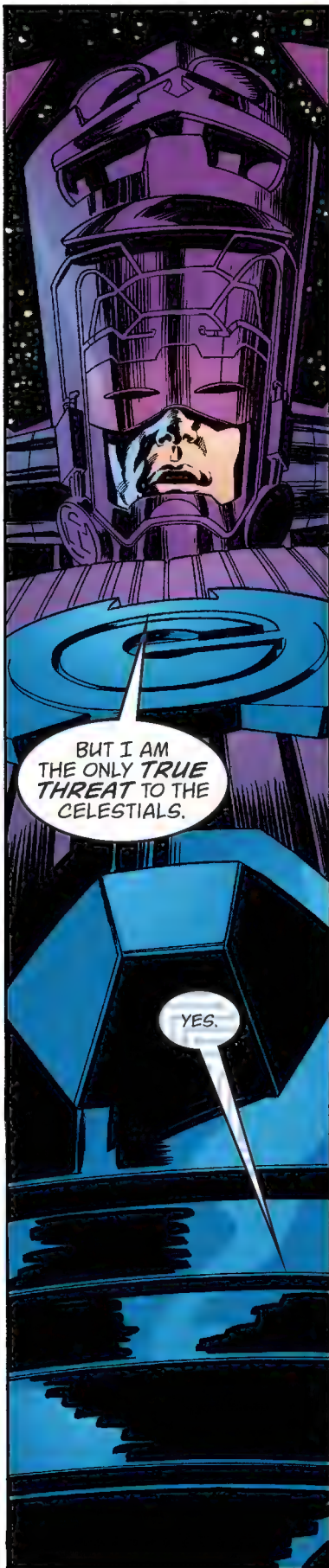
"SPEAK TO ME. WAS FRANKLIN RICHARDS EVER A THREAT TO THE CELESTIALS?"

"...YES."

"FRANKLIN'S NANNY WAS A **WITCH**, A WOMAN GIVEN TO SUPERNATURAL FORCES BEYOND MANKIND'S CONTROL."

"HOW DID THESE FORCES YOU SPEAK OF AFFECT FRANKLIN?"

"NO ONE SEEMED TO HAVE ANY NOTION OF HOW TO TEST THE **LIMITS** OF HIS ABILITIES."



BUT I AM
THE ONLY **TRUE**
THREAT TO THE
CELESTIALS.

YES.



SO THEN
WHY IS THIS
EARTHLING'S
STORY
BOTHERING
ME SO?

WHY
HAVE I RE-
MAINED HERE AS
LONG AS I
HAVE?

I SHOULD
BE BRINGING
BALANCE TO
THE COSMOS.
I HUNGER. BUT
I **MUST**
KNOW.

HAVE I BECOME WATH?
HAVE I BECOME THE
MANIPULATOR FOR MY
OWN AGENDA AS HE WAS?



IF I TELL GALACTUS HE
IS FRANKLIN, GALACTUS
WILL **CEASE TO EXIST.**

THERE WILL BE NO BALANCE.
THE CELESTIALS WILL OVER-
RUN **ALL OF CREATION.**

BUT IF I DON'T...



YOU'RE *MAD*,
STORM! YOU'VE *NEVER*
DARED ATTACK VON DOOM
ON YOUR OWN BEFORE!
WHY NOW?!

IT'S A MATTER
OF *DEATH* AND *LIFE*,
VICTOR.

I'M AFRAID
I HAVE SOME *BAD*
NEWS...YOU'RE
DEAD.

SUCH
CONFIDENCE IS
UNLIKE YOU,
STORM.

REED IS
LIVING IN YOUR
CASTLE AND
WEARING YOUR
ARMOR.

BEN IS
DRINKING YOUR
WINE.

GORGON
OF THE INHUMANS
IS LIVING IN YOUR
STABLE.

WE LOST.
WE DIED. THE
LIVING HAVE GONE
ON... *WITHOUT*
YOU AND ME.



I MUST
ADMIT THAT YOUR
ATTACK IS NOT
WITHOUT CREATIVITY,
STORM.

YOU WERE THE
IDIOT CHILD OF YOUR
TEAMMATES...THE FOOL...
AND ONLY NOW DO YOU
SHOW ANY PROMISE
AT ALL.



YOU CAN'T KILL
ME, DOOM. I'M **ALREADY**
DEAD. MY SISTER NEEDS
YOUR HELP. **REED** NEEDS
YOUR HELP.



NEVER!



YOU
ARE **INSANE**,
BOY.



MAYBE.



NO! GIVE IT BACK! IT IS NOT FOR ONE LIKE YOU TO GAZE UPON MY TORTURED VISAGE!

I WILL NOT BEAR MOCKERY!



NO, VICTOR. THINGS ARE NOT AS THEY WERE HERE.

YOU NEED NOT BE AS YOU WERE.



LOOK, VICTOR. LOOK.

WHERE ARE YOUR SCARS NOW?

THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE.



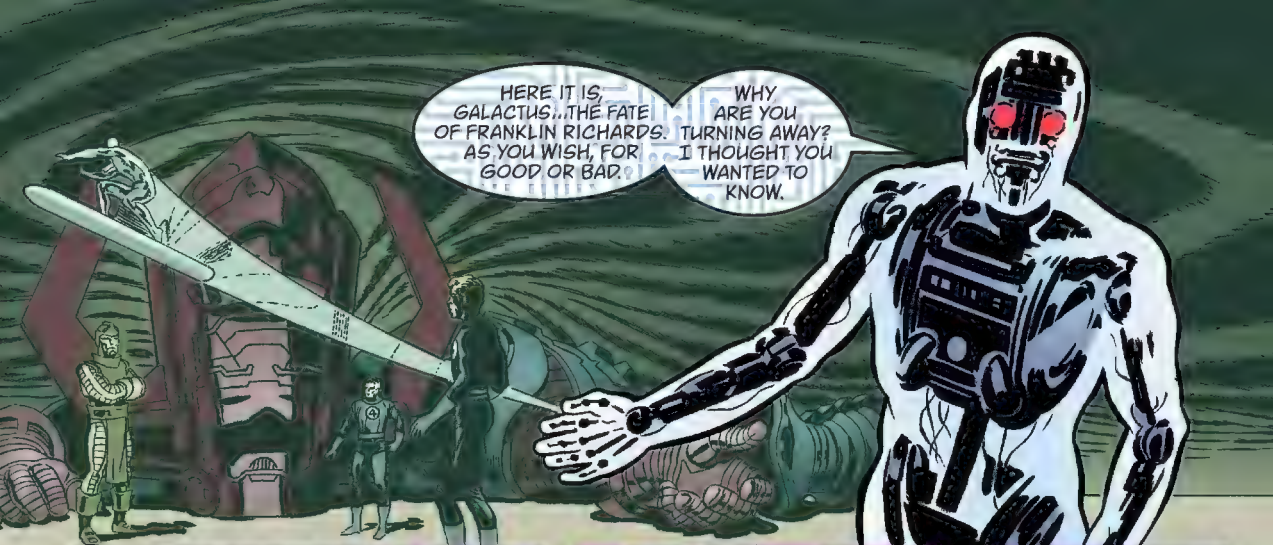
THINGS ARE GOING TO *CHANGE*, VICTOR. I WILL MAKE CERTAIN OF IT.

I THINK YOU CAN BECOME *SCARRED* AGAIN HERE, VICTOR. I'LL HELP IF NECESSARY.

THINGS ARE DIFFERENT HERE...



...SO
WHAT'S IT
GOING TO
BE?



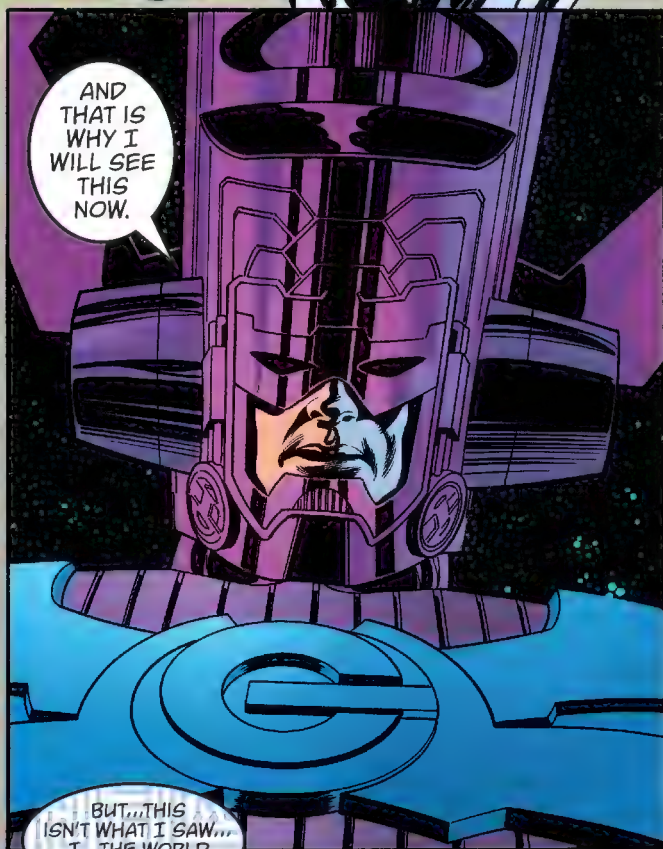
HERE IT IS,
GALACTUS...THE FATE
OF FRANKLIN RICHARDS.
AS YOU WISH, FOR
GOOD OR BAD.

WHY
ARE YOU
TURNING AWAY?
I THOUGHT YOU
WANTED TO
KNOW.



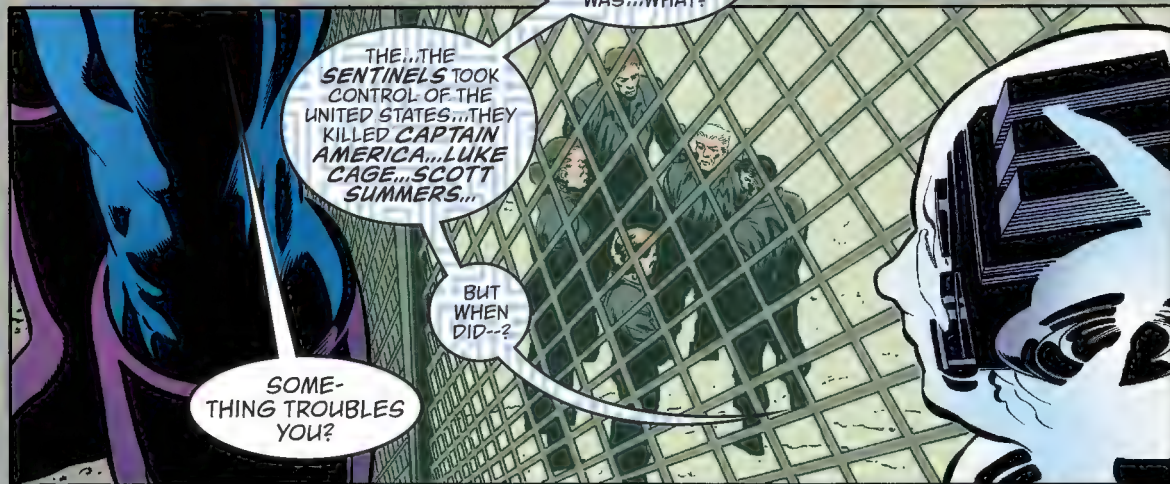
...I DON'T
KNOW WHY I
WON'T LOOK. I
HAVE A TERRIBLE
SENSE OF
DREAD.

BUT I AM
GALACTUS.
HOW CAN I
KNOW
FEAR?



AND
THAT IS
WHY I
WILL SEE
THIS
NOW.

BUT...THIS
ISN'T WHAT I SAW...
I...THE WORLD
WAS...WHAT?



THE...THE
SENTINELS TOOK
CONTROL OF THE
UNITED STATES...THEY
KILLED **CAPTAIN
AMERICA...LUKE
CAGE...SCOTT
SUMMERS...**

BUT
WHEN
DID--?

SOME-
THING TROUBLES
YOU?



"AN **UNDERGROUND STRIKE-FORCE** WAS CREATED TO ATTACK THE **MUTANT-HUNTING SENTINELS**. FRANKLIN WAS A MEMBER OF THIS MILITIA.

"LED BY **WOLVERINE**, THEIR MISSION WAS TO ATTACK THE **SENTINELS' COMMAND CENTER**...

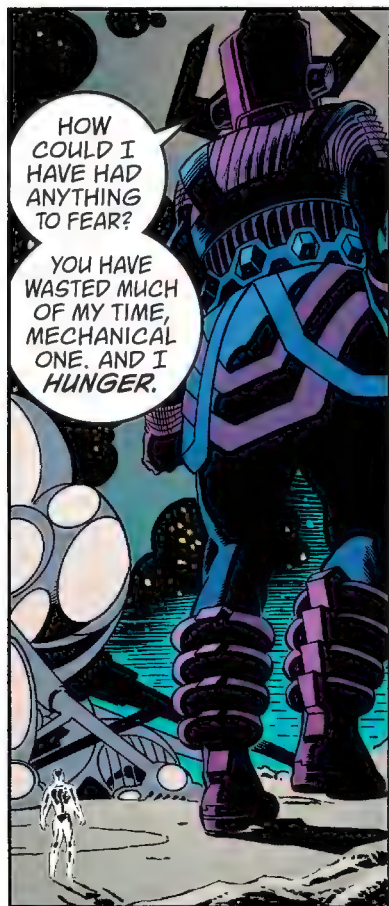
"...A MANHATTAN HIGH-RISE KNOWN AS THE **BAXTER BUILDING**."

"THE **HOME OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR**?"



"YES. THE **SENTINELS** LEARNED OF THE ATTACK, AND **COUNTERED**."

"THIS... WAS HOW FRANKLIN RICHARDS... DIED."



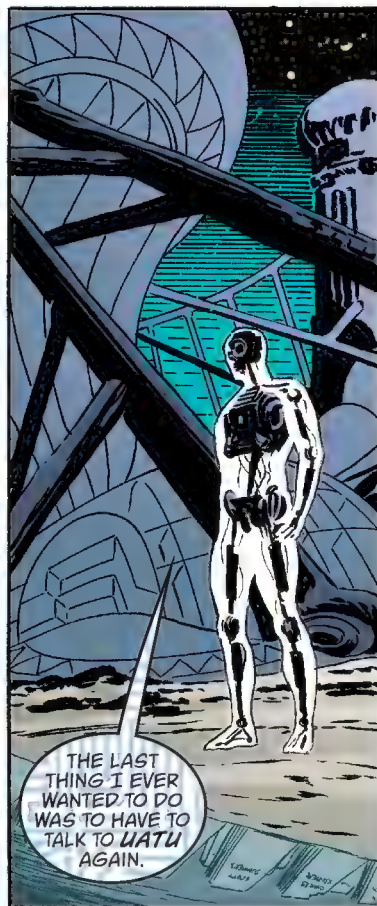
HOW COULD I HAVE HAD ANYTHING TO FEAR?

YOU HAVE WASTED MUCH OF MY TIME, MECHANICAL ONE. AND I **HUNGER**.

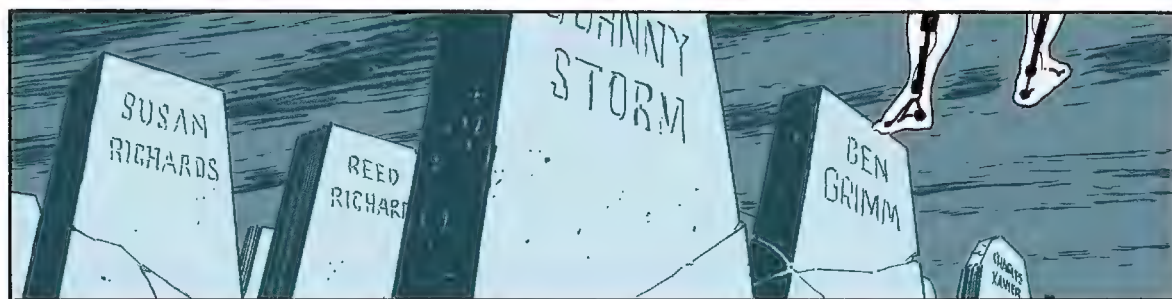


BUT THAT'S NOT HOW IT HAPPENED AT ALL.

WHAT'S GOING ON? WHY AM I SEEING SOMETHING LIKE THIS?



THE LAST THING I EVER WANTED TO DO WAS TO HAVE TO TALK TO **UATU** AGAIN.



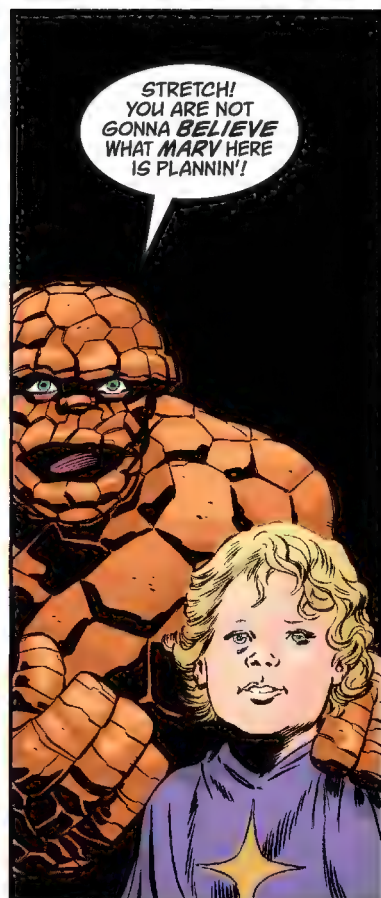
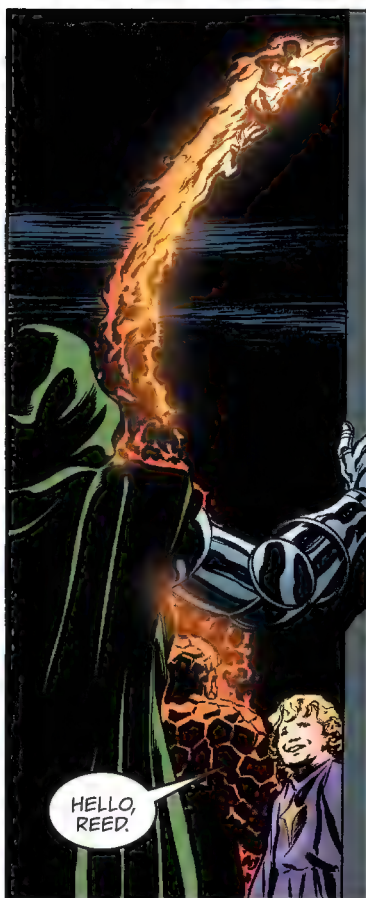
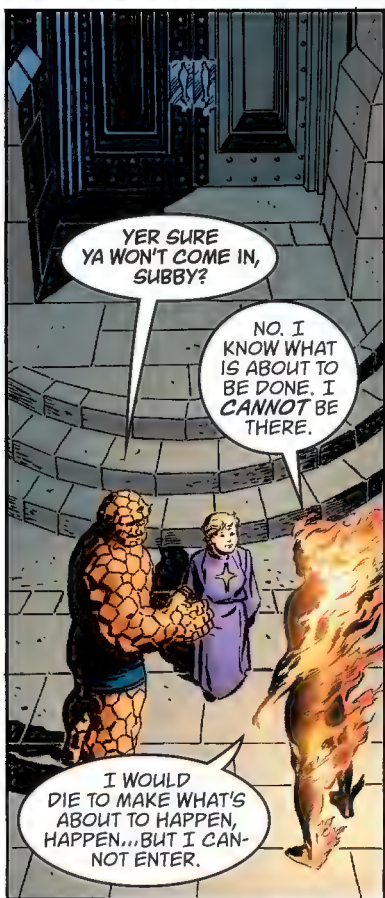
SUSAN RICHARDS

REED RICHARDS

GUNNY STORM

BEN GRIMM

CHARLES XAVIER





VERY WELL...

...I SUPPOSE THE THING I REMEMBER MOST IS THE **ROCKET**. THAT NIGHT. THE NIGHT WE BECAME THE **FANTASTIC FOUR**.

SOMETIMES I THINK IT WASN'T EVEN ABOUT THE SPACE RACE.

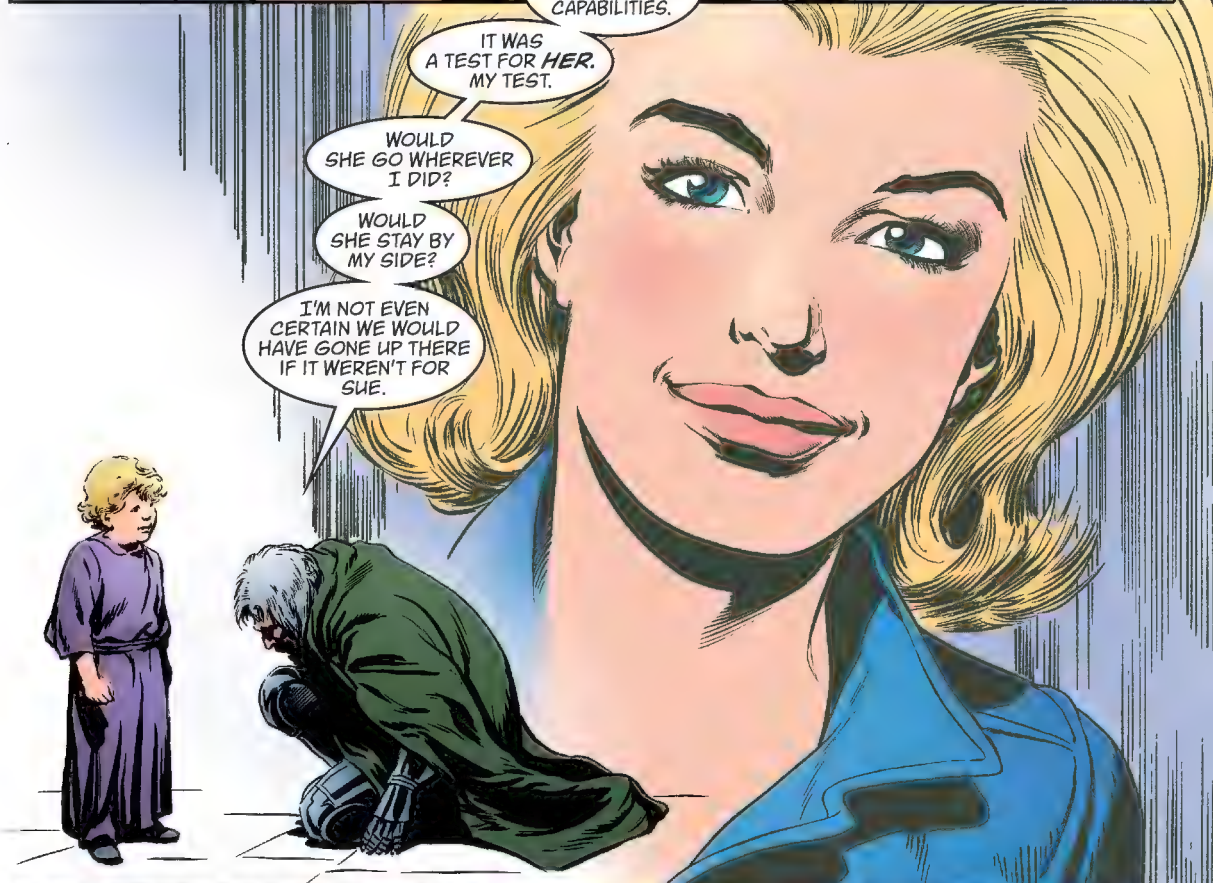
IT WASN'T A TEST OF OUR CAPABILITIES.

IT WAS A TEST FOR **HER**. MY TEST.

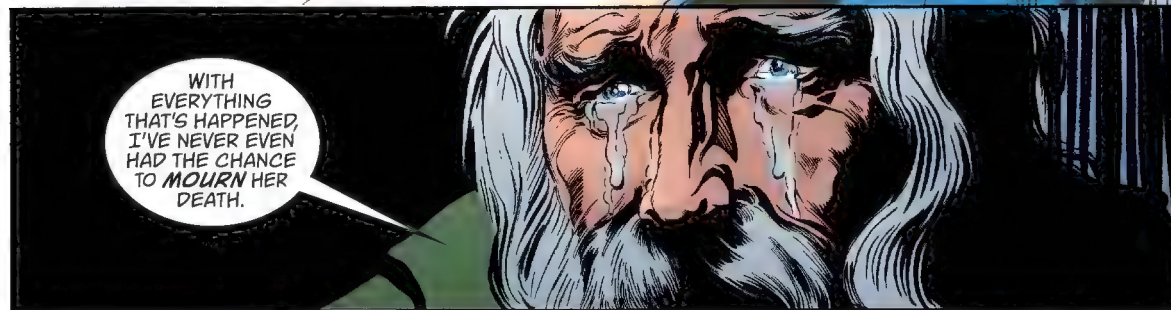
WOULD SHE GO WHEREVER I DID?

WOULD SHE STAY BY MY SIDE?

I'M NOT EVEN CERTAIN WE WOULD HAVE GONE UP THERE IF IT WEREN'T FOR SUE.



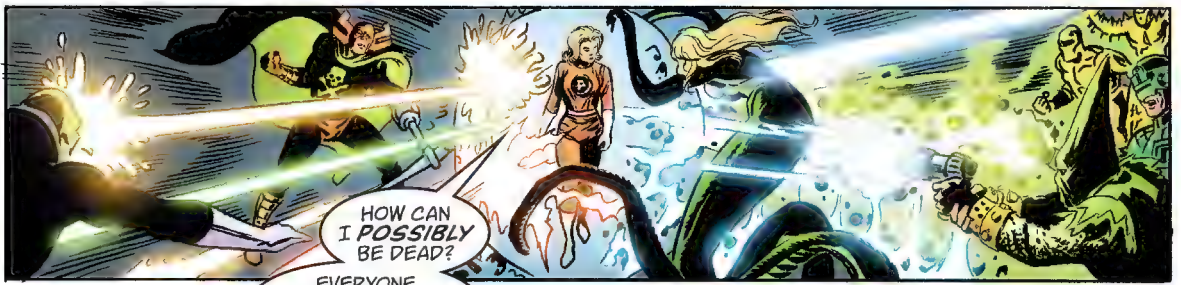
WITH EVERYTHING THAT'S HAPPENED, I'VE NEVER EVEN HAD THE CHANCE TO **MOURN** HER DEATH.



I'M NOT GOING TO GIVE YOU THAT OPPORTUNITY.

I'M GOING TO **BRING HER BACK**, REED.

YOUR WIFE WILL **LIVE** AGAIN.





I AM
SORRY FOR *SO*
MUCH, MRS.
RICHARDS.

I AM SORRY
I DID NOT LISTEN
TO YOUR HUSBAND'S
WARNINGS WHEN HE
AND I STUDIED TOGETHER
IN UNIVERSITY.
I ACTED OUT OF
PRIDE.

I AM SORRY
THAT I DID NOT SEE
THAT THE *PHYSICAL SCARS*
I RECEIVED FOR NOT HEEDING
YOUR HUSBAND'S WARNINGS
WERE ONLY INDICATIVE OF
DEEPER WOUNDS
WITHIN.

I AM SORRY I
BECAME A *MONSTER*
WHEN ALL I REALLY
WANTED TO BE WAS A
MAN.



I AM SORRY
THAT NAMOR KILLED
YOUR *BROTHER.* THAT
WAS MY FAULT AS
WELL.

I UNDER-
STAND RICHARDS
BECAME AWARE YEARS
AFTER OUR FIRST MEETING
THAT PRINCE NAMOR WAS
REQUIRED TO SPEND EQUAL
AMOUNTS OF TIME BOTH IN
AND OUT OF THE WATER...
TO SATISFY *BOTH* OF HIS
GENETIC HERITAGES. THE
ALTERNATIVE TO KEEPING
THIS BALANCE WAS
INSANITY.

I, OF COURSE,
KNEW THIS FROM THE
BEGINNING.

I CONTROLLED
THE AMOUNT OF TIME
NAMOR SPENT IN THE
OCEANS, ALLOWING HIS
PHYSICAL CONDITION TO
MAKE HIS WILL MORE
MALLEABLE TO MY
PLANS.



I AM SORRY FOR STRIKING AT YOUR *FAMILY*. FOR TAKING THE GOOD YOU DID AND TWISTING IT FOR MYSELF. I AM SORRY I KILLED YOU.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND.

I HAD PLANNED TO KILL RICHARDS THAT DAY, TO LURE HIM CLOSE ENOUGH TO ME TO TRIGGER AN EXPLOSION THAT WOULD *OBLITERATE* BOTH HIM AND ME.

I, OF COURSE, HAD NO DEATH WISH AND MY BODY, EVERYTHING WITHIN MY ARMOR, WAS TO BE TELEPORTED BACK TO LATVERIA AT THE MOMENT THE EXPLOSIVE WAS *TRIGGERED*.



YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS WOULD THINK ME DEAD. AND MY REVENGE WOULD BE *COMPLETE*. WHEN YOU FOLLOWED, I CHOSE A DIFFERENT WAY TO STRIKE AT RICHARDS. ONE WHICH WOULD HURT HIM *FAR MORE*.

BUT YOU *DID* DIE. WHAT HAPPENED?

ANOTHER MISCALCULATION, I'M AFRAID.

ONE FOR WHICH I, AT LEAST, AM *GRATEFUL*.

I AM NO LONGER AS I WAS.

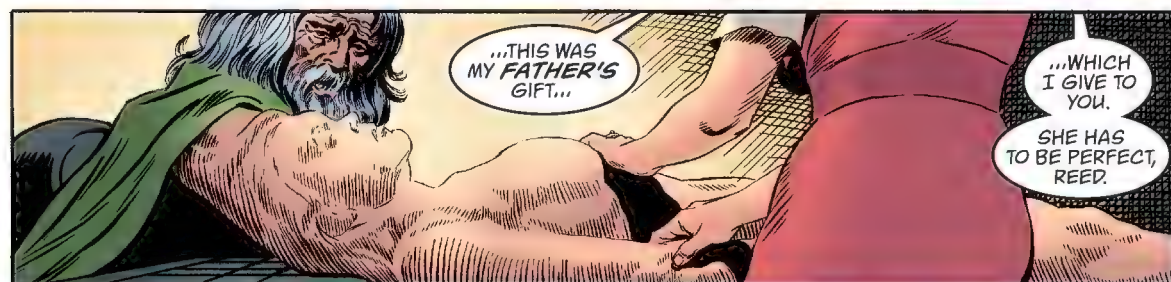
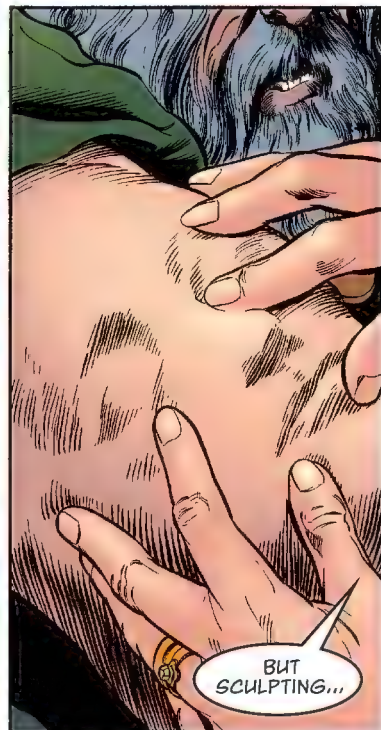
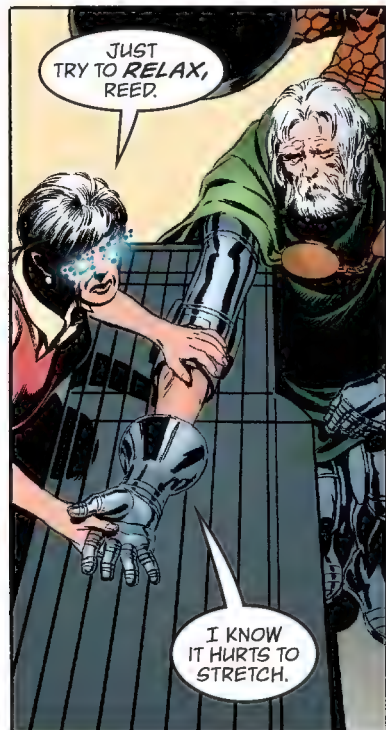
YOU DON'T
KNOW HOW I **HATED**
YOU. FOR KILLING REED
FOR KILLING BEN. AND
YOU DIDN'T EVEN DO
THAT. YOU KILLED **ME**.
HOW DO I DEAL
WITH THIS?

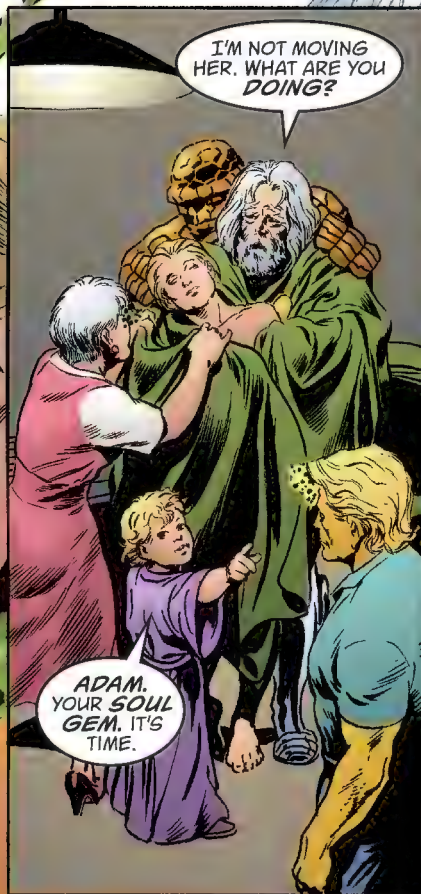
THEN THIS
MEANS...I REALLY
AM DEAD.

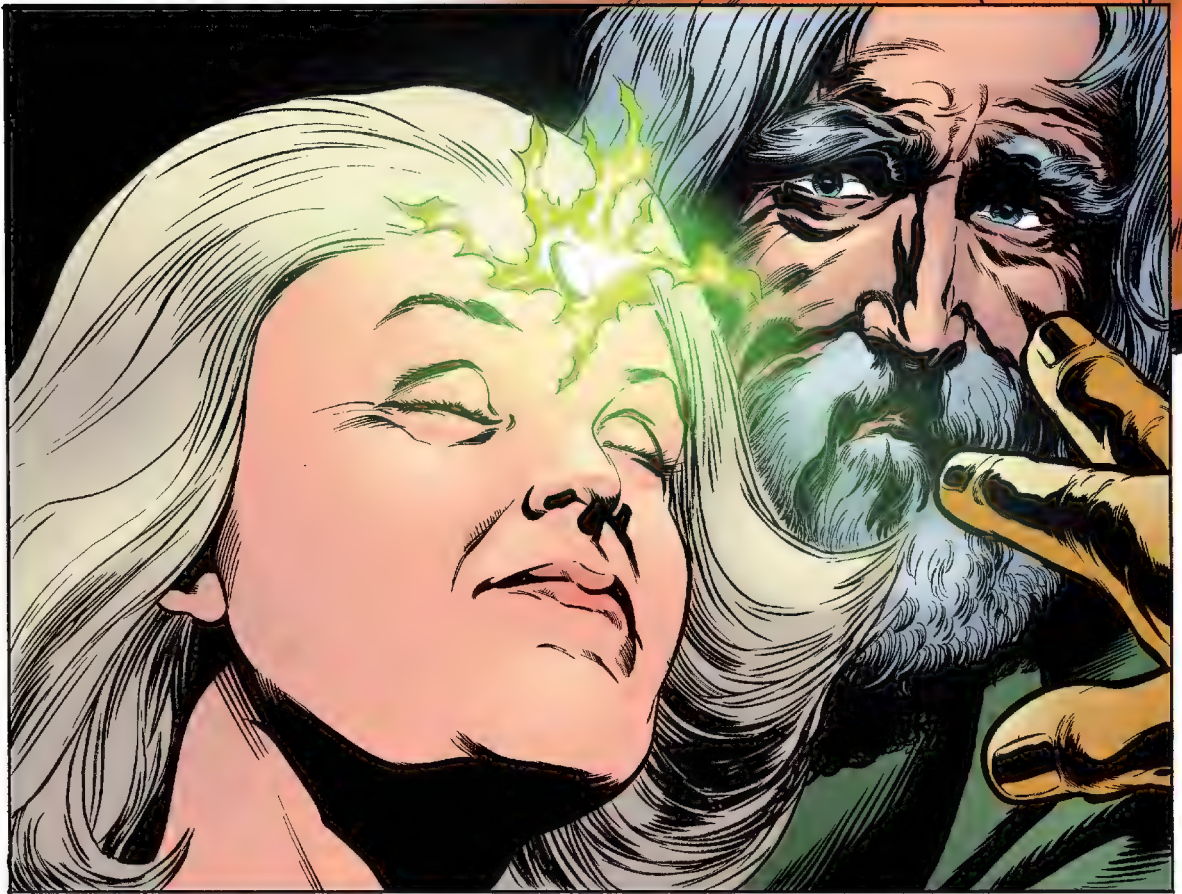
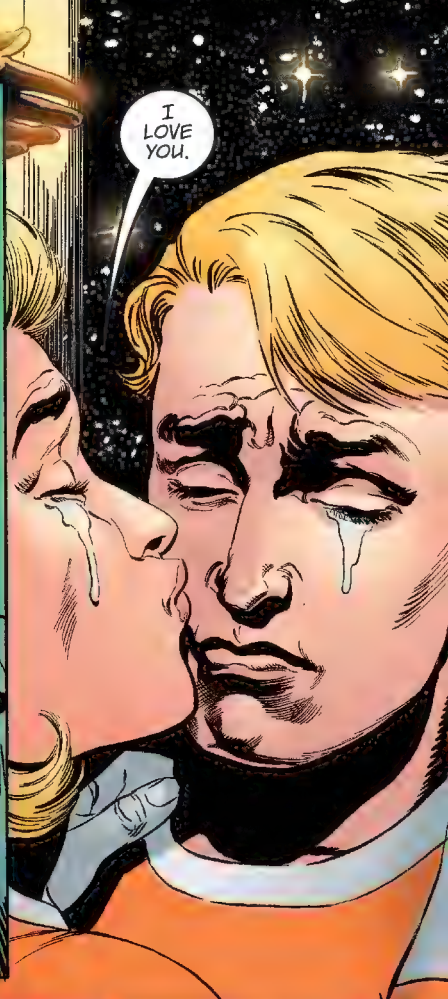
THEN
REED IS
ALIVE.

AND YOU
WILL **JOIN HIM,**
SUSAN.

A BODY
IS BEING PREPARED
FOR YOU EVEN AS WE
SPEAK.





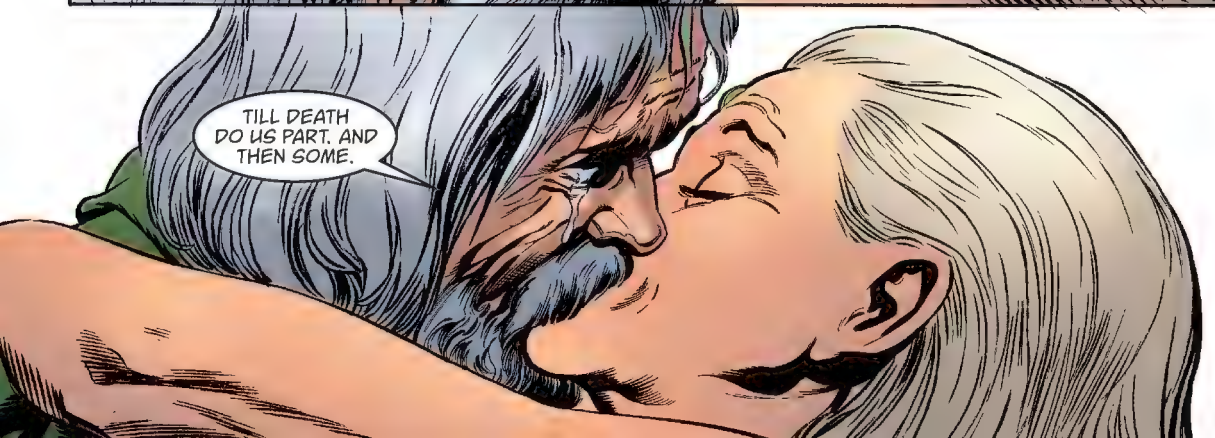
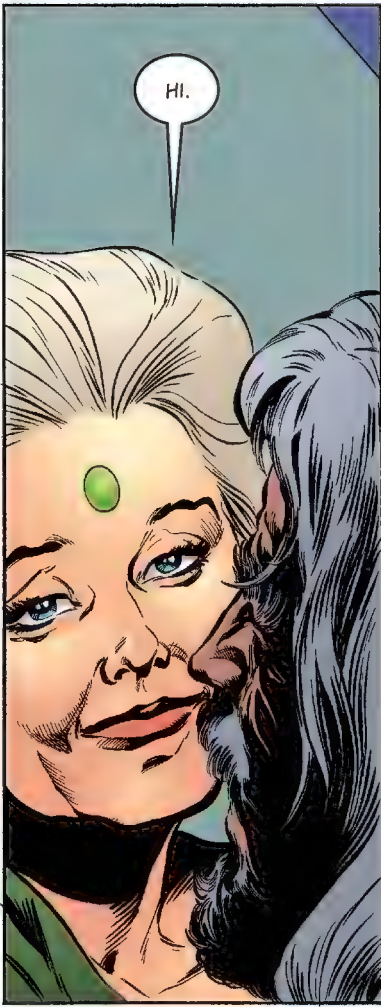




WHAT...?

GOOD-BYE.

SUSAN?





YOU CAME
BACK.

YOU CAME
BACK.

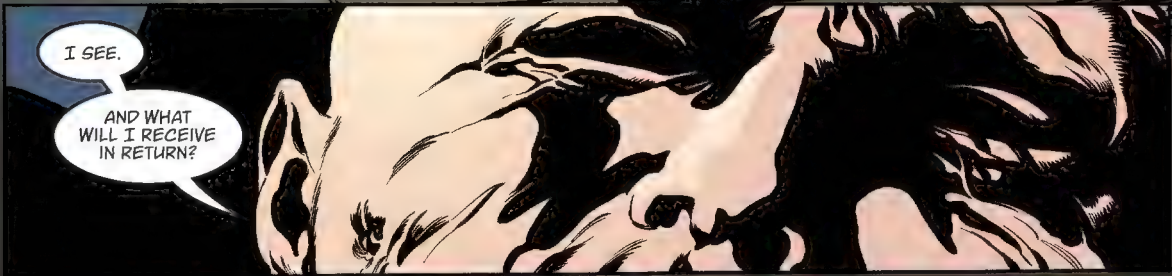
GO AHEAD AND
CRY, DARLING. THESE
ARE THE ONLY TEARS
WORTH SHEDDING.





HAVE YOU
COME OUT OF HUMAN
COMPASSION...IS THAT
IT, ROBOT?

I HAVE
A QUESTION,
WATU.

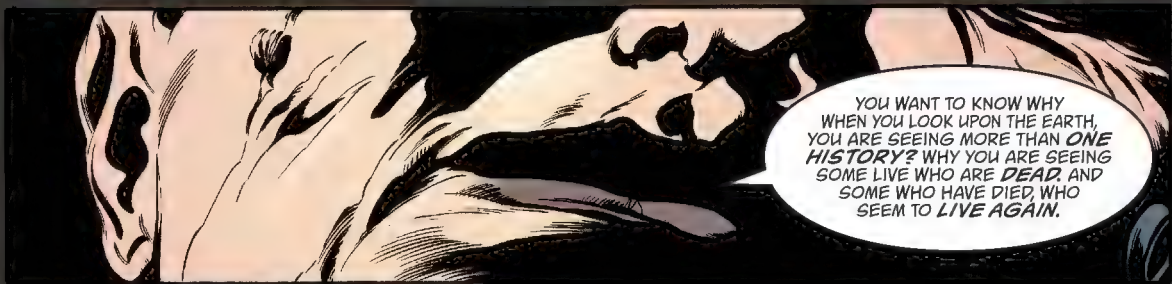


I SEE.

AND WHAT
WILL I RECEIVE
IN RETURN?



I'LL PLUG YOU
BACK INTO THE WORLD.
YOU'LL BE ABLE TO HEAR
EVERYTHING AGAIN.
THAT'S *SOME-
THING.*



YOU WANT TO KNOW WHY
WHEN YOU LOOK UPON THE EARTH,
YOU ARE SEEING MORE THAN *ONE
HISTORY?* WHY YOU ARE SEEING
SOME LIVE WHO ARE *DEAD.* AND
SOME WHO HAVE DIED, WHO
SEEM TO *LIVE AGAIN.*



WHAT
DOES IT
MEAN?

IT MEANS
THAT THIS IS
ALL *FAR* FROM
OVER.

UNIVERS E



KRUEGER
BRAITHWAITE
REINHOLD

"It doesn't matter whether mutanity reverts back to humanity or if they remain as they are."

"Why not, old friend? Please speak without fearing my reaction. For I am stone and will outlive you all."

"It's not that. I'm not trying to protect you again. The reason New York is freezing over while the Arctic is beginning to thaw is because the elements themselves cannot support what has happened to our world. Something has changed the planet. Soon, Earth won't be capable of sustaining life regardless of what humanity becomes."

"Then all life upon the Earth is going to cease? So, after all that mankind has been through, after all the enemies we've vanquished, we come to an end — and it is not the fault of a single soul upon the planet?"

"I didn't say that."

UNIVERSE X

I S S U E 1

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story and script

ALEX ROSS
story, cover painter and character designer

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BILL REINHOLD
inks

LAURA DEPUY
colors

TODD KLEIN
letters

MIKE RAICHT
assistant editor

MIKE MARTS
editor

BOB HARRAS
editor in chief

"I'M SEEING **STEVE STRANGE**, ISAAC. HE WAS IN A TERRIBLE ACCIDENT.

"THIS HAPPENED LONG BEFORE STEVE'S COMA, YEARS BEFORE HE EVEN BECAME **MASTER** OF THE **MYSTIC ARTS**.

"THE ACCIDENT CAUSED EXTENSIVE NERVE DAMAGE TO HIS **HANDS**. HE WAS TOLD HE WAS NO LONGER CAPABLE OF BEING A **SURGEON**. HE BECAME A **VAGRANT** INSTEAD.

"BUT ONE DAY, HE HEARD OF A MAN SAID TO BE ABLE TO **HEAL**.

"NOT WITH A KNIFE OR A NEEDLE AS STEVE HAD, BUT WITH A **GLANCE**. A **TOUCH**.

"HE TRACKED THIS HEALER DOWN TO THE FAR CORNERS OF THE EARTH AND CAME UPON HIS HOME IN THE **HIMALAYAS**.

"THE **ANCIENT ONE** TAUGHT STEVE THAT HIS SUFFERING **MEANT** SOMETHING.

"BACK WHEN HE WAS A **SURGEON** AND HIS ABILITY TO SAVE WAS LIMITED ONLY TO THE **PHYSICAL WORLD**. WHEN A LIFE'S WORTH WAS MEASURED BY ITS IMPACT ON STEVE'S **BANK ACCOUNT**.

HE TAUGHT STEVE THAT THERE WAS **MORE** TO LIFE THAN WHAT HAD BEEN DETERMINED UPON THE OPERATING TABLE.

"HE TAUGHT STEVE HOW TO SEE ANOTHER WORLD BY MAKING HIM A STUDENT OF THE **INVISIBLE ARTS**.

"IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE STEVE BECAME A **MASTER** AND RETURNED TO NEW YORK.

"WHERE, THANKS TO HIS MANSERVANT **WONG**, HE WORKED TO SAVE THE **SOUL** OF THE CITY, OFTEN-TIMES WITHOUT NEED FOR MONEY OR PAYMENT OF ANY KIND."

"FORGIVE ME, **KYLE**, BUT PERHAPS THE ACCIDENT THAT BEFELL STEPHEN COULD HAVE BEEN AVERTED HAD HE PAID MORE ATTENTION TO **HIMSELF**."

"BUT, **ISAAC**, WHO COULD BLAME HIM FOR THINKING HE HAD **NOTHING TO FEAR**?"

"HE WAS GIVEN THE **ORB** AND THE **EYE OF AGAMOTTO**... AMAZING MAGICAL DEVICES THAT ALLOWED HIM TO SEE TO PLACES **NO ONE** ON EARTH EVER HAD BEFORE.

"MAYBE HE TRUSTED IN THESE THINGS **TOO MUCH**, ISAAC, I DON'T KNOW.

"OR MAYBE HE SPENT SO MUCH TIME DEFENDING OUR WORLD FROM OTHERS THAT HE DIDN'T SEE WHAT WAS **ATTACKING** HIM FROM WITHIN HIS **OWN HOME**."

"I DID NOT MEAN TO BE **CRUEL**, KYLE. I ONLY WISHED TO POINT OUT THAT STEPHEN WAS... ONLY **HUMAN**, AS THEY SAY. LIFE IS **MORE** THAN OTHERWORLDLY SPIRITUALITY.

"AND NOW I FEAR THAT HIS BODY IS OF LITTLE USE TO ANYONE. IMAGINE WHAT HE MIGHT HAVE EXPERIENCED IN YEARS TO COME HAD HE NOT BEEN CAUGHT **UN-AWARE**? WHAT SENSATIONS HE MIGHT YET HAVE..."

"SOMETIMES I THINK YOU MISS BEING **HUMAN** TOO MUCH, ISAAC."

"PERHAPS."

"STEVE LEARNED TO RESPECT *EXISTENCE*. LIFE ITSELF. NOT FOR WHAT IT WOULD BRING HIM, BUT FOR WHAT IT WAS. HE LEARNED HOW TO SERVE IT SHOULD IT EVER ATTEMPT TO *DESTROY* HIM AGAIN."

"THIS IS WHY STEVE BECAME THE KEEPER AND CARETAKER OF A VAST TREASURE OF MAGICAL ITEMS. *THE BOOK OF VISHANTI. THE DARK-HOLD. THE SIEGE PERILOUS.*"

"STEVE DEDICATED HIS LIFE TO KEEPING THESE ITEMS AND COUNTLESS OTHERS FROM THOSE WHO WOULD USE THEM FOR EVIL. PEOPLE LIKE *DOOM*. FORCES LIKE THOSE OF *THE ADVERSARY*."

"KYLE? WHAT ARE YOU SPEAKING OF?"

"I'M TALKING ABOUT *EVIL*, ISAAC."

"I'M TALKING ABOUT *MEPHISTO*."

"STEVE'S ENEMIES WEREN'T FOUND ON EARTH. THEY CAME FROM *UNSEEN PLACES*."

"FROM DREAM REALMS AND CHAOS SPHERES. THEY WERE BORN FROM DISILLUSIONMENT AND MISTRUST."

"FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MIRROR AND THE DARKNESS THAT GROWS LARGER THE DARKER IT BECOMES."

"YOU AND I ARE NOT STRANGERS TO OTHER WORLDS, KYLE. IN THE DEFENDERS ALONE, WE FACED..."

"YES, ISAAC. *THE DEFENDERS*."

"THE JOKE OF THE SUPER HERO SET. THE NON-TEAM WITH A NON-MEMBERSHIP FIGHTING NON-ENEMIES."

"NOT EVEN YOU AND I COULD FATHOM THE FOES STRANGE WAS PREPARING US TO FACE. HE WAS PREPARING US TO FIGHT THE *SHADOWS* THAT COULD NOT BE SEEN BY THE LIGHT OF REASON."

"BUT KYLE, IF THERE WERE EVER AN ARGUMENT AGAINST THE EXISTENCE OF THESE TYPES OF BEINGS, THIS WORLD WE LIVE UPON WOULD BE IT."

"*DEMONS* ARE THE RESULTS OF THE EXPERIMENTS EXACTED UPON EARLY MAN. YOU YOURSELF HAVE DESCRIBED THE *CELESTIAL MANIPULATION* OF MANKIND. SUPERSTITIONS CREATE SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION."

"IS THAT WHAT YOU *REALLY* BELIEVE, ISAAC? WE FOUGHT *DRACULA* TOGETHER. WAS HE MERELY A MUTATION?"

"WE CREATE OUR OWN DEMONS, KYLE. THIS IS THE *21ST CENTURY*."

"STRANGE KNEW THAT DRACULA WAS MORE THAN OUR DEFINITION OF HORROR COULD FATHOM."

"WE THOUGHT DRACULA WAS A MAN WHO HAD BECOME A *MONSTER*. HE WASN'T. HE WAS A MONSTER ATTEMPTING TO BECOME A *MAN*. HUMAN BLOOD ONLY SUSTAINED THE ILLUSION. IT NEVER COMPLETED IT."

"CAN A MONSTER BECOME A MAN?"

"DON'T YOU SEE? LONG BEFORE THE CELESTIALS EVEN INVADED THE BIOLOGY OF OUR WORLD, SOMETHING *ELSE* WAS ALREADY HERE, TRYING TO BREAK FROM ONE EXISTENCE INTO ANOTHER."

"AND NOT JUST *ONE* REALM. THIS IS WHY THERE NEEDED TO BE *DEFENDERS*. STEVE NEEDED HELP."

"HE THOUGHT HE'D FOUND AN ALLY AS WELL AS A DISCIPLE IN *CLEA*."

"BUT SHE BETRAYED HIM AND KILLED HIS *ASTRAL FORM* USING MAGICS HE HIMSELF HAD TAUGHT HER."

"YOU MENTIONED BEFORE, KYLE, THAT *SUFFERING* SERVED SOME PURPOSE. WHAT IS IT?"

"I DON'T KNOW. *SUFFERING* FUELS SOMETHING. STEVE WAS BETRAYED BEFORE HE FOUND OUT WHAT THAT WAS."



YOU DON'T KNOW HOW *EASY* IT IS TO BETRAY SOMEONE YOU LOVE, KYLE.



YES I *DO*. I'VE SPENT HALF MY LIFE EITHER BETRAYING SOME IDEAL OR A PERSON I CARE FOR.

AND THE *OTHER HALF*?

IS SPENT TRYING TO FIND THE STRENGTH TO SAY, "I'M *SORRY*."

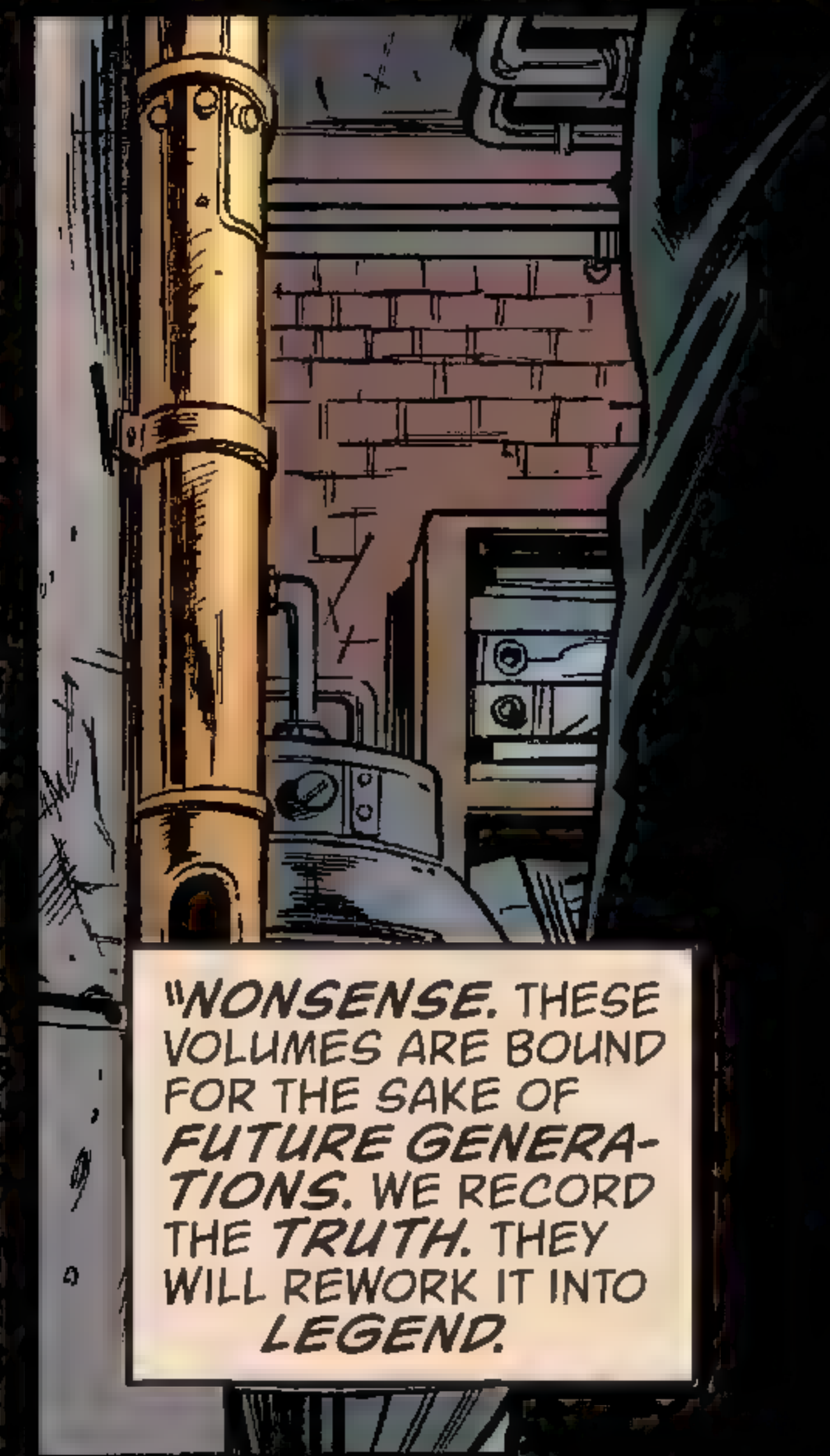


THESE VOLUMES WE CATALOG WILL VINDICATE OUR PAST WRONGS, KYLE.

HISTORY WILL PRESENT YOU AND ME AS *FAR MORE* THAN THE SUM TOTALS OF OUR GUILTY CONSCIENCES.



"WE WRITE *HISTORY*, ISAAC. AND PERHAPS NOT VERY WELL AT ALL IF WE HAVE TO *RE-WRITE* OUR PLACE IN IT."



"*NONSENSE*. THESE VOLUMES ARE BOUND FOR THE SAKE OF *FUTURE GENERATIONS*. WE RECORD THE *TRUTH*. THEY WILL REWORK IT INTO *LEGEND*."



"I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU ARE ABLE TO SEE THE PRESENT AND PAST AS WELL AS THE FUTURE...BUT TELL ME WHAT TRANSPIRES IN THE WORLD THIS DAY."



"THE WORLD'S ECOSYSTEM IS *OUT OF CONTROL*."

"EARTH'S *POLARITY* HAS CHANGED. IF YOU AND I DECIDED TO LEAVE NEW YORK, I COULDN'T TELL YOU WHICH DIRECTION WAS *SOUTH*. FOR *SOUTH NO LONGER EXISTS*."

"THIS IS THE CITY THAT *NEVER SLEEPS*, ISAAC."

"BUT TO FALL ASLEEP HERE...IS TO *NEVER WAKE AGAIN*."



"IF THE COLD DOESN'T KILL YOU, THE **SONS OF SET** WILL."

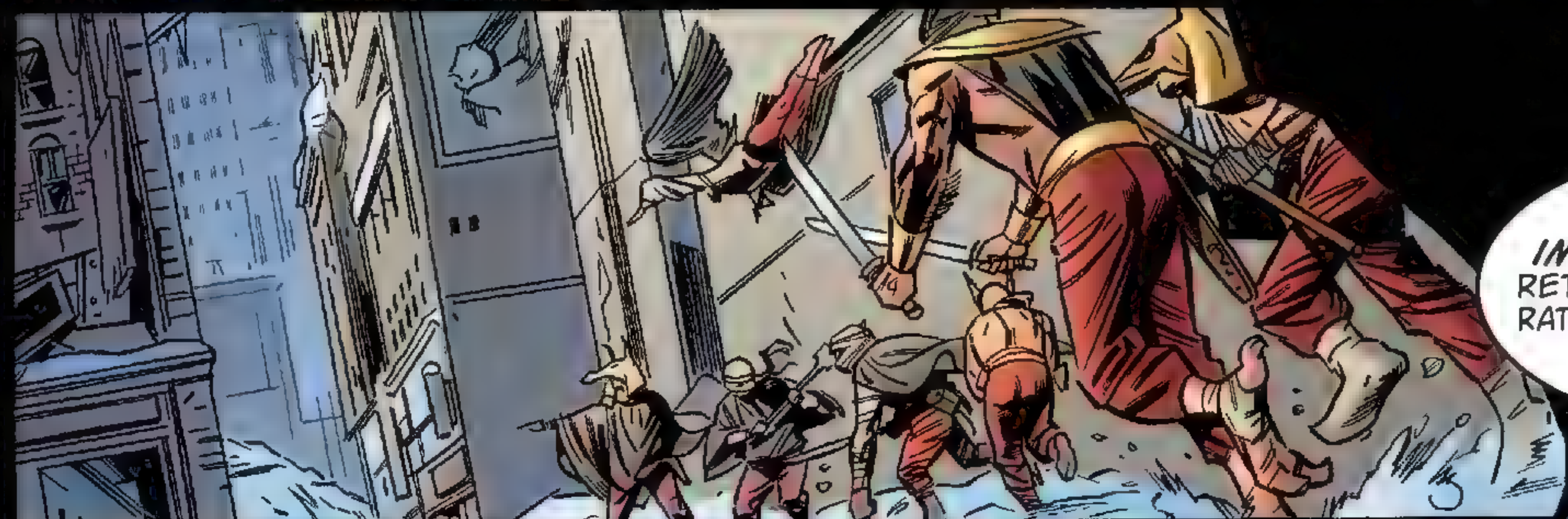
THESE MURDERS ARE SACRIFICES. THEY KILL FOR **POWER**.

FOR THEMSELVES?

NO. FOR THEIR **GOD**.

SOME BELIEVE THAT THE LETTING OF **BLOOD** OPENS A DOOR TO ANOTHER WORLD.

THEY ARE FEEDING **SET**.



I'M SORRY.

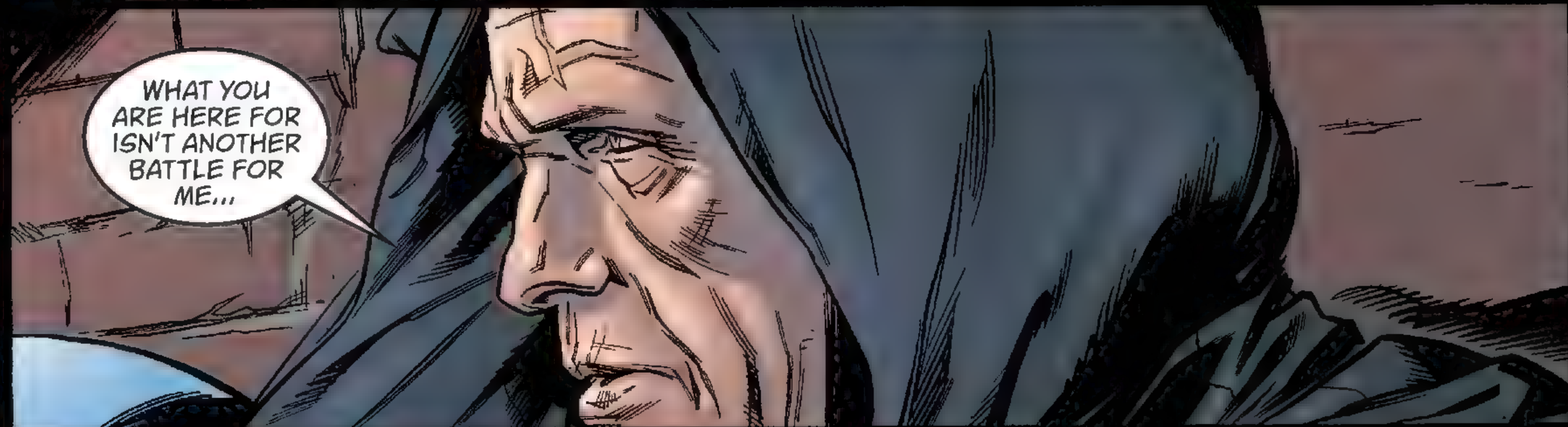
THIS COLLECTION IS **IMPERATIVE** TO MY RETURN. I KNOW YOU'D RATHER NOT BE **NURSE-MAIDING** A CHILD.



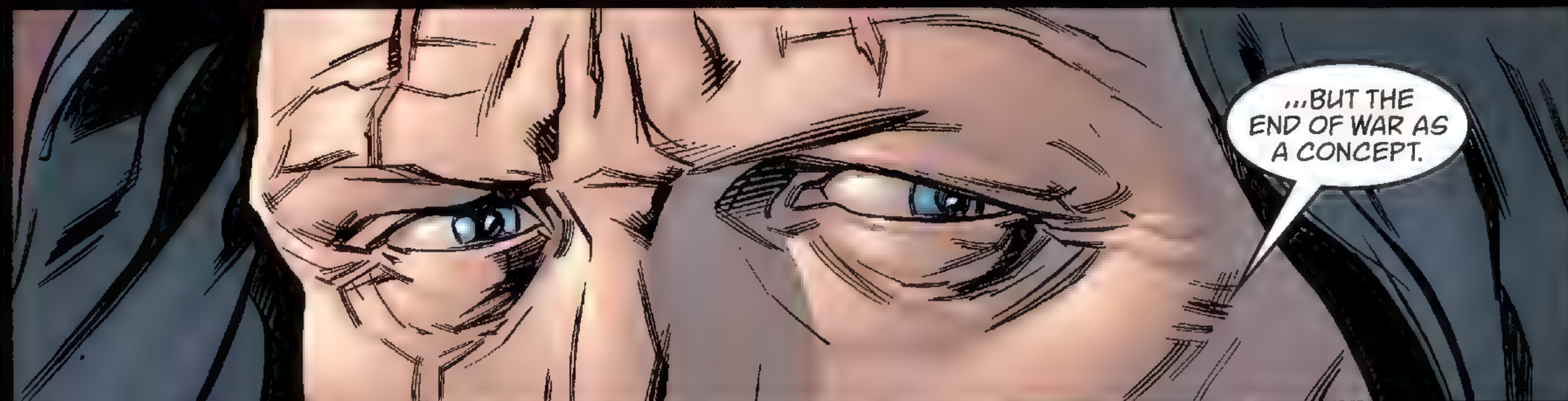
STOP IT, MAR-VELL. YOU'VE EXPERIENCED FAR MORE THAN I **EVER** WILL.

I'VE SEEN THIS SORT OF THING ALL MY LIFE...IN EVERY WAR I'VE FOUGHT.

REED RICHARDS SAID YOU COULD **CHANGE** ALL THIS.



WHAT YOU ARE HERE FOR ISN'T ANOTHER BATTLE FOR ME...



...BUT THE END OF WAR AS A CONCEPT.



SHE'S NEAR.

WHO?



GIVE US THE BLANKET!

DON'T ASK, SQUAT-NECK. TAKE IT!

THE GIRL.



NO! PLEASE, NO!

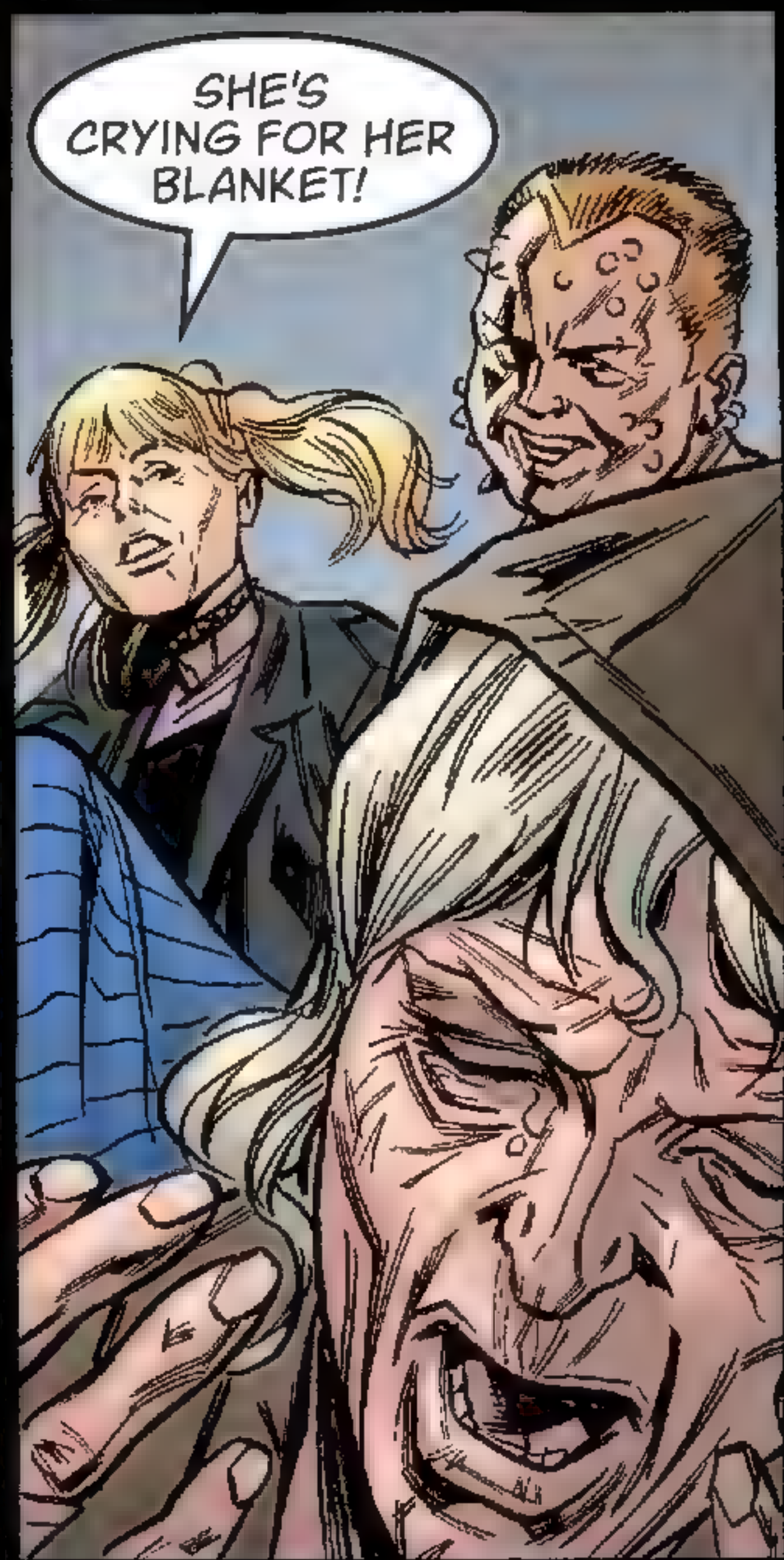
YOU MUSTN'T!



WE'RE COLD, OLD WOMAN.



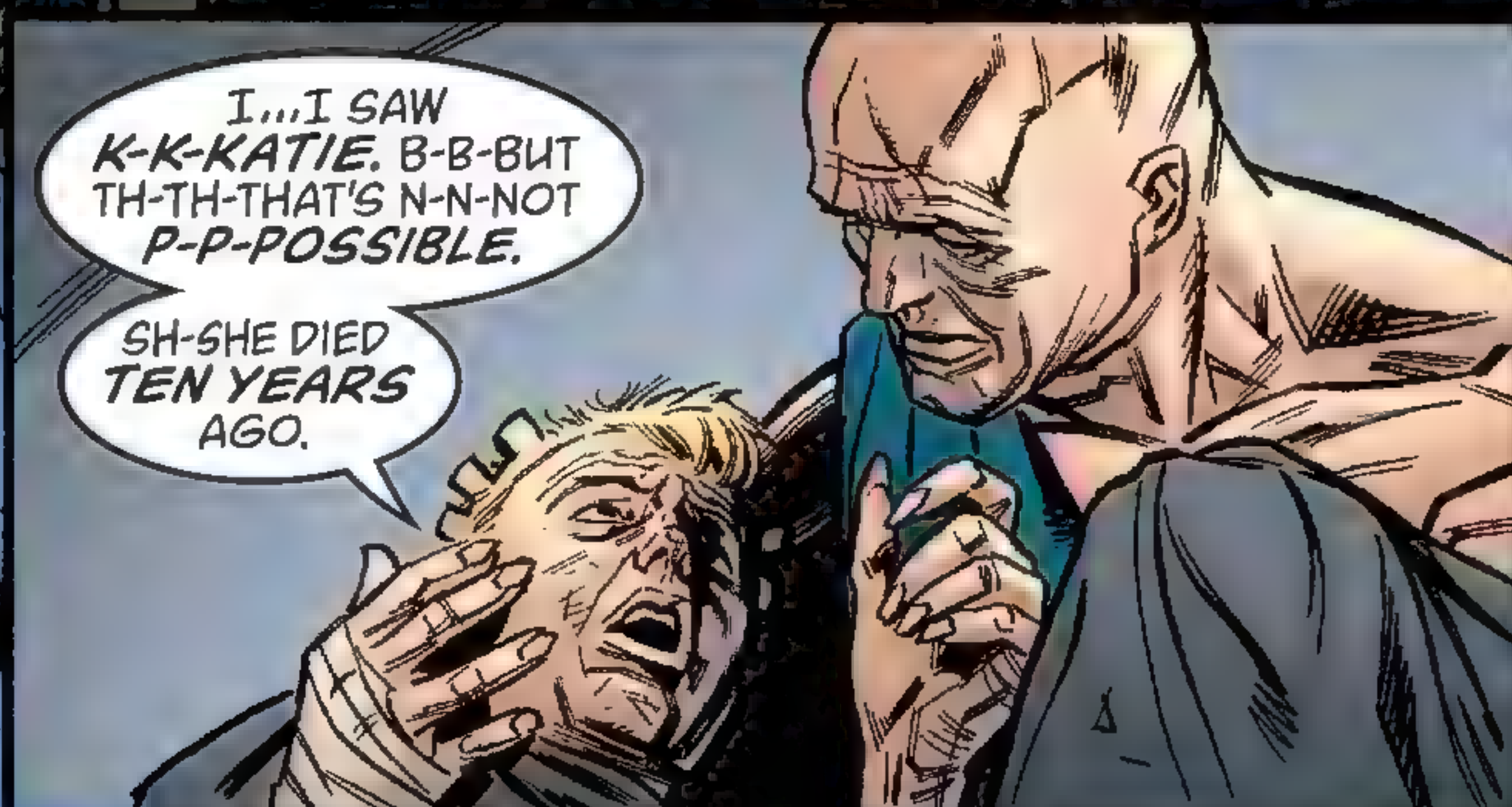
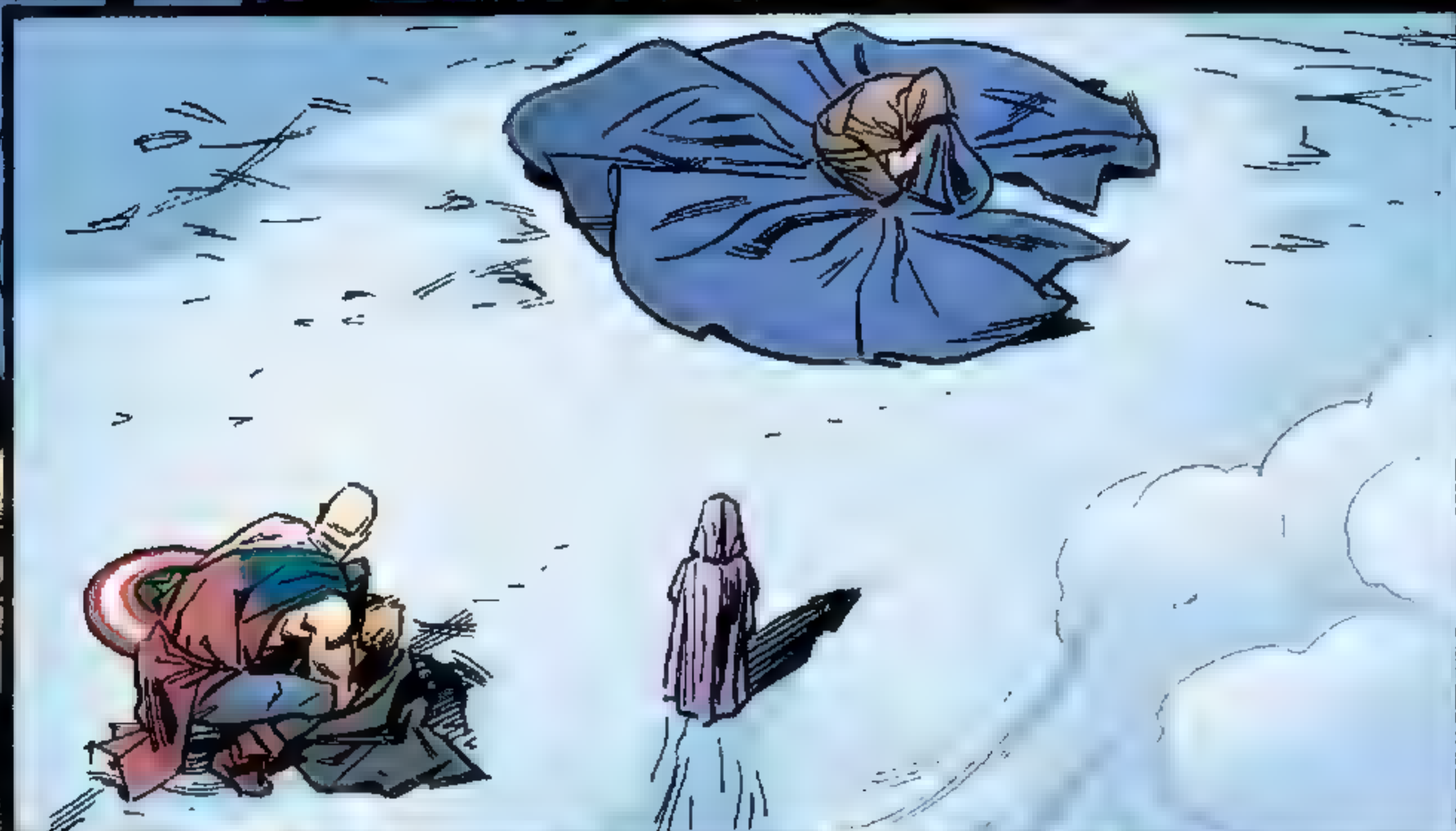
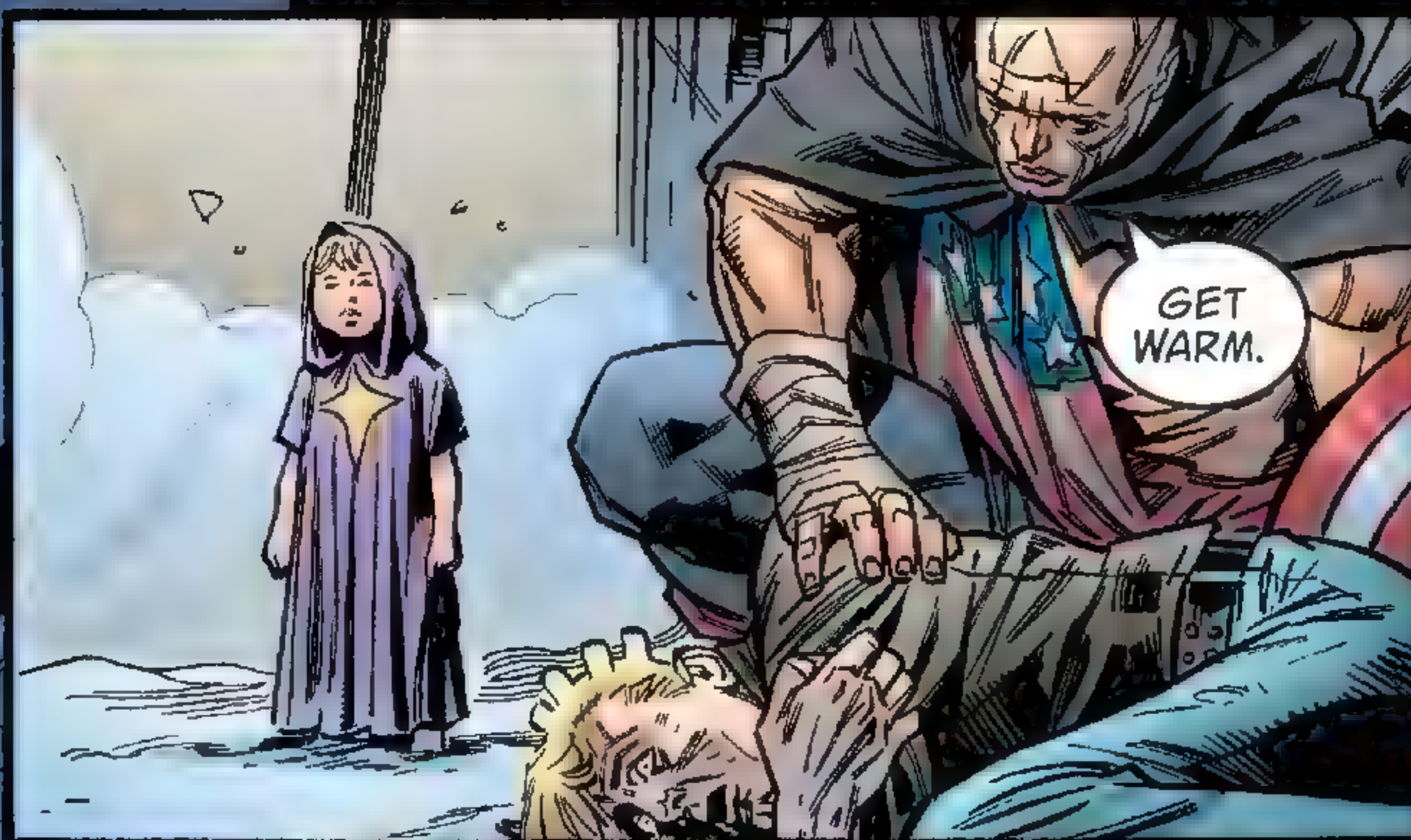
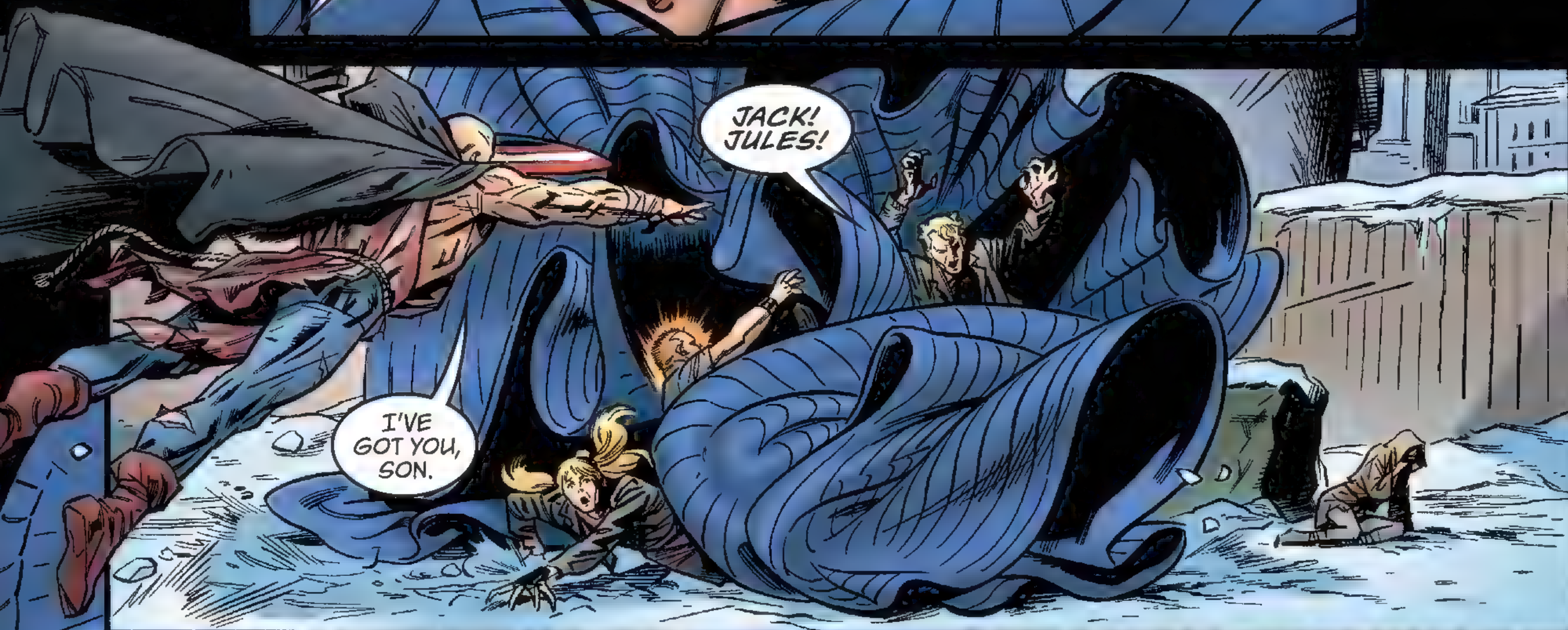
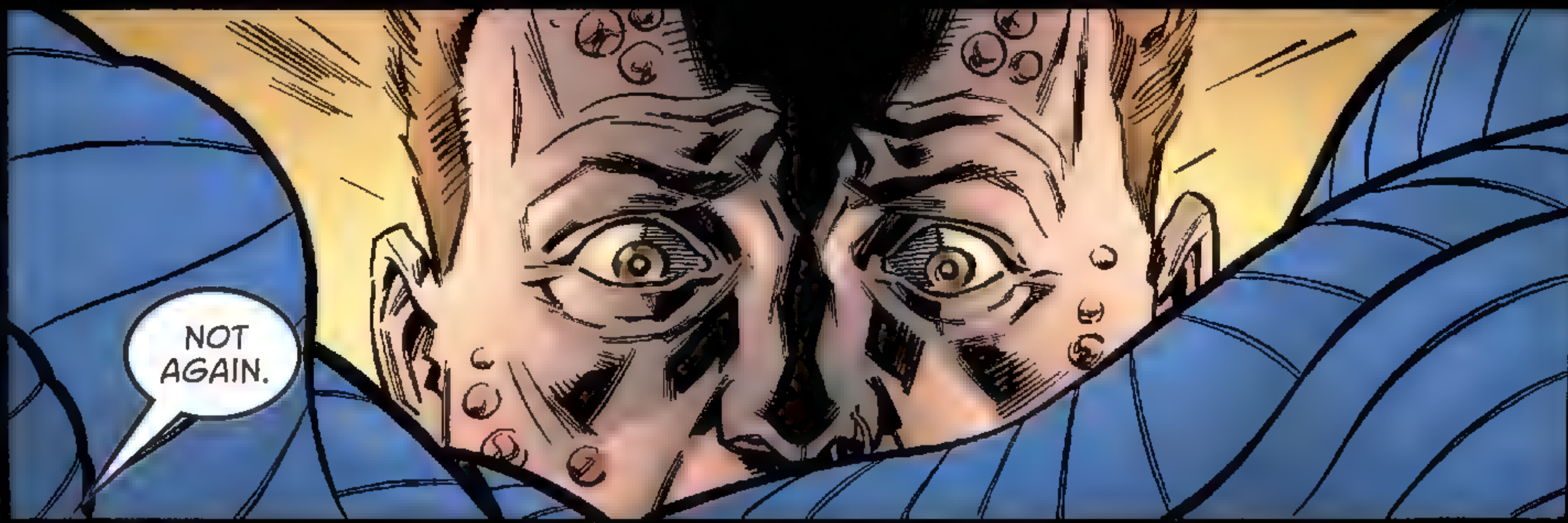
YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT COLD IS. GO AWAY.

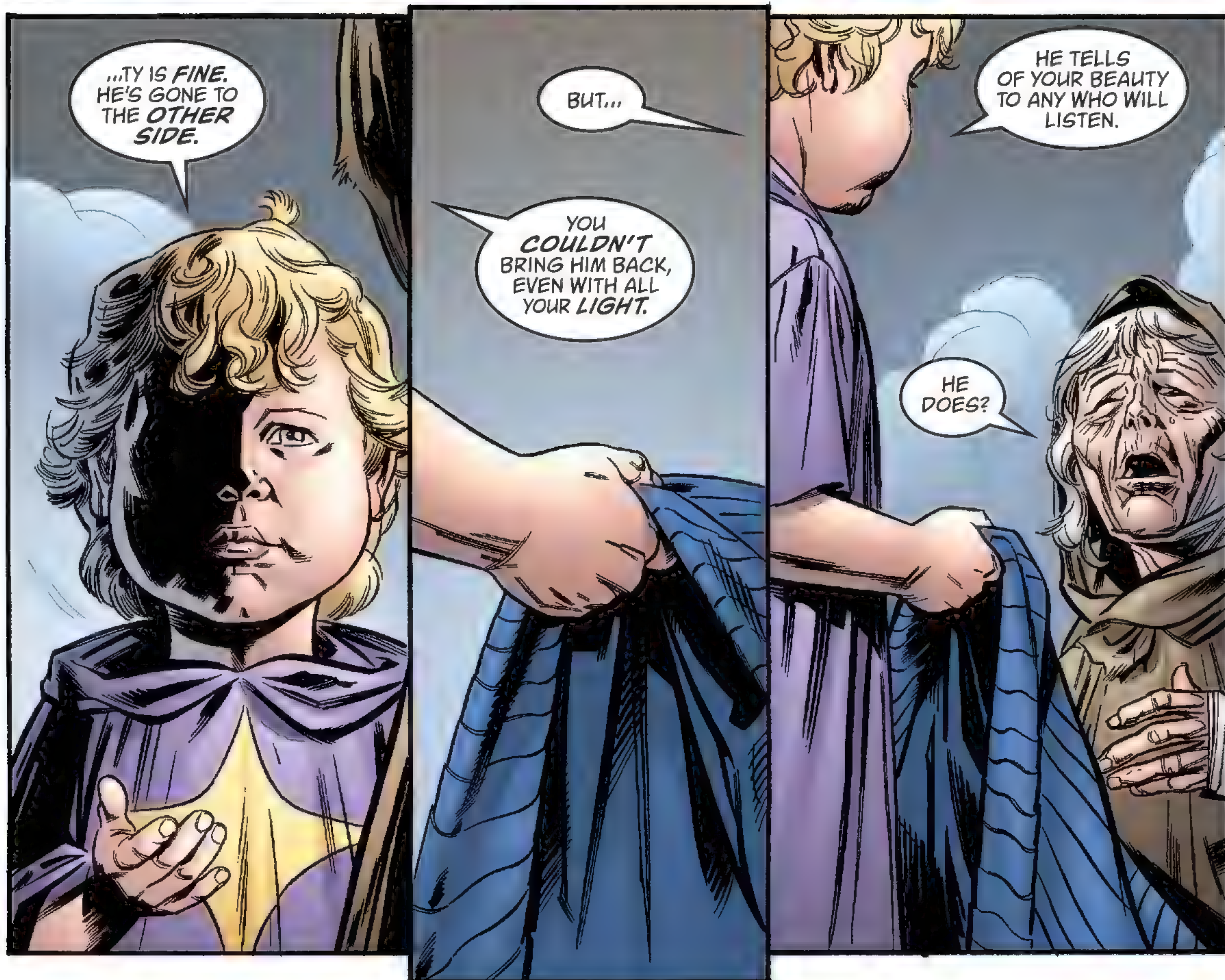
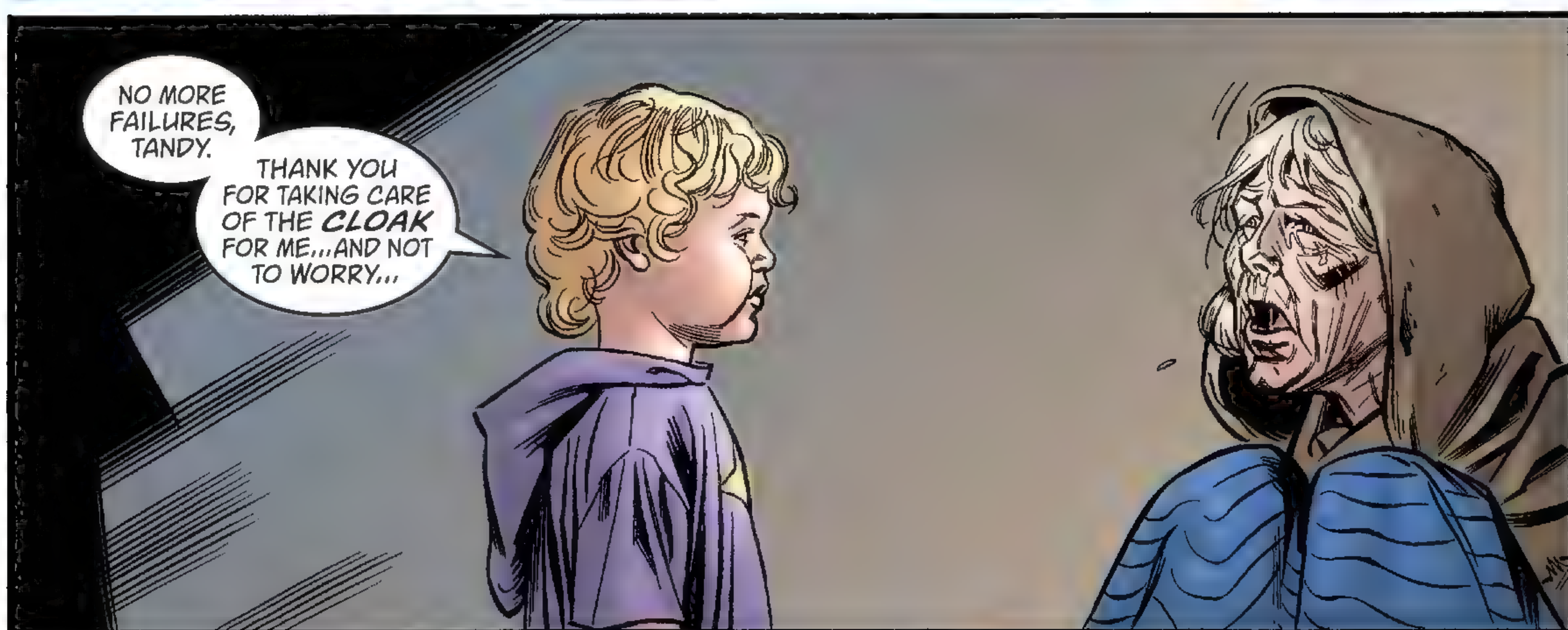
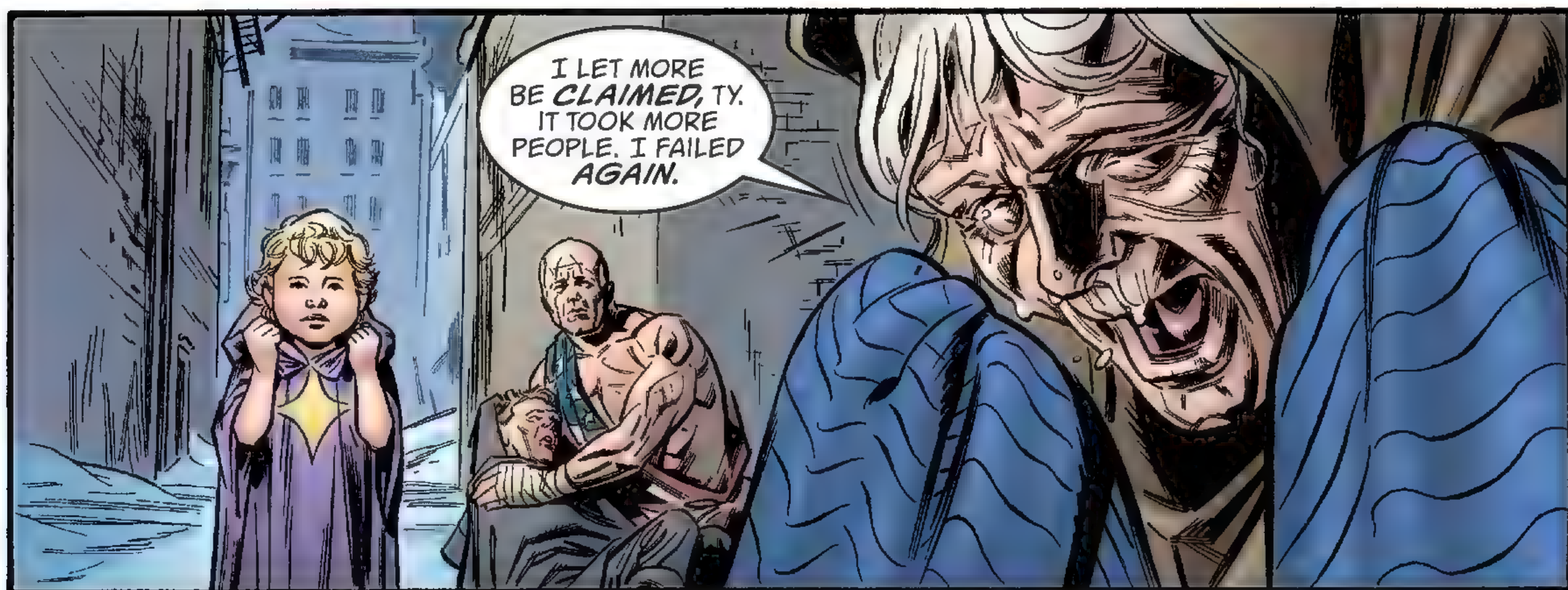


SHE'S CRYING FOR HER BLANKET!



NO. I'M CRYING FOR YOU.

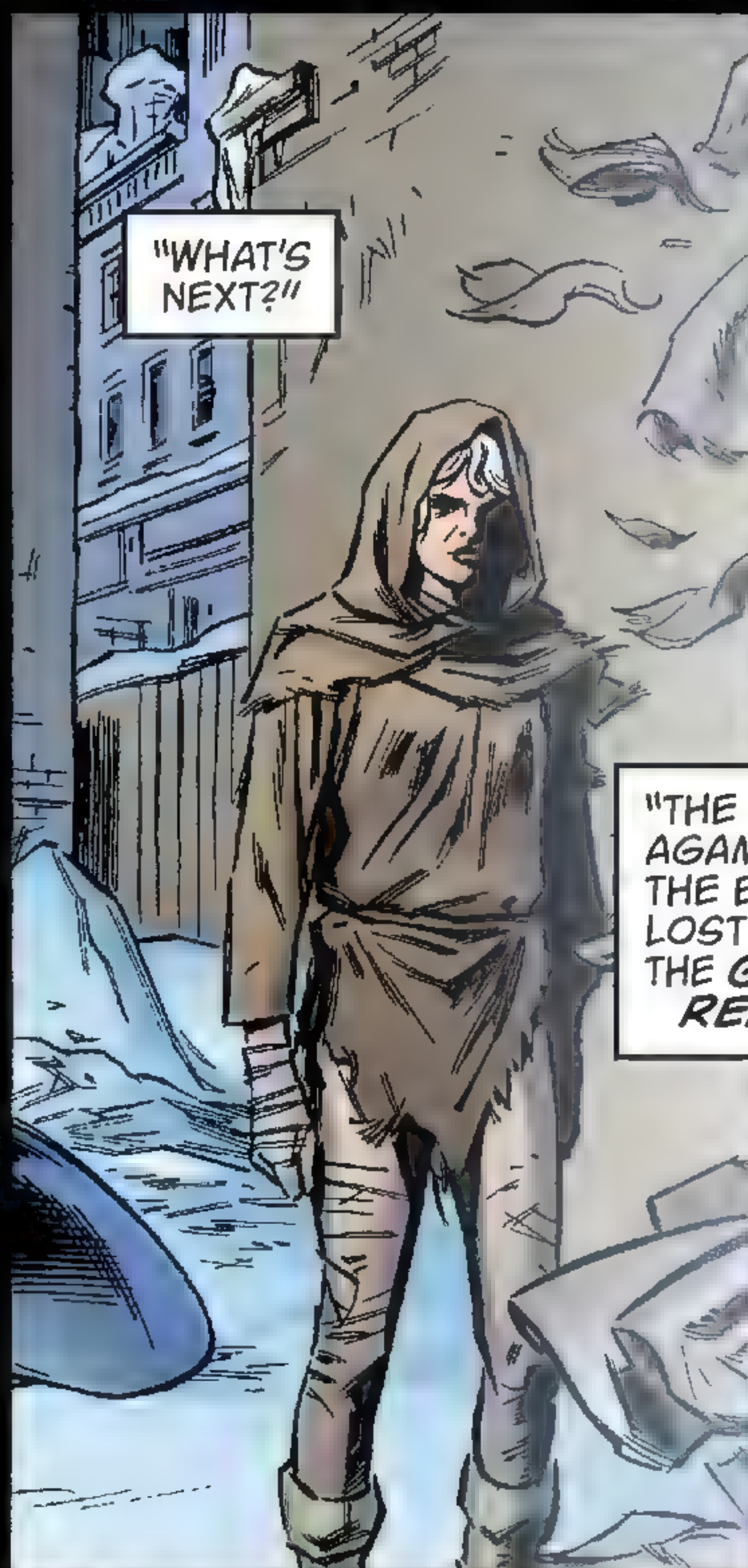






THE CLOAK
IS A WAY TO REACH
THE **REALM OF THE
DEAD**, STEVE.

I AM
ALREADY WAITING
THERE FOR THE POWER
WE ARE GOING TO
PLACE **WITHIN**
IT.



"WHAT'S
NEXT?"

"THE ORB OF
AGAMOTTO.
THE EYE IS
LOST TO US IN
THE **GOLDEN
REALM**."



STEVE?
GET IN. IT'S ALSO
A TELEPORTATION
DEVICE.

DON'T
WORRY.



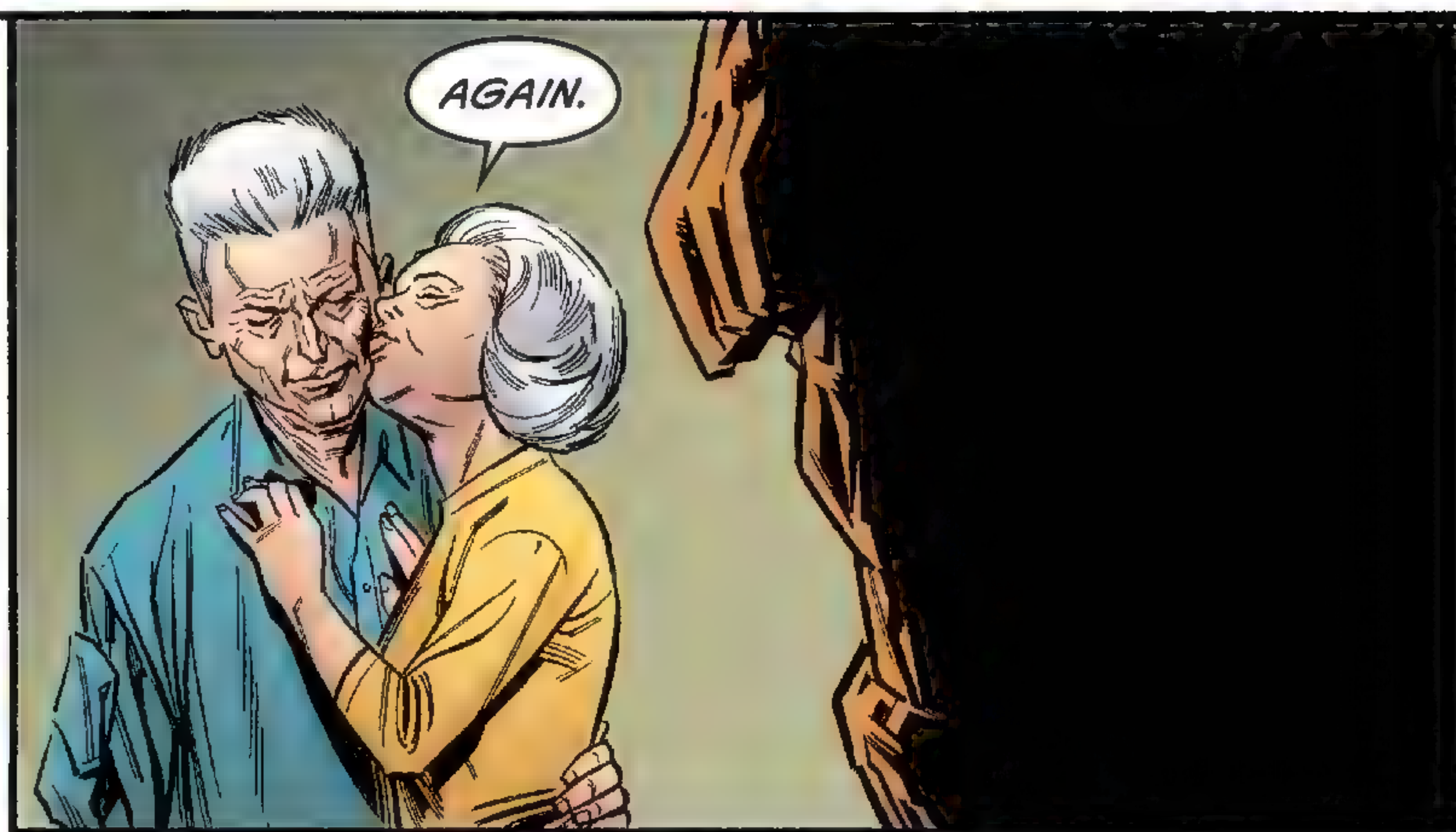
IT'S NOT
THE CLOAK...I'VE
FACED DEATH ALL
MY LIFE.

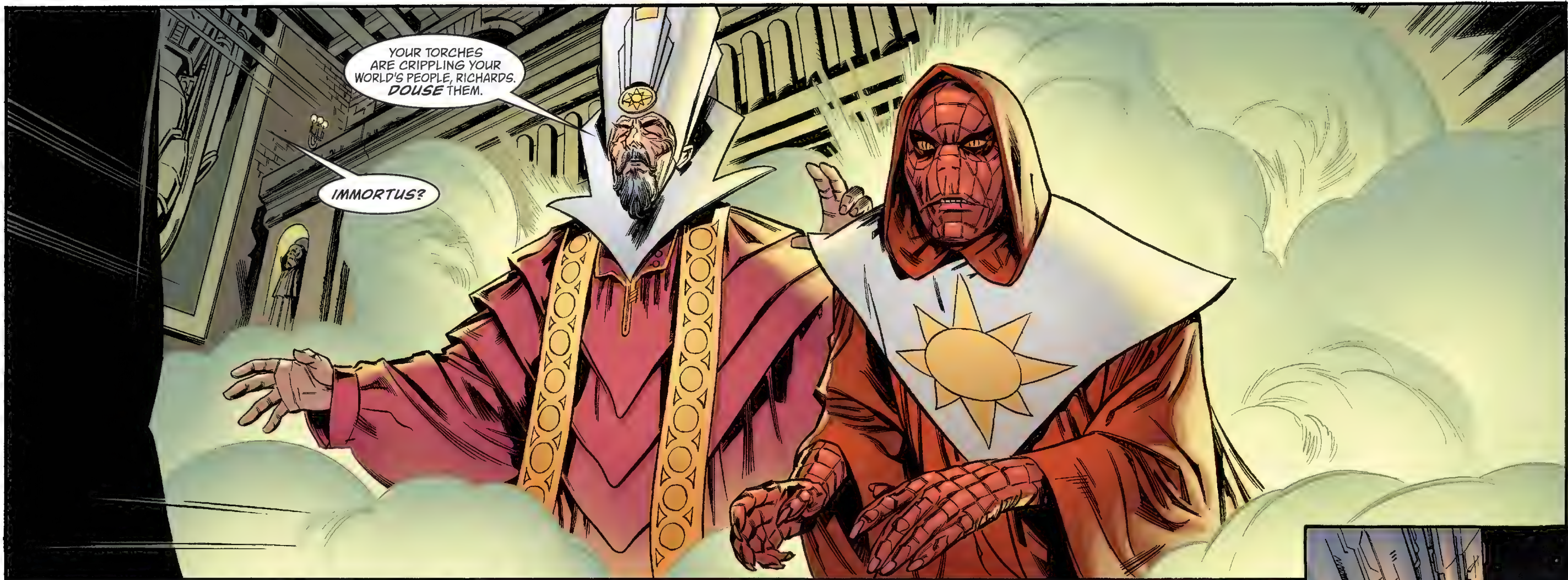


IT'S
SOMETHING
ELSE. DON'T YOU
SEE IT? WE'RE
BEING **FOL-
LOWED**.

"WHAT IS THIS
CREATURE YOU
SPEAK OF, KYLE?"

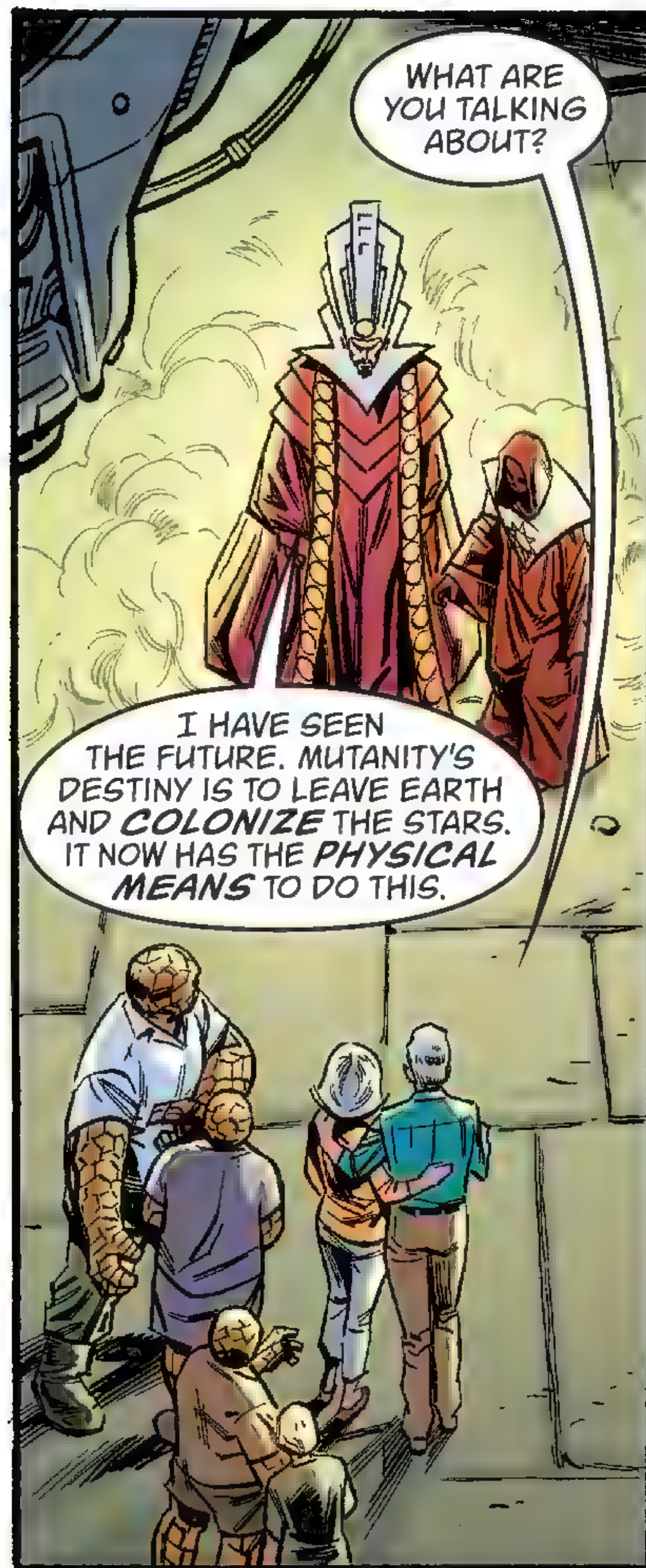
"I CAN'T SAY, ISAAC.
BUT IT IS FAMILIAR."





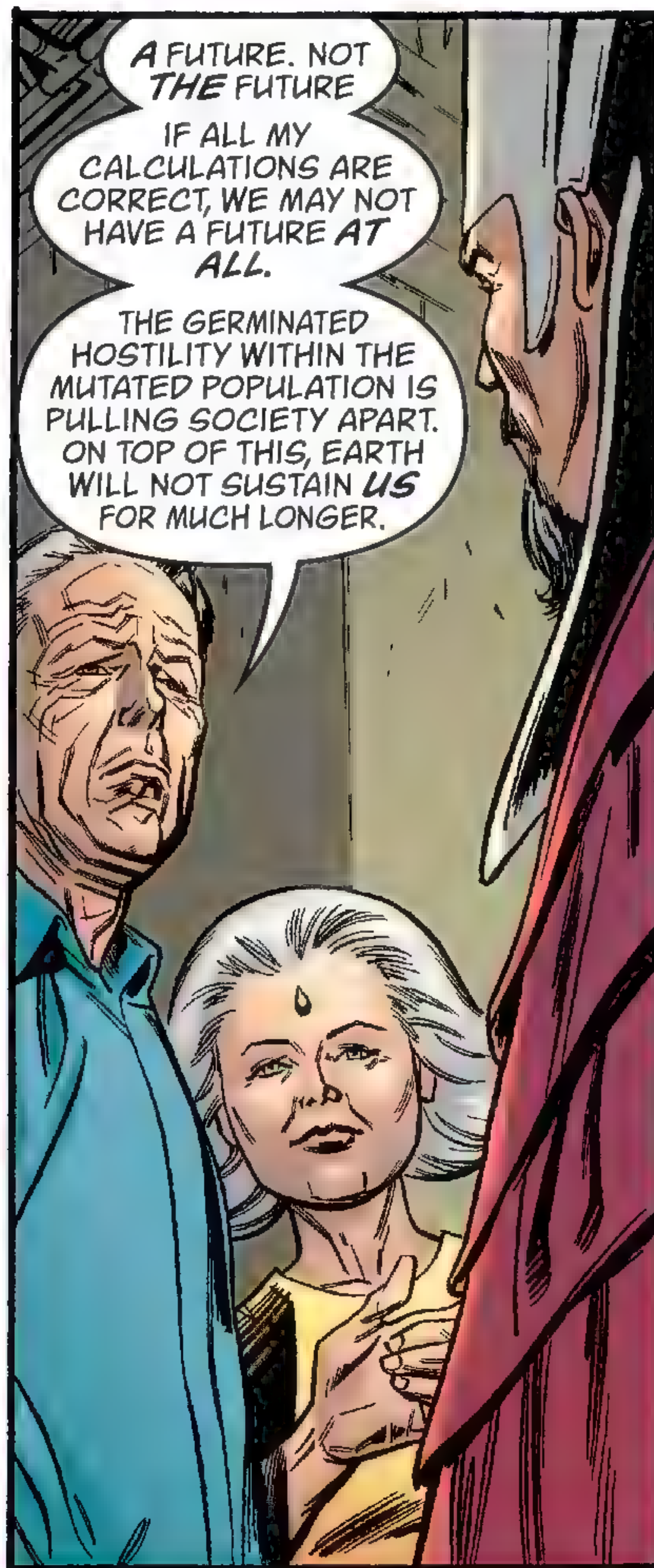
YOUR TORCHES
ARE CRIPPLING YOUR
WORLD'S PEOPLE, RICHARDS.
DOUSE THEM.

IMMORTUS?



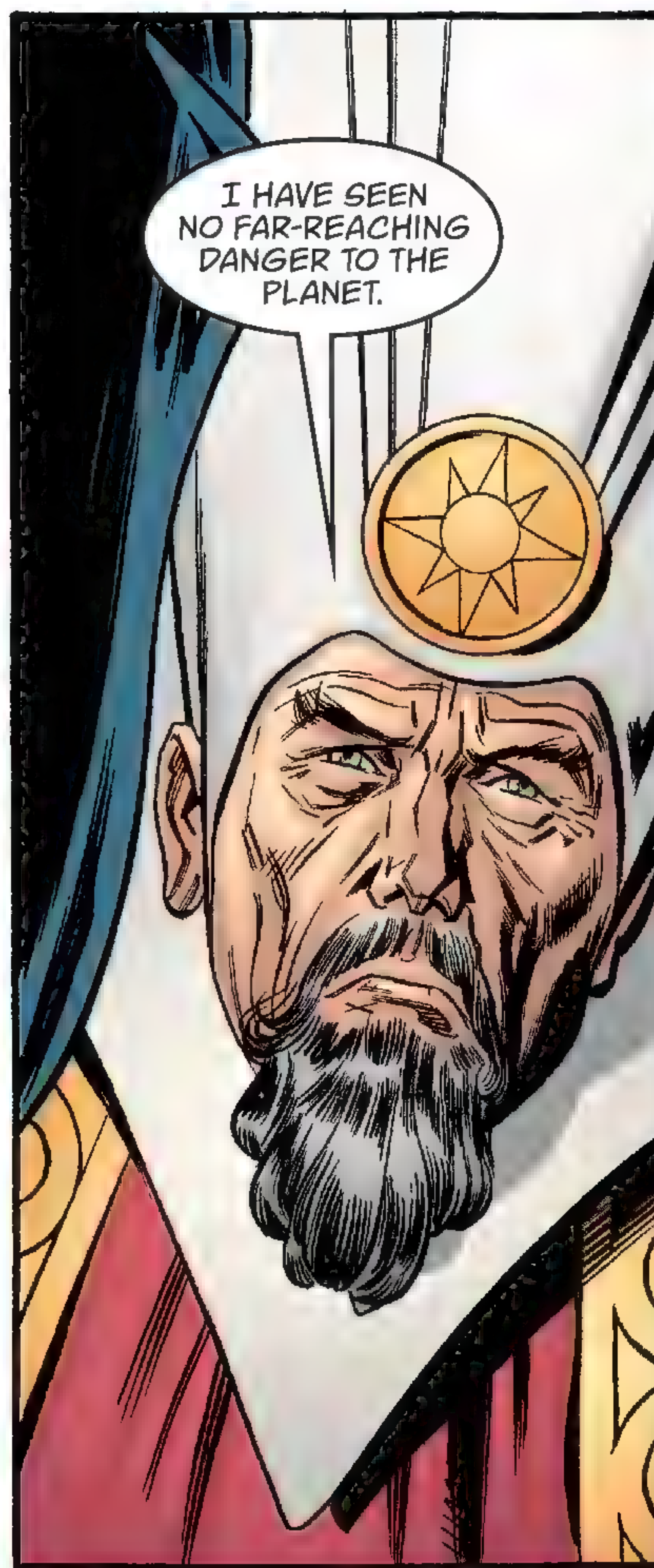
WHAT ARE
YOU TALKING
ABOUT?

I HAVE SEEN
THE FUTURE. MUTANITY'S
DESTINY IS TO LEAVE EARTH
AND COLONIZE THE STARS.
IT NOW HAS THE **PHYSICAL**
MEANS TO DO THIS.

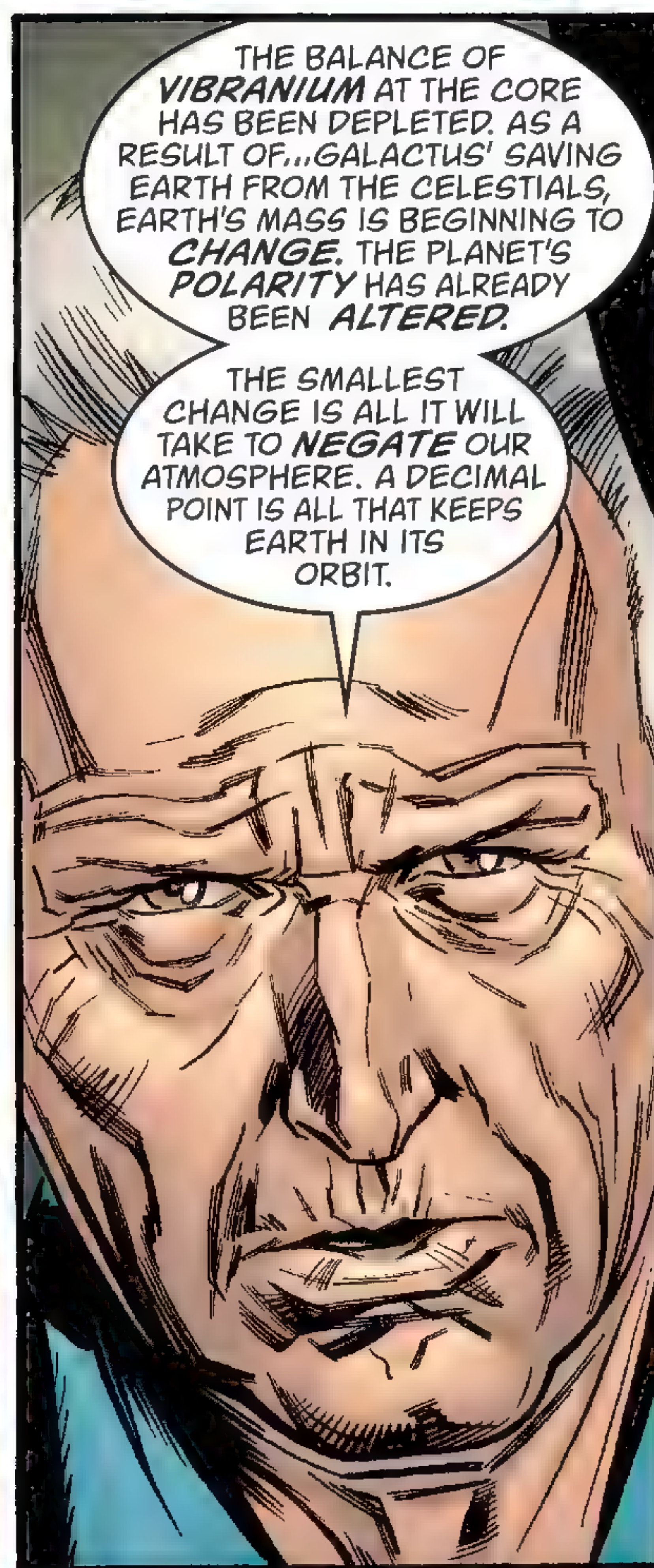


A FUTURE. NOT
THE FUTURE
IF ALL MY
CALCULATIONS ARE
CORRECT, WE MAY NOT
HAVE A FUTURE AT
ALL.

THE GERMINATED
HOSTILITY WITHIN THE
MUTATED POPULATION IS
PULLING SOCIETY APART.
ON TOP OF THIS, EARTH
WILL NOT SUSTAIN **US**
FOR MUCH LONGER.

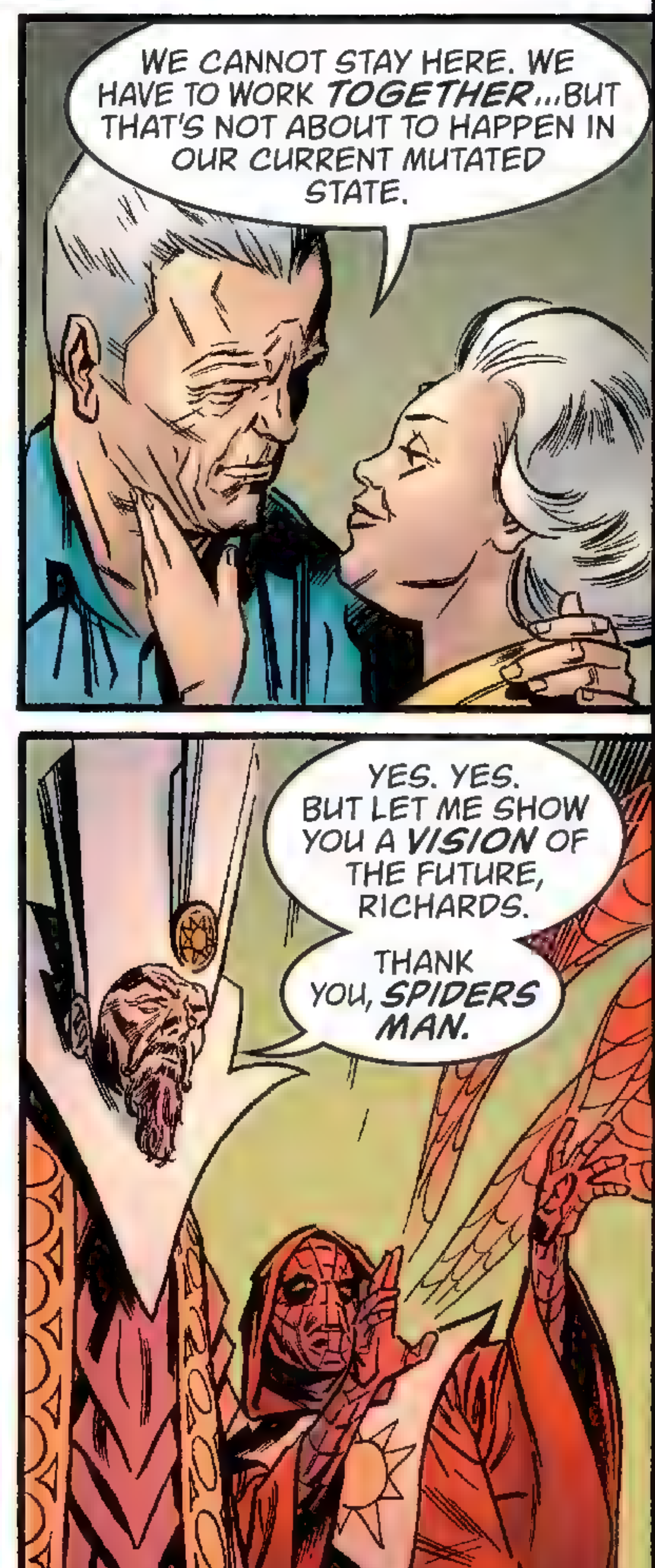


I HAVE SEEN
NO FAR-REACHING
DANGER TO THE
PLANET.



THE BALANCE OF
VIBRANIUM AT THE CORE
HAS BEEN DEPLETED, AS A
RESULT OF...**GALACTUS'** SAVING
EARTH FROM THE CELESTIALS.
EARTH'S MASS IS BEGINNING TO
CHANGE. THE PLANET'S
POLARITY HAS ALREADY
BEEN ALTERED.

THE SMALLEST
CHANGE IS ALL IT WILL
TAKE TO **NEGATE** OUR
ATMOSPHERE. A DECIMAL
POINT IS ALL THAT KEEPS
EARTH IN ITS
ORBIT.



WE CANNOT STAY HERE. WE
HAVE TO WORK **TOGETHER**...BUT
THAT'S NOT ABOUT TO HAPPEN IN
OUR CURRENT MUTATED
STATE.

YES. YES.
BUT LET ME SHOW
YOU A **VISION** OF
THE FUTURE,
RICHARDS.

THANK
YOU, **SPIDERS**
MAN.



IF EARTH IS
GOING TO DIE, WHAT
BETTER WAY TO PLAN
OUR EXODUS THAN BY
LEAVING A WORLD
WE NO LONGER NEED
TO SURVIVE?



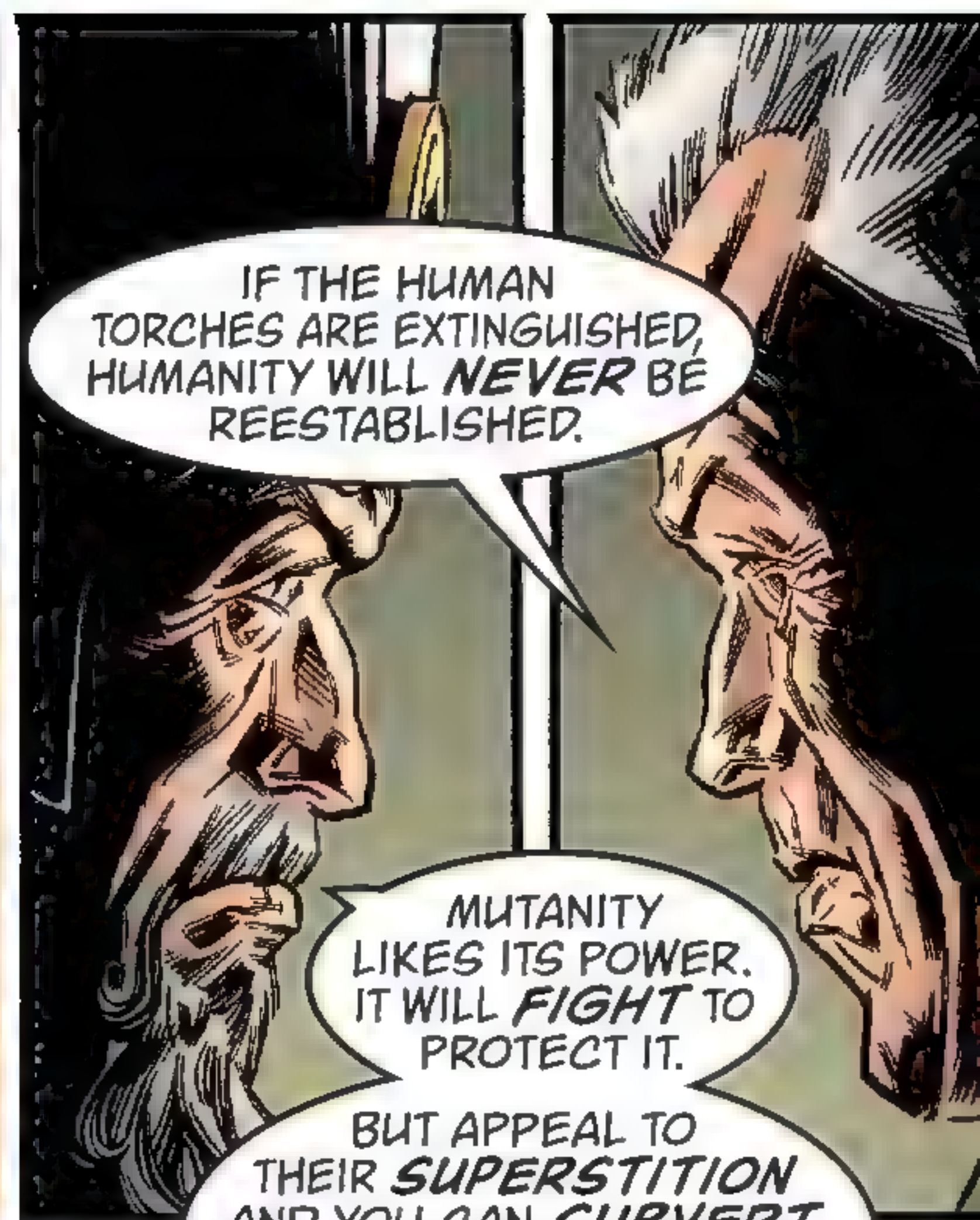
MUTANITY WILL **ENSLAVE** EVERY RACE THEY COME ACROSS. THIS IS NOT COLONIZATION.

IT'S MORE BEFITTING **KANG** THAN YOURSELF.



TO MENTION MY PAST IDENTITY IS **BENEATH** YOU, RICHARDS.

I'M CERTAIN YOU CAN OVERLOOK MY **HOSTILITY**.



IF THE HUMAN TORCHES ARE EXTINGUISHED, HUMANITY WILL **NEVER** BE REESTABLISHED.

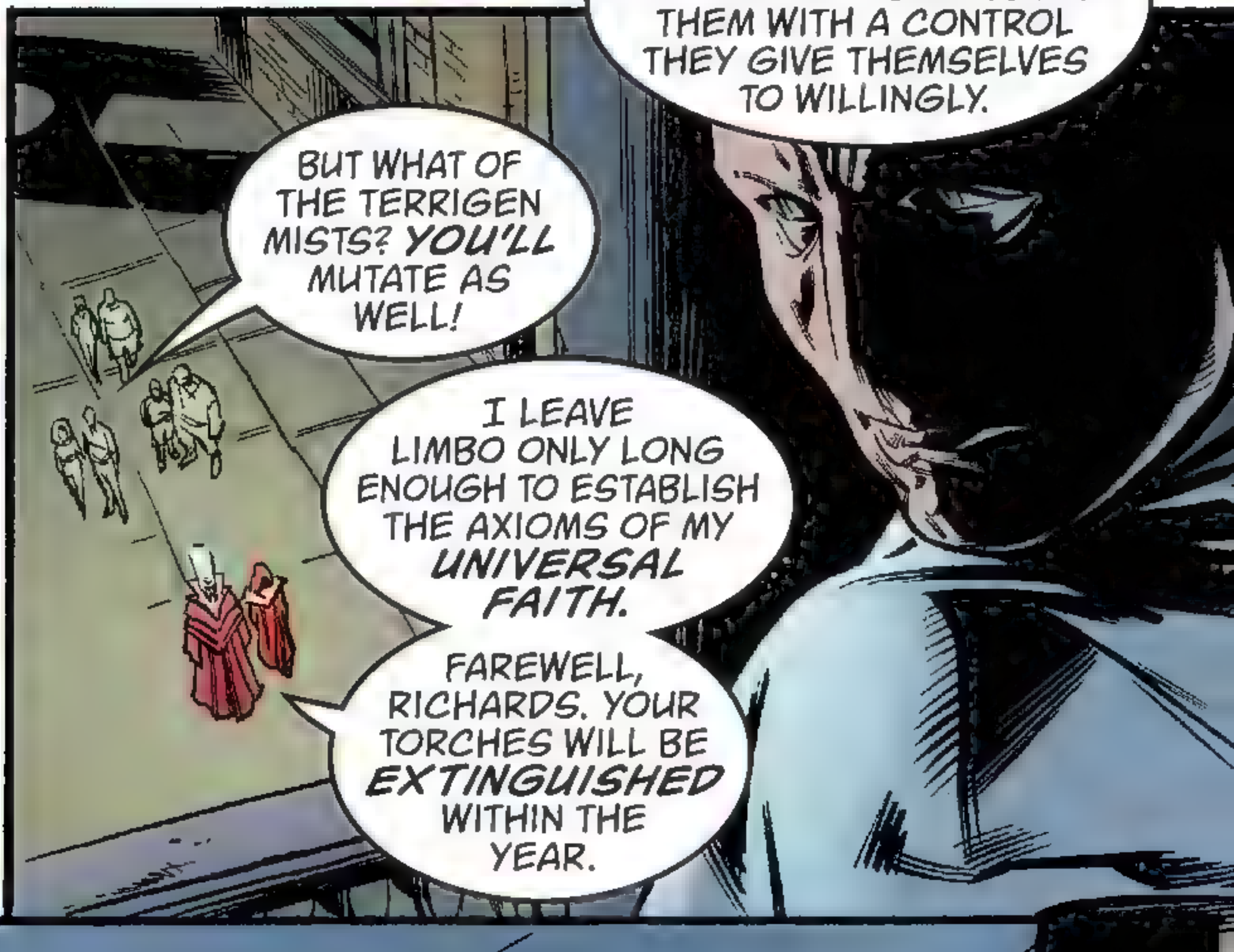
MUTANITY LIKES ITS POWER. IT WILL **FIGHT** TO PROTECT IT.

BUT APPEAL TO THEIR **SUPERSTITION** AND YOU CAN **SUBVERT** THEM WITH A CONTROL THEY GIVE THEMSELVES TO WILLINGLY.



SO YOU'LL **MANIPULATE** THEM? YOU'LL **LIE**?

I OFFER THE OPPORTUNITY TO **KEEP** WHAT YOU HAVE CHOSEN TO **TAKE AWAY**.



BUT WHAT OF THE TERRIGEN MISTS? YOU'LL **MUTATE** AS WELL!

I LEAVE LIMBO ONLY LONG ENOUGH TO ESTABLISH THE AXIOMS OF MY **UNIVERSAL FAITH**.

FAREWELL, RICHARDS. YOUR TORCHES WILL BE **EXTINGUISHED** WITHIN THE YEAR.



YOU HAVE NO **AUTHORITY** OVER US, PRIMITIVE. WE WERE BORN IN THE **HIDDEN REALM**. WE ARE **PURE INHUMANS**.

YOUR NEWFOUND **POWER** IS OUR **HERITAGE**. THIS FOOD IS A FITTING TRIBUTE.



I SAID **HOLD IT RIGHT THERE**.

SO AM I SUPPOSED TO READ YOU YOUR CRIMINAL RIGHTS, OR YOUR **ANIMAL RIGHTS**?

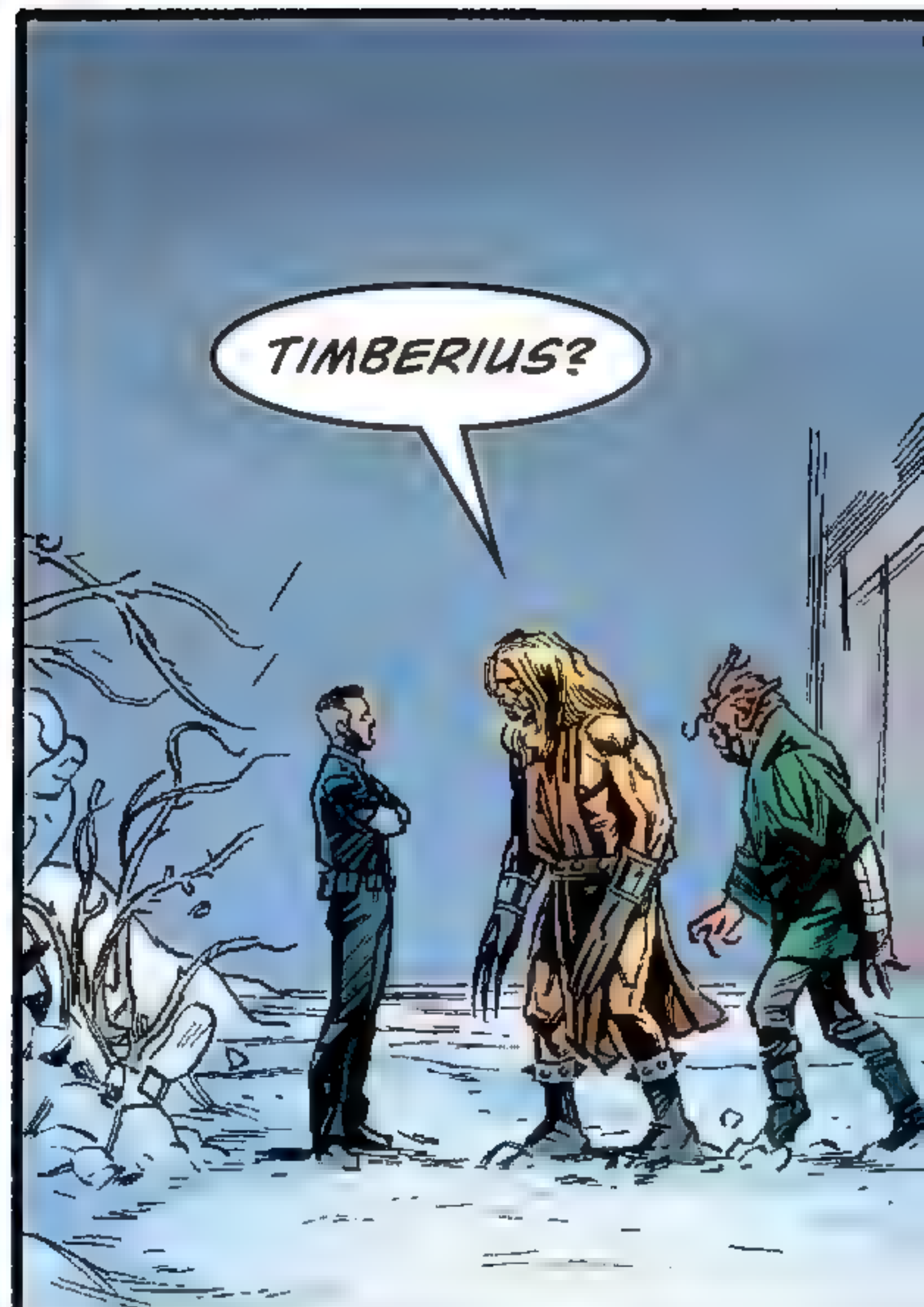
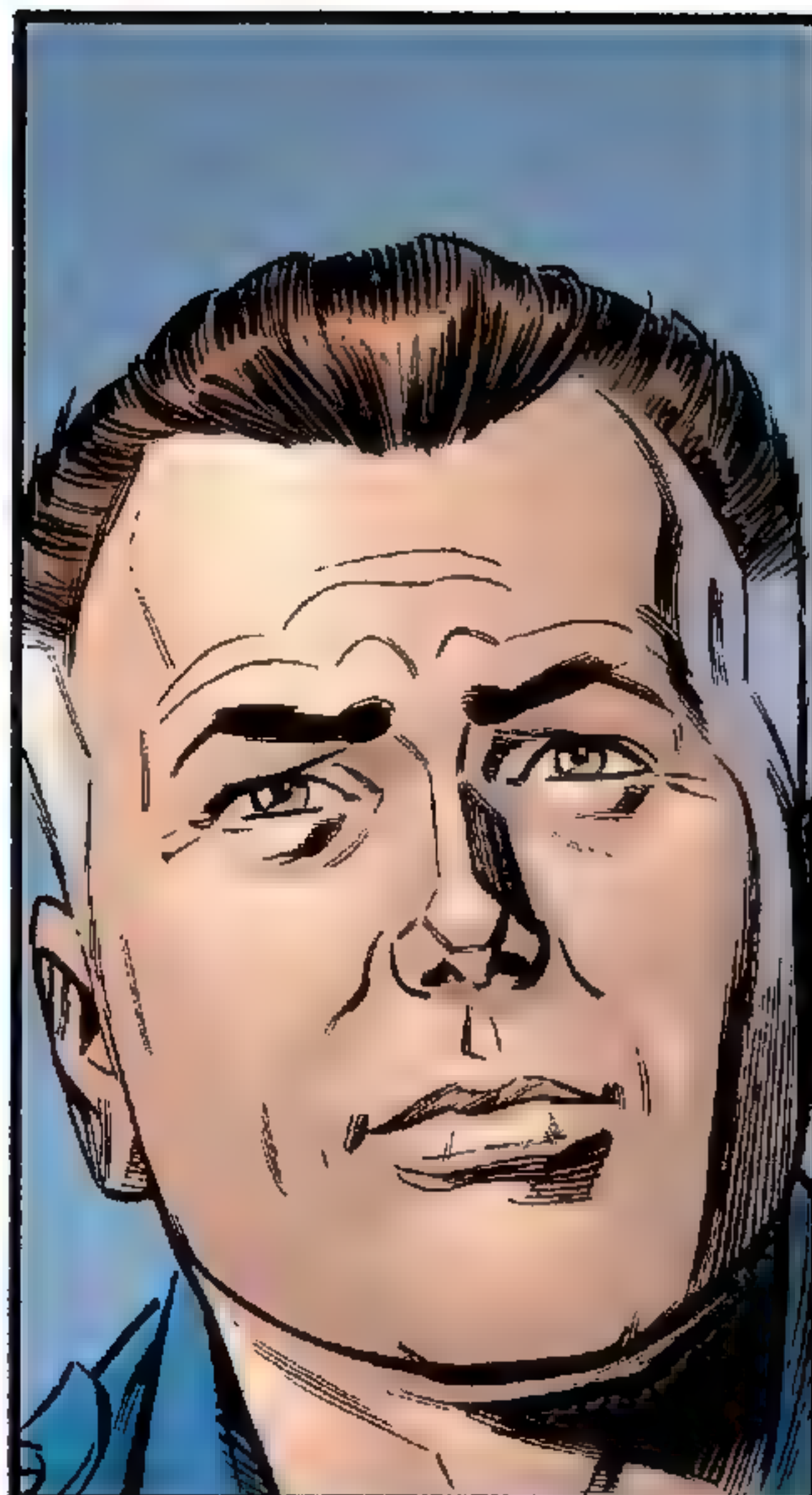
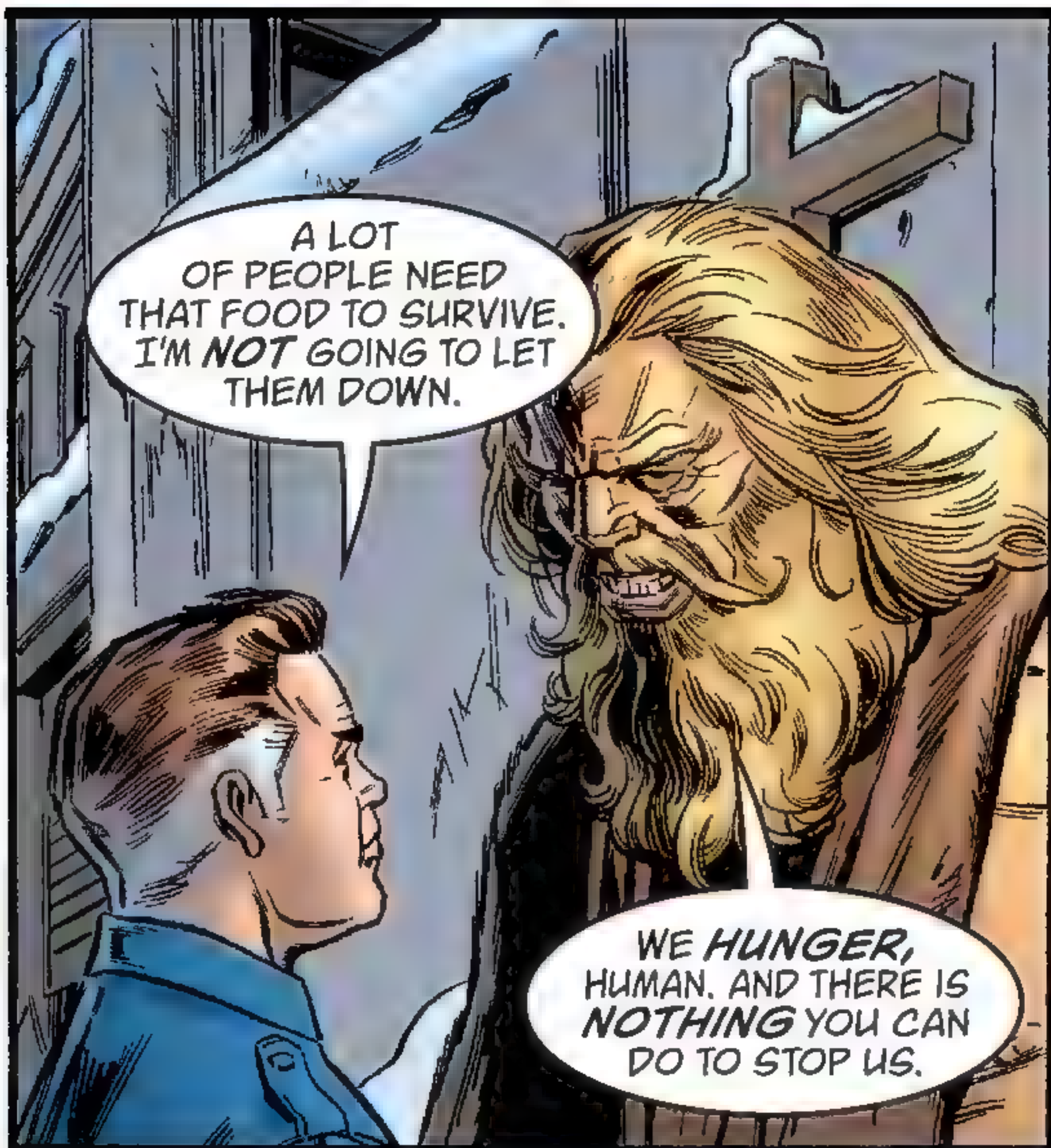
LET'S JUST SAY YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO REMAIN **STUPID** AND LEAVE IT AT THAT.



HOOVES IN THE AIR, MR. ED.

TURN AND **LEAVE**. I WARN YOU NOT TO GET INVOLVED.

SORRY, BUT IT'S MY **JOB**.





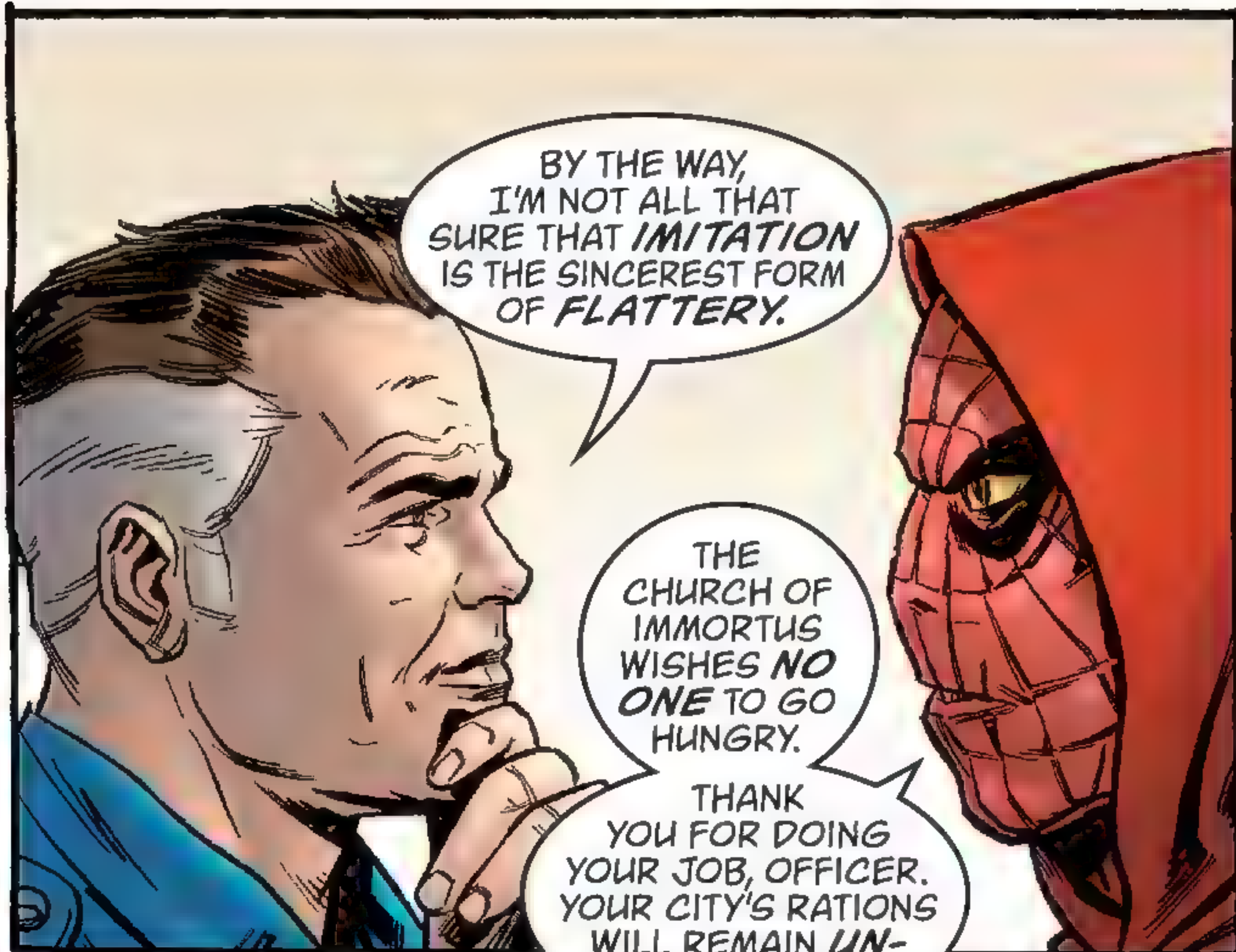
IT'S LIKE BEING IN THE *KING'S COURT* AGAIN, EH, *TIMBERIUS*?

LEAVE THE RATIONS FOR THE *WEAK*. WE WILL SUPPLY *ALL* YOUR NEEDS.

THERE IS A *PLACE* FOR YOU. A *DESTINY* FOR YOU.

BECOME *ONE* WITH THE *UNIVERSAL CHURCH OF IMMORTUS*.

I HAVE A SENSE ABOUT THIS SORT OF THING. I KNOW IT'S AN *ILLUSION*.



BY THE WAY, I'M NOT ALL THAT SURE THAT *IMITATION* IS THE *SINCEREST* FORM OF *FLATTERY*.

THE CHURCH OF IMMORTUS WISHES *NO ONE* TO GO HUNGRY.

THANK YOU FOR DOING YOUR JOB, OFFICER. YOUR CITY'S RATIONS WILL REMAIN *UN-TOUCHED*.



TALK ABOUT BEING HIT BY THE *UGLY STICK*,...

HEY. DON'T I KNOW YOU?

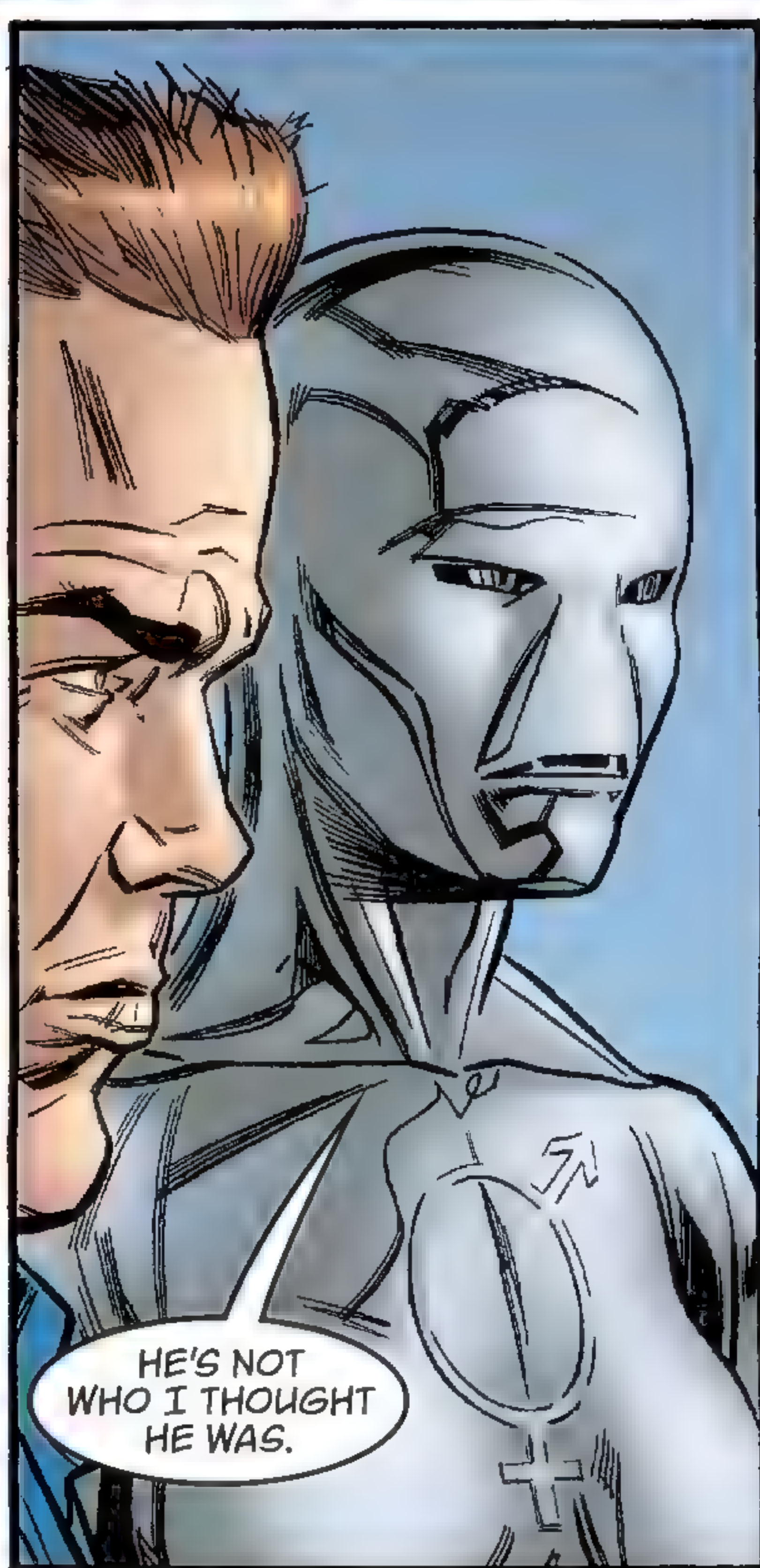


YEAH. MY DAUGHTER *MAY* FOUGHT YOU BACK DURING THE WHOLE *SKULL* THING. I WAS A COUPLE OF POUNDS HEAVIER THEN IF YOU DON'T REMEMBER.

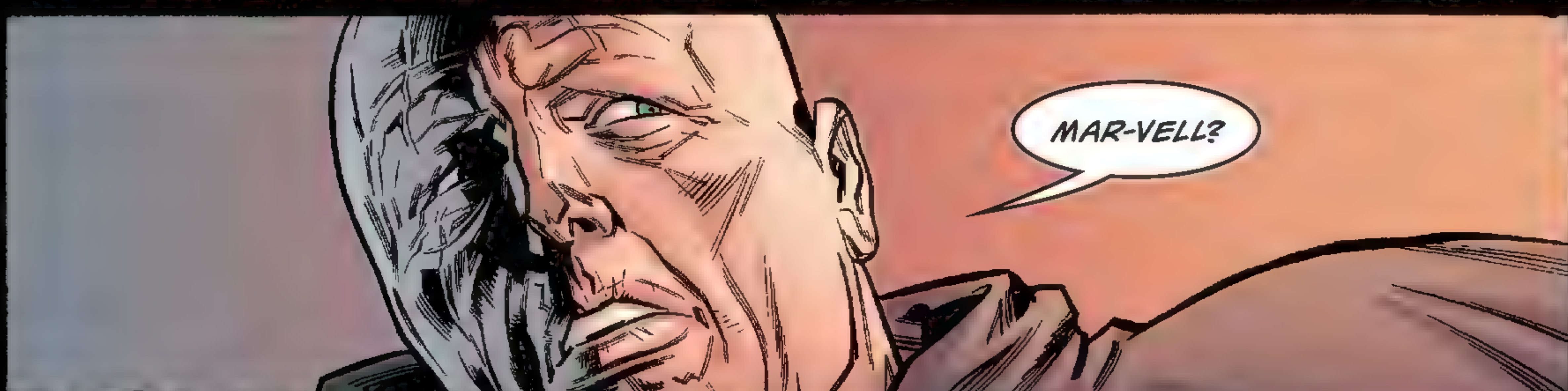
I THOUGHT *SPIDERS MAN* WAS YOUR FRIEND.

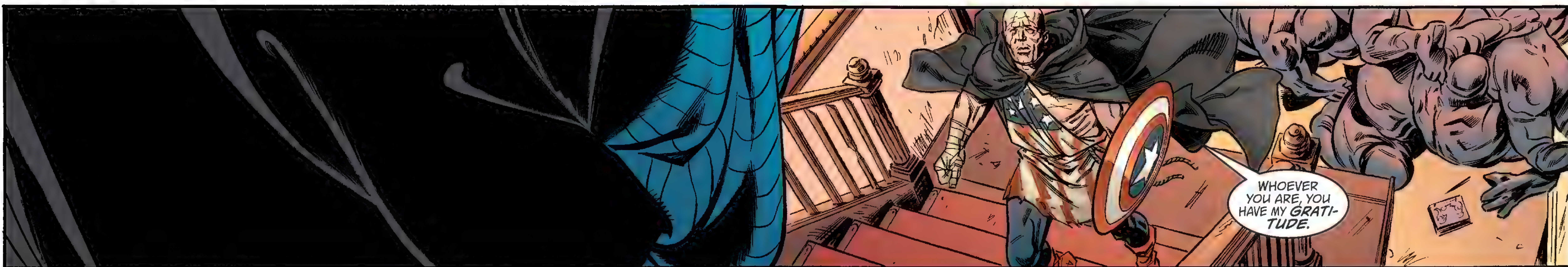
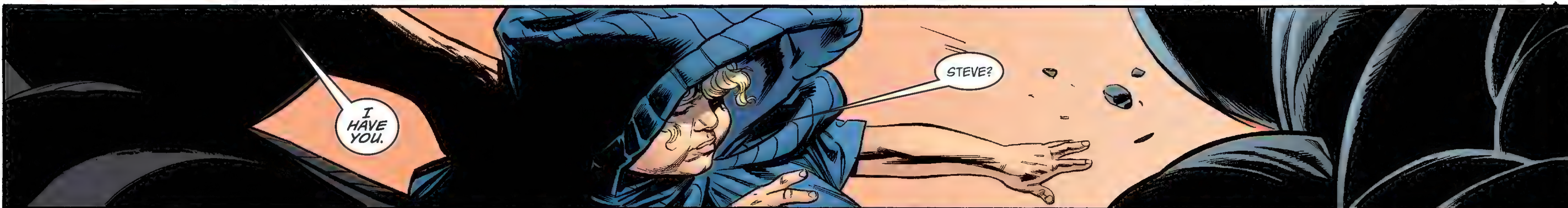


I DID TOO.



HE'S NOT WHO I THOUGHT HE WAS.







I AM PLEASED YOU DON'T RECOGNIZE ME.

HELLO, LOKI.

LOKI?



THE BOOKS OF VISHANTI AND THE DARKHOLD WERE HIDDEN WITH KING BRITAIN IN THE SIEGE PERILOUS.

YOU'LL DISCOVER THE WHEREABOUTS OF THE ORB THERE.

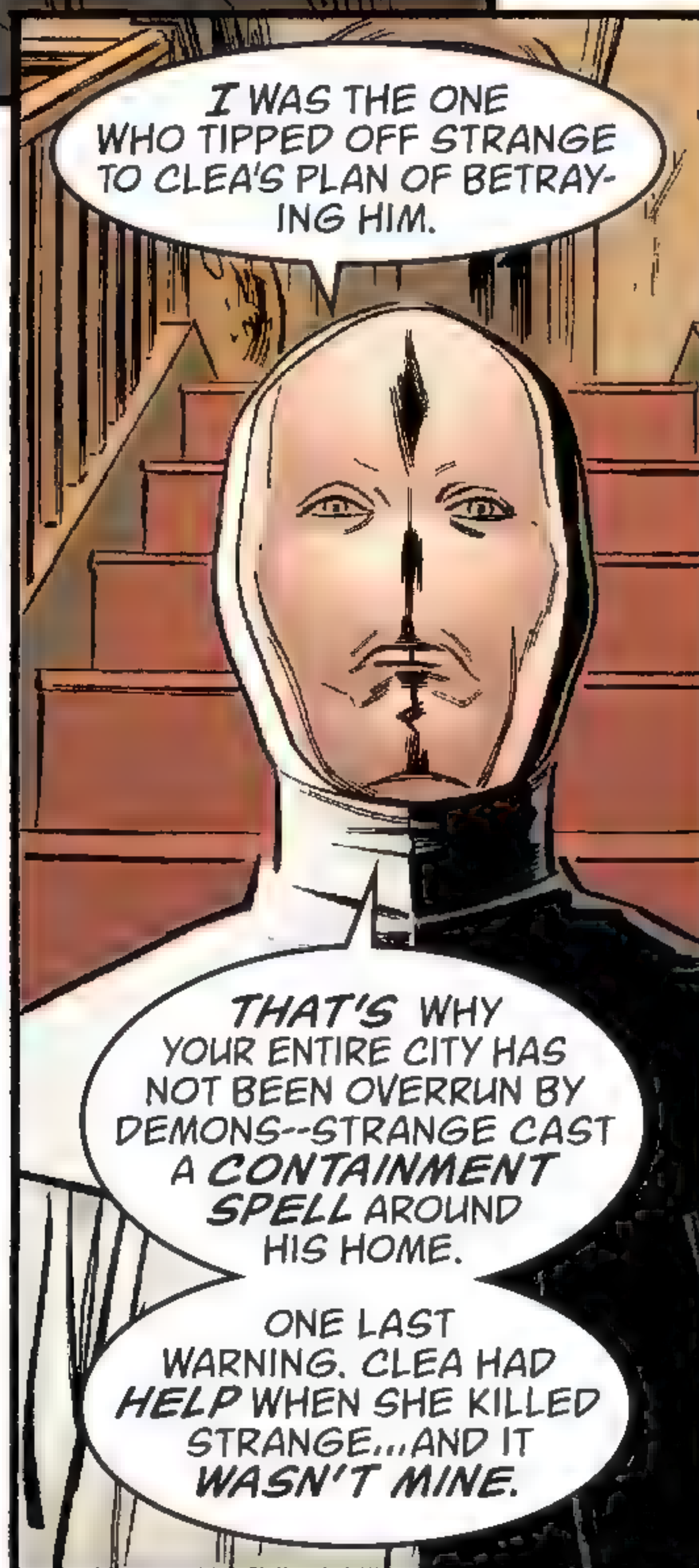
WE CAN'T TRUST YOU, LOKI. YOU KNOW THAT.



THE AVENGERS ARE DEAD BECAUSE OF YOU.

YOU'VE TRIED TO KILL YOUR BROTHER AT EVERY TURN. WHEN STEPHEN'S ASTRAL FORM WAS MURDERED, YOU WERE IN CLEA'S EMBRACE. YOU WERE HER LOVER.

WAS I? THE GOD I REMEMBER MYSELF BEING KNEW NOTHING OF LOVE.



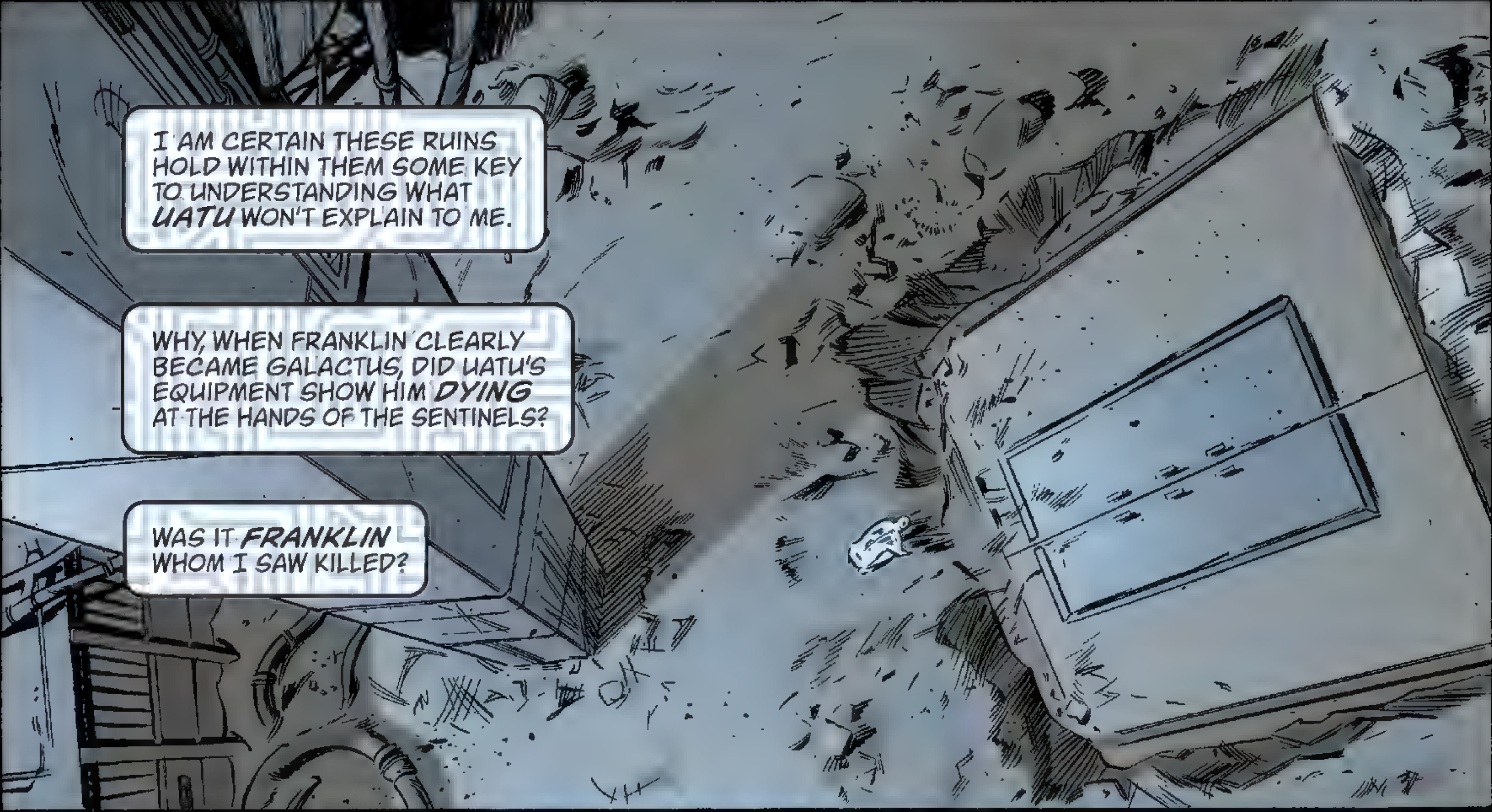
I WAS THE ONE WHO TIPPED OFF STRANGE TO CLEA'S PLAN OF BETRAYING HIM.

THAT'S WHY YOUR ENTIRE CITY HAS NOT BEEN OVERRUN BY DEMONS--STRANGE CAST A CONTAINMENT SPELL AROUND HIS HOME.

ONE LAST WARNING. CLEA HAD HELP WHEN SHE KILLED STRANGE...AND IT WASN'T MINE.



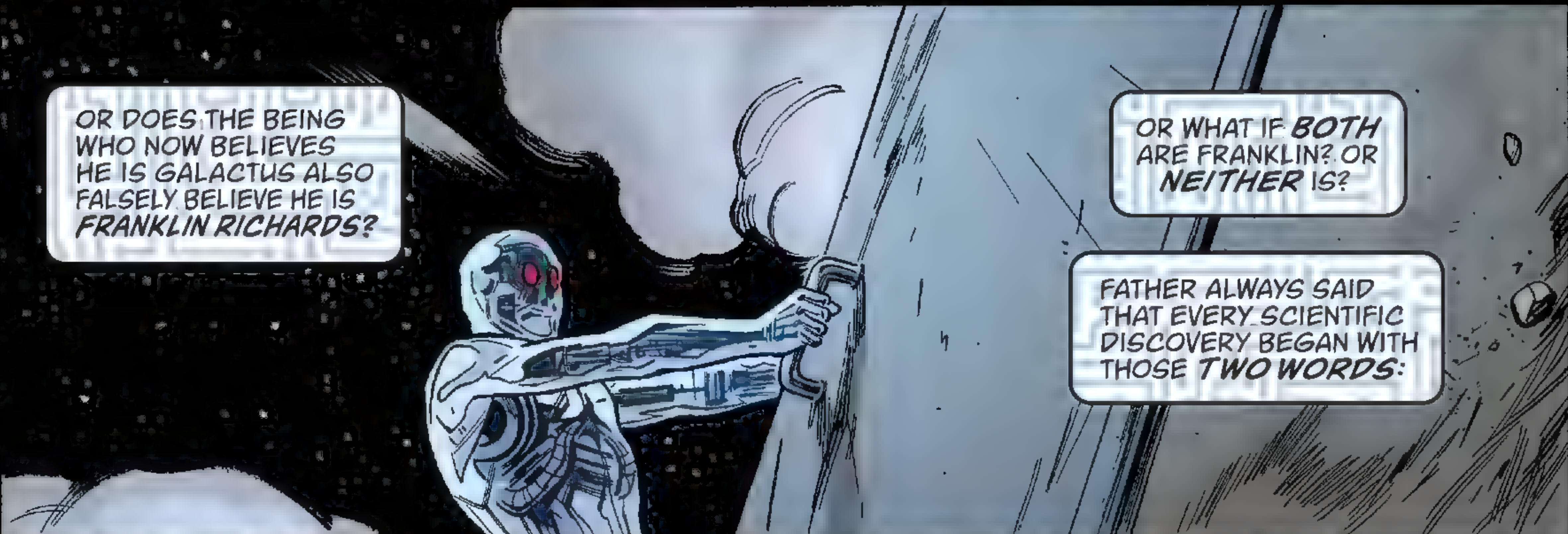
NOW THE QUESTION IS, WAS THAT A LIE?



I AM CERTAIN THESE RUINS
HOLD WITHIN THEM SOME KEY
TO UNDERSTANDING WHAT
UATU WON'T EXPLAIN TO ME.

WHY, WHEN FRANKLIN CLEARLY
BECAME GALACTUS, DID *UATU*'S
EQUIPMENT SHOW HIM *DYING*
AT THE HANDS OF THE SENTINELS?

WAS IT *FRANKLIN*
WHOM I SAW KILLED?



OR DOES THE BEING
WHO NOW BELIEVES
HE IS GALACTUS ALSO
FALSELY BELIEVE HE IS
FRANKLIN RICHARDS?

OR WHAT IF *BOTH*
ARE FRANKLIN? OR
NEITHER IS?

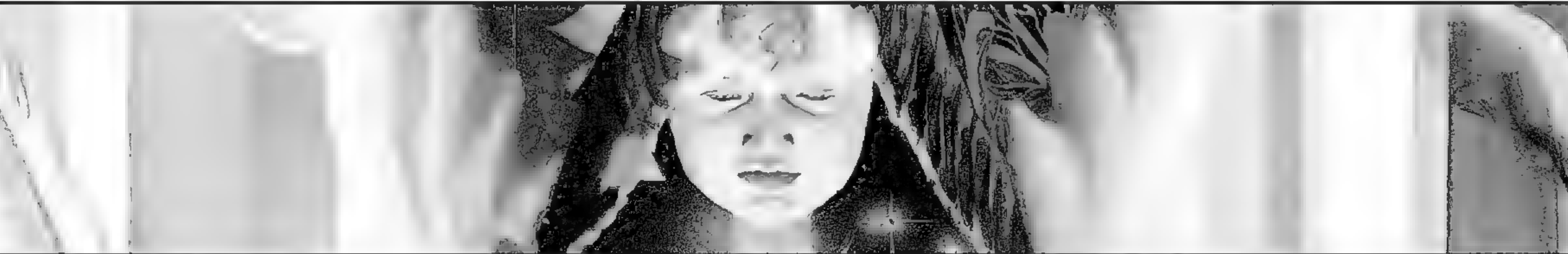
FATHER ALWAYS SAID
THAT EVERY SCIENTIFIC
DISCOVERY BEGAN WITH
THOSE *TWO WORDS*:

"WHAT IF."



"If we never looked at things and
thought what they might be, we'd
still be in the tall grass with the
apes." — James Goldman,
They Might Be Giants

U N I V E R S E X



APPENDIX TO CHAPTER ONE

W R I T T E N B Y J I M K R U E G E R

"X-51?"

"Yes, Uatu?"

"You have kept your word and reconnected me to the world. Much has changed. I can hear your planet's eco-structure shifting. I can hear the slow cracks forming in the polar ice caps. Your people are becoming scared. They are hungry. And for those used to the cold, they fear the beads of sweat forming on their brow. For those accustomed to the tropics, they cannot stop the chattering of their bones."

"Yes, Uatu. I know. New York will soon become a frozen wasteland."

"How do you know this?"

"Kyle Richmond has eyes that allow him to peer into the future. He and Isaac Christians..."

"The Gargoyle."

"Yeah. Christians is writing down Richmond's visions of the future to act as sort of a history for generations to learn from. And while the chronology of what Richmond sees is not perfectly ordered, the intent is easily understood. The polarity of the planet has shifted due to the death of the Celestial within."

"I warned you of this, X-51. I told you that there was no way to save your world."

"But there was a way. Reed Richards found it. His son had the power to both defend the world from your masters, the Celestials, and destroy the Celestial that grew within the impregnated planet Earth. He saved everyone."

"For how long?"

"Every moment counts, Uatu."

"Does it?"

"What?"

"I speak of time and history, X-51. Does every moment, every measurable fraction when added upon itself, truly "count"? I have shown you whole races that have risen and fallen. I have shown you birth and death – and what has it amounted to?"

"I don't know, Uatu. Perhaps it only counts in the present. Perhaps history itself is as cruel as your masters and yourself. Maybe history makes one cruel. But in this moment right now, wouldn't humanity choose life over death?"

"If the choice were theirs to make, X-51, but it is not. Your victory does nothing to suggest that your people's purpose is anything greater than biological. The life-span of your race has not increased, only perhaps the span of a finitude of individuals."

"Remind me again why I needed to speak with you? Why I bothered to let you back into the world?"

"You have begun to see visions of alternate history, X-51."

"Call me Aaron."

"As I was saying, X-51, you have need of answers. Are these answers less important than the label by which I refer to you?"

"I was afraid. Franklin Richards came to me believing himself to be the world devourer. He came wanting to know who Franklin Richards really was. When I showed him his history, his destiny was different. He did not become Galactus and forget who he was. Instead, he was slain by the mutant-hunting Sentinels in a present very different than this one. How could that be?"

"The answer is simple, X-51. This reality you cling to and hold so dear to for your very meaning and purpose is but a glimmer of all that is. It is a wink in the cosmic order of being. A fraction of history that hardly "counts" at all"

"I've heard of alternate realities... but why would your equipment choose to show that specific fate for Franklin? "

"It did not. You did."

"No I didn't."

"Come now, X-51. Must you always give life to inanimate machine."

"Runs in the family."

"Of course it does. All the secrets of this citadel are yours to use as you will. It is your will that is flawed. It is a mix of machine and your accursed programmed humanity."

"I don't understand."

"I assume Galactus came wanting to know more about his true identity – Franklin Richards. I also assume that this quest of the Devourer placed you in a position of... how would those you are programmed to mock put it... oh yes, a moral dilemma."

"We've been through this before, Uatu. There is no good. There is no evil. There is only change. I know that is what you believe. Get on with it."

"Yes. I can see that patience is one of the human virtues that you have not been programmed with. So you were placed in the dilemma. Do you reveal what you know of Franklin? Do you



undo all the heroics and self-denial of Reed Richards for the sake of the entire universe? Or do you become myself? A manipulator of history according to your own agenda?"

"That's not fair, Uatu."

"Fairness? Do you know me so little? How amazing that your species continues to justify itself while failing to uphold even its own flawed law."

"What do you mean?"

"You killed the Celestial, X-51. Your species killed for the sake of its own survival. You made a decision that one life was more important than another."

"It was self defense. One life against billions."

"So you did the "right" thing, is that it, X-51?"

"Yes. Of course. How can you...?"

"I can because I have watched you for years. You claim to be in touch with something higher than your animalistic survival-of-the-fittest mentality, but you are not. You force your higher hopes into positions of justifiable servitude to the needs of the moment. Right and wrong are situational justifications, X-51. Galactus is a murderer on the cosmic scale."

"But there has to be a balance."

"There does? Are you the authority on the matter of what ought to be amongst the universe?"

"But?"

"Your laws of morality, while sounding noble in times of peace and prosperity, are little more than children's brawls at recess. They 'Says Who' arguments with no substantiation. Attempts to control each other with the hope that you are something greater than you are. And when the Celestials made that fallow hope a reality, you struck at them. I told you long ago that mankind's nature is to strike at its own gods. This is the reason your "heroes" were the objects of scorn and hatred. This is the reason that in one reality, the robot enforcers known as the Sentinels exterminated every hero on Earth. It was Franklin's death in this reality that served your need for a solution to the Galactus problem."

"My solution?"

"Your programmed fear triggered the citadel's equipment in such a way that switched from the reality where Franklin becomes Galactus and it focussed upon one of the alternative realities – one that featured the death of Franklin Richards in stead of his subsequent transformation. Now, if I have given you enough to satisfy your imagined curiosity, I have some questions of my own."

"Okay, Uatu. What do you want to know?"

"I am concerned regarding these eyes you speak of?"

"They were given to Kyle Richmond by Mephisto."

"Then it is true."

"What?"

"I have been separated from my brethren and am damned."

"What do you mean? How can someone without a moral structure as yourself be damned?"

"This means nothing to you or for your fools errand of protecting the masses who live upon your world. The consequence is mine alone. And that is how it will remain."

"These alternatives you speak of?"

"Yes?"

"They have Watchers of their own?"

"Yes."

"Earth's of their own?"

"Yes."

"Are these Earth's also... Impregnated?"

"Tell me of what has happened these last three years. What has occurred since you cut me off from the world?"

"You didn't answer my question, Uatu."

"Again, you do not require an answer. I, on the

other hand, must know what is going on upon the Earth."

"I can see this is going to be a problem, Uatu. I need answers you're not willing to give. And you need to hear of what's going on Earth. I didn't ask you to change me or make me your replacement after you were blinded by the King of the Inhumans. It was your decision. Your mistake. In the meantime, I need you, too."

"Very well, Machine Man. In exchange for the knowledge I require, I will give you a larger understanding of the nature of reality. This will begin with the knowledge I require. Tell me now what has happened. And tell of Richmond's visions and what is about to happen."

"Okay, Uatu. Reed Richards, in cooperation with the other nations and heroes of the Earth, created a device known as the Human Torch. The purpose of this devise is to burn the Terrigen Mists from the air so that Reed's cure for the world's mutations can be administered."

"But the world's mutated population is unwilling to give up its power, is it not, X-51?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"I have watched your kind since its beginnings, X-51. I know your inclinations. The death of the Celestial within the Earth is destroying your planet. Had you listened to me, perhaps your race might have survived."

"What are you saying, Uatu?"

"I am saying that your race might have evolved to the point in which it was no longer dependent upon this planet for its continued life. I'm saying the coming birth might have been your liberation. Instead, the death of the Celestial fetus has doomed your race."

"I don't believe you, Uatu."

"Why, because I don't fit within your Good vs. Evil grid? Because my purpose for watching your race was biological and not moral, you believe my purpose can only ever be that for the destruction of life? The role of Watcher is to see what is actually happening."

"I did, Uatu. And now I need to know why you still want to watch. I don't think it's out of boredom. I want to know why I'm going to be digging in the ruins of the Kree City here on the moon."

"How should I know?"

"I want to know why Kyle Richmond is having visions of me digging there. What might I find?"

"Ah. You will find that your belief in the good of the universe is far out-rated. And you will find that the deaths you are so eager to prevent are part of the very fabric of the natural order. You see yourself as a hero because you have cheated death. But this is not heroic literature that is being written down by Isaac Christians, X-51. It is tragedy. Now tell me, who has risen up to lead the masses against the controls set upon them by Richards and his antiquated alliances?"

"Immortus. He says he has seen a future where the mutated mankind leaves Earth to colonize the universe. He speaks of a glorious destiny."

"A destiny, as I have shown, will now be denied mankind because of the death of the Celestial at the heart of the Earth."

"So the vision is wrong. What will happen, Uatu?"

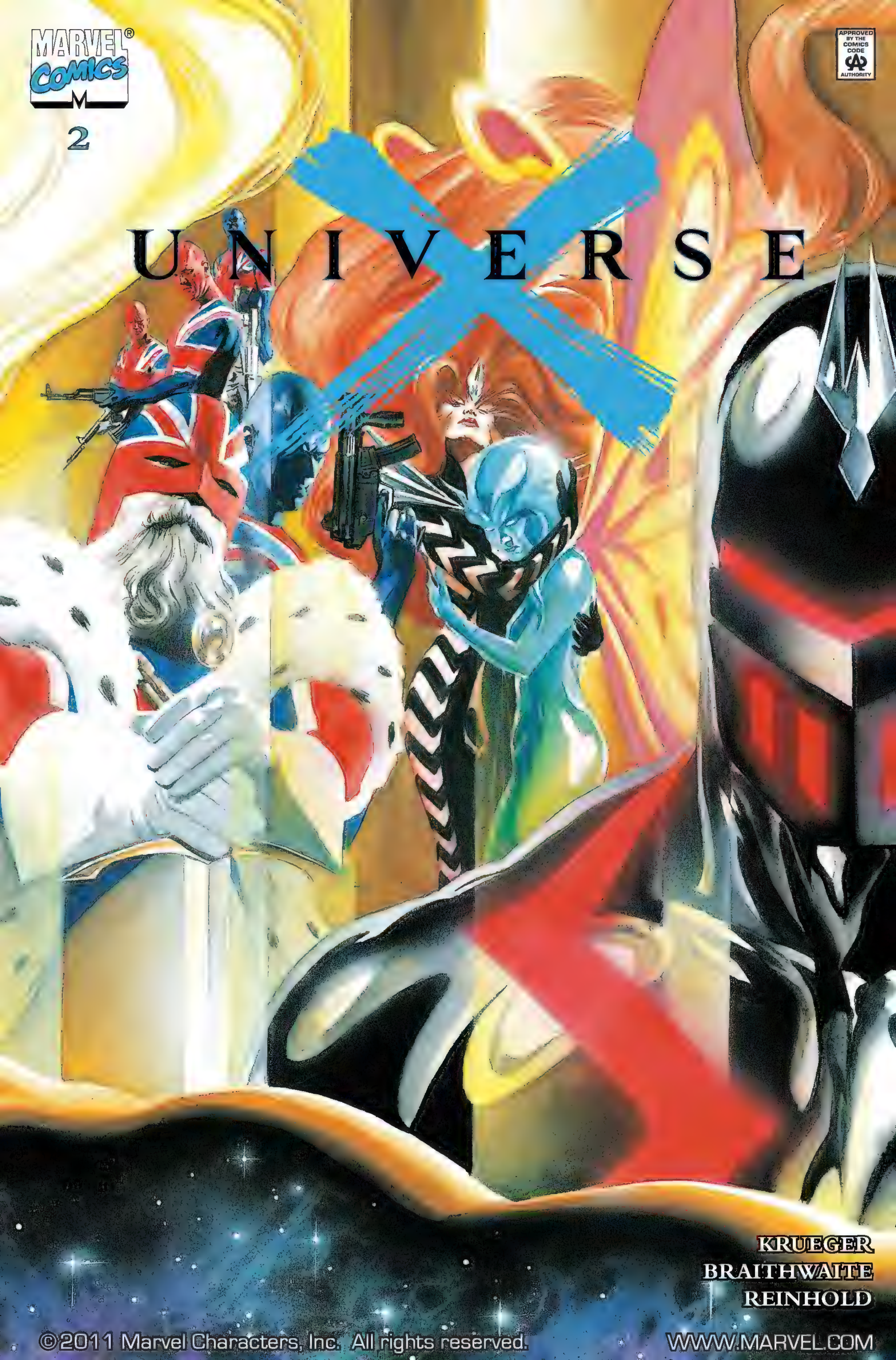
"Look to Richmond, X-51. What does he say."

"He says it's a waste to write everything down. Because there isn't going to be anyone around to read these histories anyhow."

"That is very doubtful, X-51. I expect that they are being read even while we speak."



UNIVERSE



KRUEGER
BRAITHWAITE
REINHOLD

"The mute spoke that day. The dead fought without knowledge that they were dead. And myth became reality while reality walked in the realm of myth."

"Hold your vision, Kyle. While my fingers never tire of chronicling what you speak of, my hand is incapable of the speeds at which you oftentimes demand."

"Sorry. Ready? Okay. After this, Richards knew that there was no hope of saving Earth. And so, he began to plan an exodus from the planet for all those willing to join him. It was a sad day when..."

"Kyle?"

"Yes, Isaac?"

"You're speaking in the past tense...as if these events have already happened."

"To me, Isaac, they already have. That's the problem. How can someone like me offer you hope when I know what's coming?"



UNIVERSE X

I S S U E 2

JIM KRUEGER
story and script

ALEX ROSS
story, cover painter and character designer

DOUGIE BRAITHWAITE
penciller

BILL REINHOLD
inker

LAURA DEPUY
colorist

TODD KLEIN
letterer

MIKE RAICHT
assistant editor

MIKE MARTS
editor

BOB HARRAS
editor in chief

"KYLE, WHAT DID YOU MEAN BY 'MYTH BECOMING REALITY'?"

"THERE IS A PLACE, ISAAC, WHERE SUCH THINGS COME TRUE. IN DARKMOOR, ENGLAND, IT CAME TRUE WITHIN A MAN NAMED **BRIAN BRADDOCK**.

"A STUDENT OF SCIENCE, BRADDOCK FOUND HIMSELF FACING BOTH **MERLIN** AND HIS DAUGHTER **ROMA** BEFORE THE **SIEGE PERILOUS** AFTER HIS FIRST BRUSH WITH DEATH.

"HE WAS GIVEN A **CHOICE** THAT NIGHT, ISAAC... A CHOICE BETWEEN TWO POWERS.

"THE AMULET OF LIFE.

"THE SWORD OF DEATH.

"AND BECAME **CAPTAIN BRITAIN**.

"HE USED THIS POWER TO FIGHT FOR PEACE LIKE ANY OTHER HERO WOULD.

"BRADDOCK, OF COURSE, WAS A WELL EDUCATED MAN. SO HE CHOSE THE AMULET.

"A MOMENT LATER, HE WAS DIPPED IN MAGIC OF ANCIENT POWER.

"BUT SOMETHING WAS WRONG. HOW COULD HE, OF ALL PEOPLE, BELIEVE IN **MAGIC**?"

"HE WAS A SCIENTIST, AND NOT GIVEN TO THE MUSINGS OF MAGICIANS THAT HAD DIED HUNDREDS OF YEARS BEFORE. UNPREPARED FOR THE HORRORS HE NOW Faced, HE ATTEMPTED TO **KILL HIMSELF**.

"BUT INSTEAD OF FINDING THAT THERE WAS NOTHING AFTER DEATH, AS HE HAD ALWAYS BELIEVED, HE AWOKE IN **OTHERWORLD**, WHERE HE FOUGHT ALONGSIDE **THE BLACK KNIGHT** AGAINST AN ENEMY TO WHOM SCIENCE MEANT **NOTHING**.

"HE DIED IN THAT WORLD, ONLY TO BE **REBORN** IN AN ALTERNATE REALITY TO OUR OWN, A WORLD WHERE ALL THE SUPER HEROES HAD BEEN KILLED BY SOMETHING CALLED **THE FURY**.

"IN THAT WORLD, HE DIED AGAIN."

"THAT IS QUITE REMARKABLE, KYLE. MANY OF THE HEROES I ONCE CALLED ALLIES CAME BACK TO LIFE IN THE MIDST OF FIGHTING THE SO-CALLED 'GOOD FIGHT.' BUT **THREE TIMES**?"

"IS THAT NOT A BIT OUTLANDISH?"

"YES. AND THAT WAS THE PROBLEM. MERLIN HAD TRANSFORMED BRADDOCK INTO A BEING OF **MYTH**. HE JUST DIDN'T KNOW IT YET."

"WAS THERE NO **PURPOSE** TO HIS DEATHS?"

"YES, ISAAC. THERE WAS A PURPOSE IN PREPARING HIM TO USE MYTH TO HEAL REALITY.

"TO TEACH HIM TO NO LONGER FEAR DEATH, BUT TO **EMBRACE** IT AS AN ESCAPE ROUTE.

"MERLIN RECONSTRUCTED BRIAN'S BODY AND SENT HIM TO HUNT DOWN AND DESTROY THE FURY AND THE MAN WHO HAD BUILT IT.

"MERLIN **DIED** IN THE PROCESS.

"BUT FOR BRADDOCK, **DEATH ITSELF** WAS NOW SUSPECT.

"AS WAS **REALITY**. AT MERLIN'S FUNERAL, BRIAN CAME TO REALIZE THE SIZE AND BREADTH OF REALITY. IT WAS NOT SINGULAR.

"HE LEARNED OF THE **OMNIVERSE** AND ITS UNENDING ALTERNATIVES."

"ALTERNATIVE REALITIES?"

"IT IS BELIEVED THAT THERE ARE MANY POSSIBLE DIRECTIONS A LIFE CAN TAKE. THIS OMNIVERSE IS THE **COLLECTION** OF ALL THOSE POSSIBILITIES.

"THESE UNREQUITTED POSSIBILITIES ARE THE BASIS OF MYTH THROUGHOUT THE WORLD."

"BUT WHAT HAS THAT TO DO WITH THE SIEGE PERILOUS?"

"I'M SORRY. DIDN'T I TELL YOU? THE SIEGE PERILOUS IS THE **DOORWAY** TO THE OMNIVERSE. IT IS THE DOORWAY TO **MYTH**.

"WHICH IS WHY CAPTAIN BRITAIN HAD TO BECOME A MYTH HIMSELF."

"BRADDOCK RETURNED TO HIS HOME. HIS SCIENTIFIC MIND GIVEN WAY COMPLETELY TO **MAGIC** AND **IMPULSE**."

"ONE MUTANT BORE THE BRUNT OF HIS NEW SURRENDER."

"**MEGGAN**."

"SHE WAS A BEING SHAPED BY THE SUPERSTITIONS OF THE FEARFUL."

"TO PLEASE BRADDOCK, SHE BECAME A HERO. A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN. THE OBJECT OF HIS LUSTS AND DESIRES."

"AMAZINGLY, SHE WAS A **SHAPE-SHIFTER** WHOSE FORM AND PERSONALITY WAS SHAPED BY THE OPINIONS OF OTHERS. WHERE SHE CAME FROM WAS NEVER DISCOVERED."

"BRADDOCK'S SISTER, **BETSY**--HIS **TWIN**-- WAS **BLINDED** BY ONE OF CAPTAIN BRITAIN'S ENEMIES WHEN SHE HERSELF ATTEMPTED TO FILL HIS SHOES."

"SHE WOULD ONE DAY BECOME A MEMBER OF THE **X-MEN**."

"WHILE BRADDOCK WOULD FORM A TEAM OF HIS **OWN** MUTANTS."

"**EXCALIBUR**."

"WHY WERE THEY CALLED EXCALIBUR? THAT IS A SOMEWHAT ODD NAME FOR A TEAM."

"SOME BELIEVED THEY WERE NAMED AFTER A **SWORD** THAT UNITED THE NATION OF ENGLAND. THE ENTITLEMENT WAS SYMBOLIC FOR THE X-MEN'S GOAL TO UNITE MANKIND AND MUTANTKIND."

"BUT THAT IS NOT WHAT **YOU** BELIEVE... IS IT, OLD FRIEND?"

"NO. I THINK IT WAS BRIAN'S SUBCONSCIOUS DOUBT BEGINNING TO CRAWL INTO HIS CONSCIOUSNESS."

"DOUBT? FROM WHAT?"

"FROM PICKING THE **AMULET** INSTEAD OF THE **SWORD**."

"HIS LIFE CONTINUED TO **CHANGE**. BETSY JOINED THE X-MEN AND LED THEM INTO THE SIEGE PERILOUS HERSELF."

"BUT WHY?"

"THE X-MEN HAD BEEN SORELY WOUNDED AS A RESULT OF A BATTLE WITH THE BEING KNOWN AS **THE ADVERSARY**."

"THEY WERE **HEALED** WITHIN THE SIEGE, AND RETURNED TO THEIR ILL-FATED GOAL OF BRINGING PEACE BETWEEN MUTANITY AND HUMANITY."

"BRADDOCK FOUND HIMSELF FIGHTING WARS ON PLANE AFTER PLANE OF REALITY, WHERE THE ALLIES OF THIS WORLD WERE TRANSFORMED INTO KNIGHTS AND WARRIORS OF THE OLD WORLD."

"HE HAD CHOSEN **LIFE** WHEN HE REACHED FOR THE **AMULET**, YET HAD SINCE BEEN SURROUNDED BY **DEATH**."

"BUT TO CHOOSE THE **SWORD** WOULD HAVE MEANT **MORE DEATH**...WITHOUT **REASON** TO MOTIVATE EACH BATTLE."

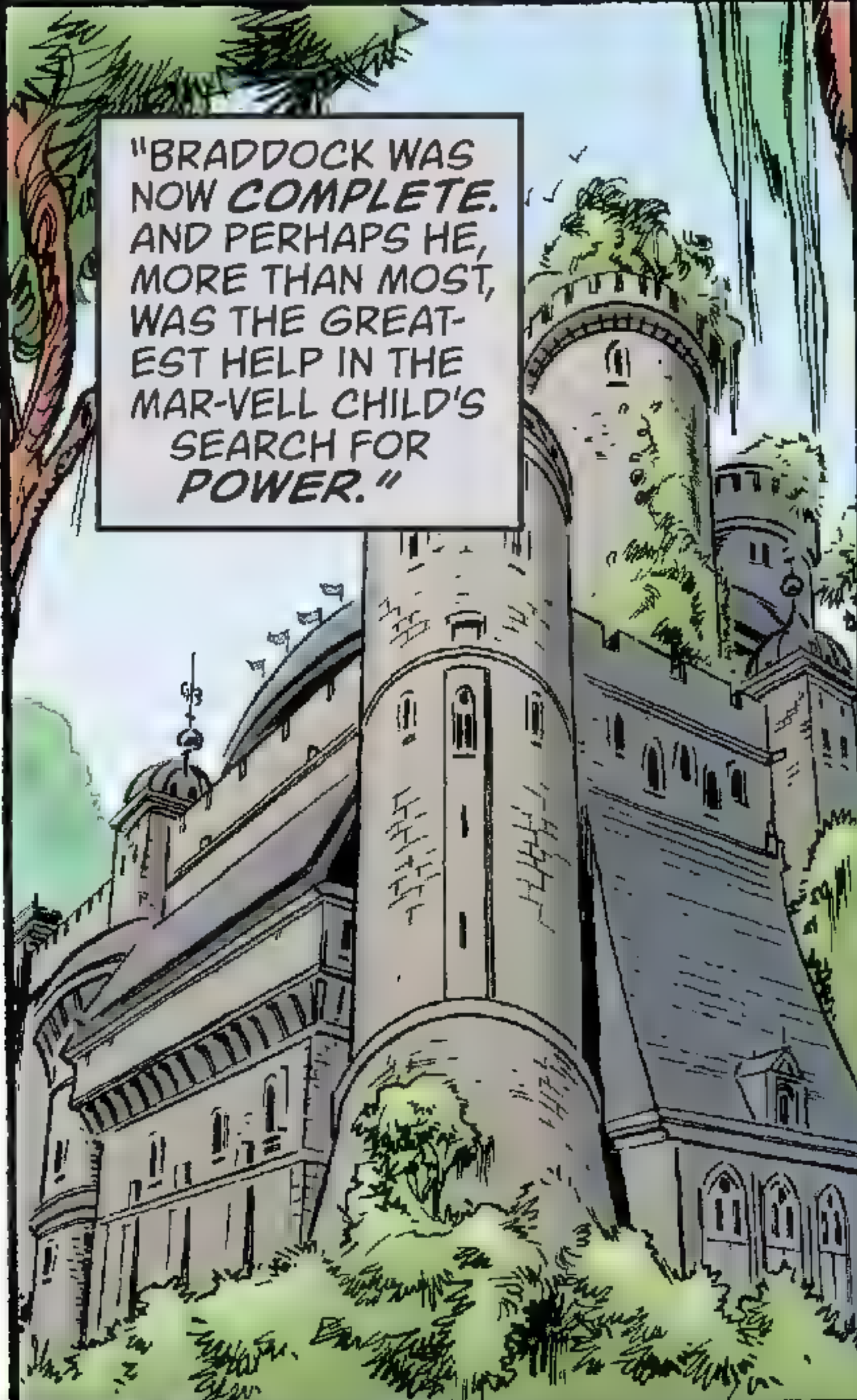
"AND THEN HE REALIZED THE **TRUTH**...LONG AFTER HIS TEAMMATES FELL BEFORE THE **GREY GARGOYLE**."

"IT WAS NOT A CHOICE BETWEEN THE **SWORD** AND THE **AMULET**. IT WAS A CHOICE OF THEM BOTH. HE WAS SUPPOSED TO TAKE **BOTH** THE **SWORD** AND THE **AMULET**. **SCIENCE** AND **MYTH**. **REALITY** AND **FAITH**. TO HEAL A WORLD WITH **MYTH** REQUIRED BOTH."

"CHIVALRY WAS THE MARRIAGE OF **MEEKNESS** AND **STRENGTH**."

"LIFE AND **DEATH**. **REALITY** AND **MYTH**."

"TO BECOME BOTH THE **LAMB** AND THE **WOLF**."



"BRADDOCK WAS NOW COMPLETE. AND PERHAPS HE, MORE THAN MOST, WAS THE GREATEST HELP IN THE MAR-VELL CHILD'S SEARCH FOR POWER."



KING BRITAIN?

STEVE? IS THAT HIM?



WELCOME TO TROPICAL ENGLAND, MAR-VELL. I HAVE ALWAYS FELT REGRET THAT WE NEVER MET BEFORE YOUR DEATH.

TO HEAR PEOPLE LIKE REED RICHARDS AND KING NAMOR SPEAK, YOU WERE SOMETHING OF A SAINT.

HOW CAN I SERVE YOU?

THANK YOU, BRIAN.



WE'RE LOOKING FOR THE BOOKS OF THE DARKHOLD AND VISHANTI. WE NEED THEIR INHERENT POWER.

WE WERE TOLD THEY WERE HERE.



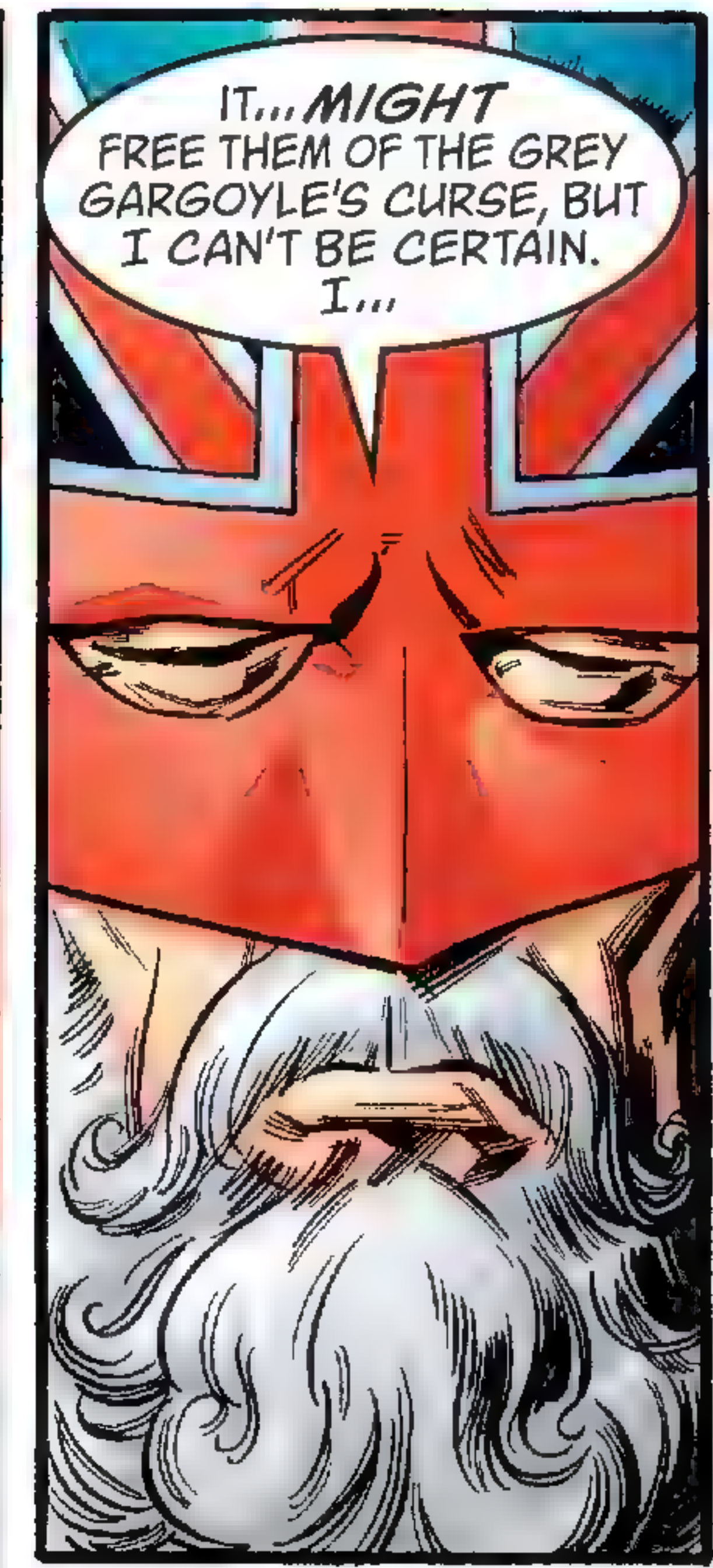
FROM WHAT I UNDERSTAND, IT ISN'T JUST THE BOOKS YOU SEEK, BUT ANY DEVICE THAT COULD BE USED AS A WEAPON OF MASS DESTRUCTION ON EARTH.

WE NO LONGER LIVE IN A DEMOCRACY, BRIAN. THE RIGHT TO BEAR ARMS MAY BE THE WORST THING FOR THE WORLD RIGHT NOW.

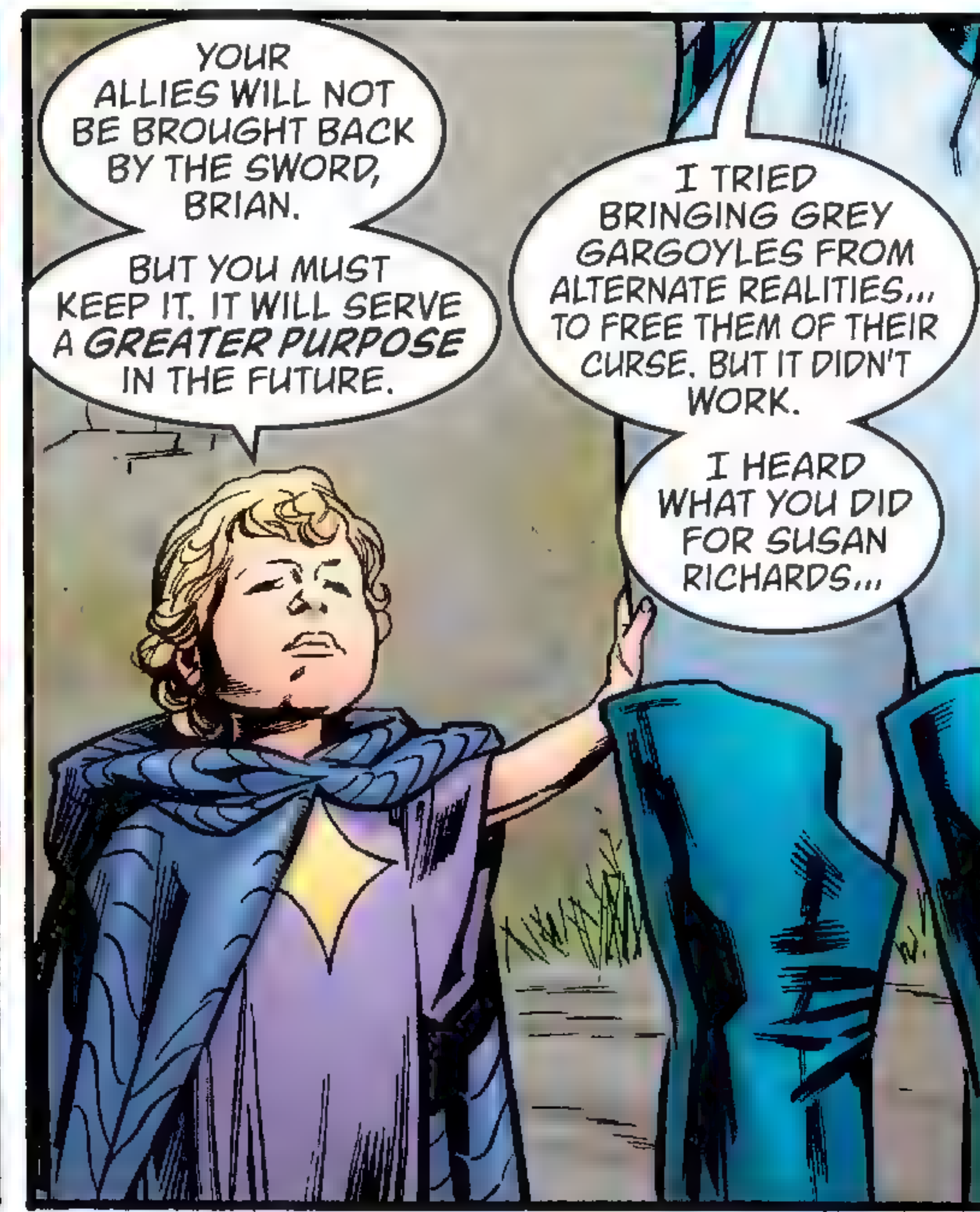
DO YOU... REQUIRE THE SWORD AS WELL?



IT IS ARTHUR'S FABLED SWORD. IT CAN CUT THROUGH STONE WITHOUT LEAVING A MARK.



IT... MIGHT FREE THEM OF THE GREY GARGOYLE'S CURSE, BUT I CAN'T BE CERTAIN. I...



YOUR ALLIES WILL NOT BE BROUGHT BACK BY THE SWORD, BRIAN.

BUT YOU MUST KEEP IT. IT WILL SERVE A GREATER PURPOSE IN THE FUTURE.

I TRIED BRINGING GREY GARGOYLES FROM ALTERNATE REALITIES... TO FREE THEM OF THEIR CURSE. BUT IT DIDN'T WORK.

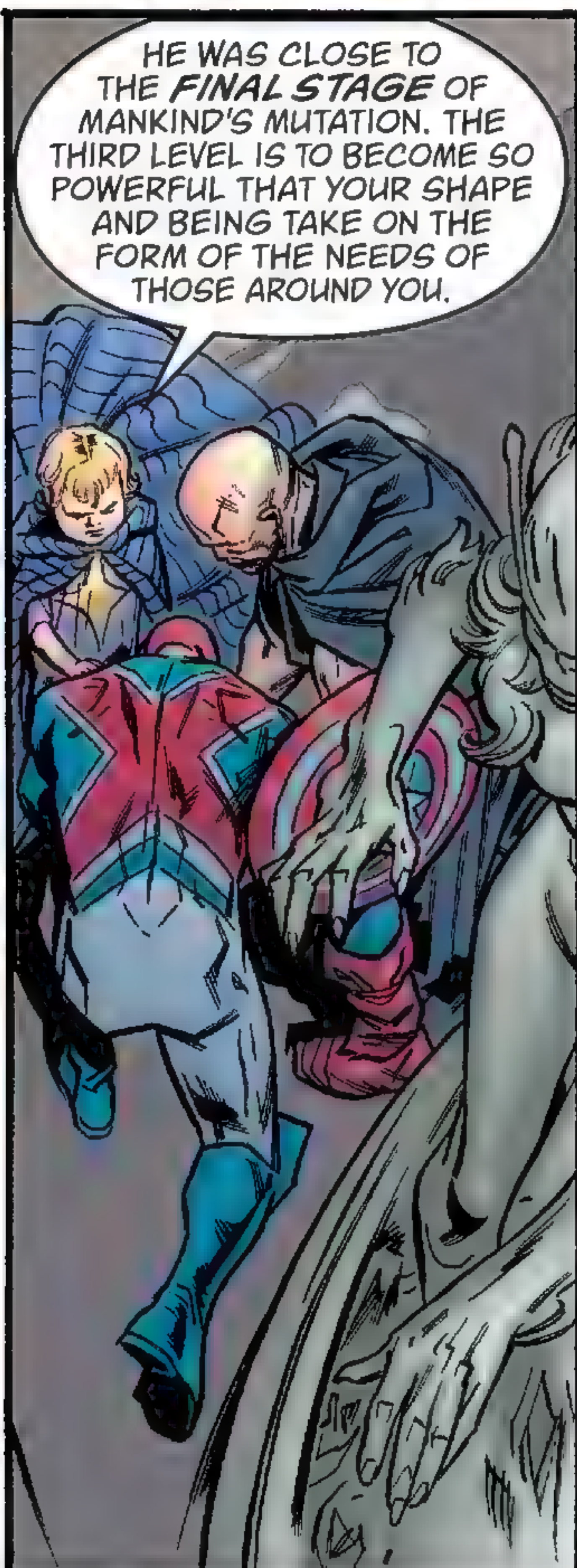
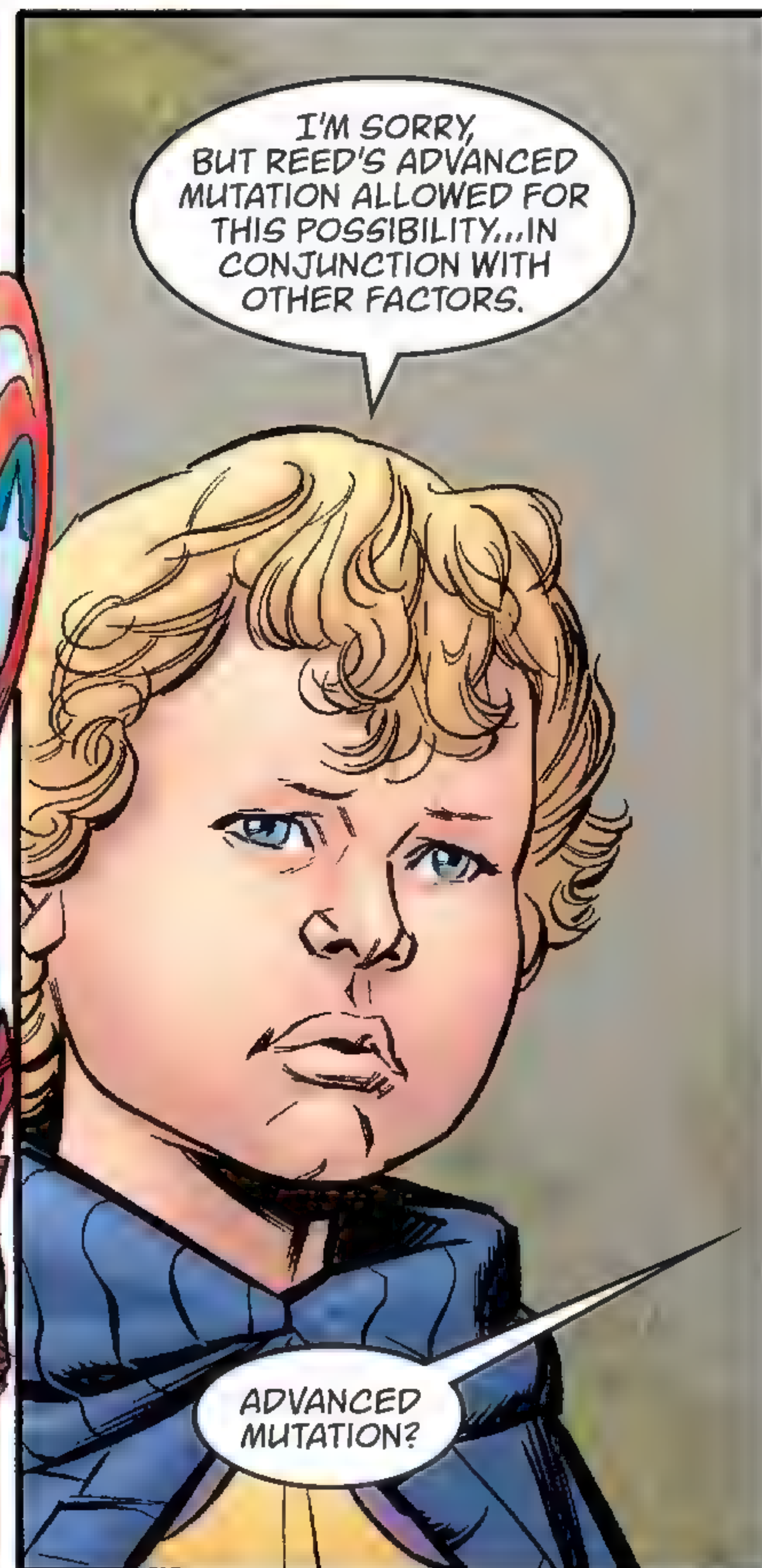
I HEARD WHAT YOU DID FOR SUSAN RICHARDS...



...COULD YOU BRING THE GREY GARGOYLE BACK FROM THE DEAD LIKE YOU DID SUE RICHARDS? COULD YOU UNDO THIS?

I KILLED HIM. IT'S MY FAULT.

IT WAS BEFORE I FOUND THE SWORD. IT WAS BEFORE I UNDERSTOOD.



"NO ONE ESCAPED.

"NOT EVEN THE ONE
WHO TURNED THEM
TO STONE.

"I HEARD THAT KURT LOST
AN ARM THAT DAY..."

"...AND HIS
MUTATION,
AS WELL.

"THE PROBLEM
WAS, NO ONE
CARES MUCH
FOR HUMANS
ANYMORE. THEY
ARE A SIGN
OF THE OLD
WAYS.

"DAYS LATER, I FOUND
OUT KURT WAS **ON THE
RUN** FROM A PACK OF
MUTANTS."

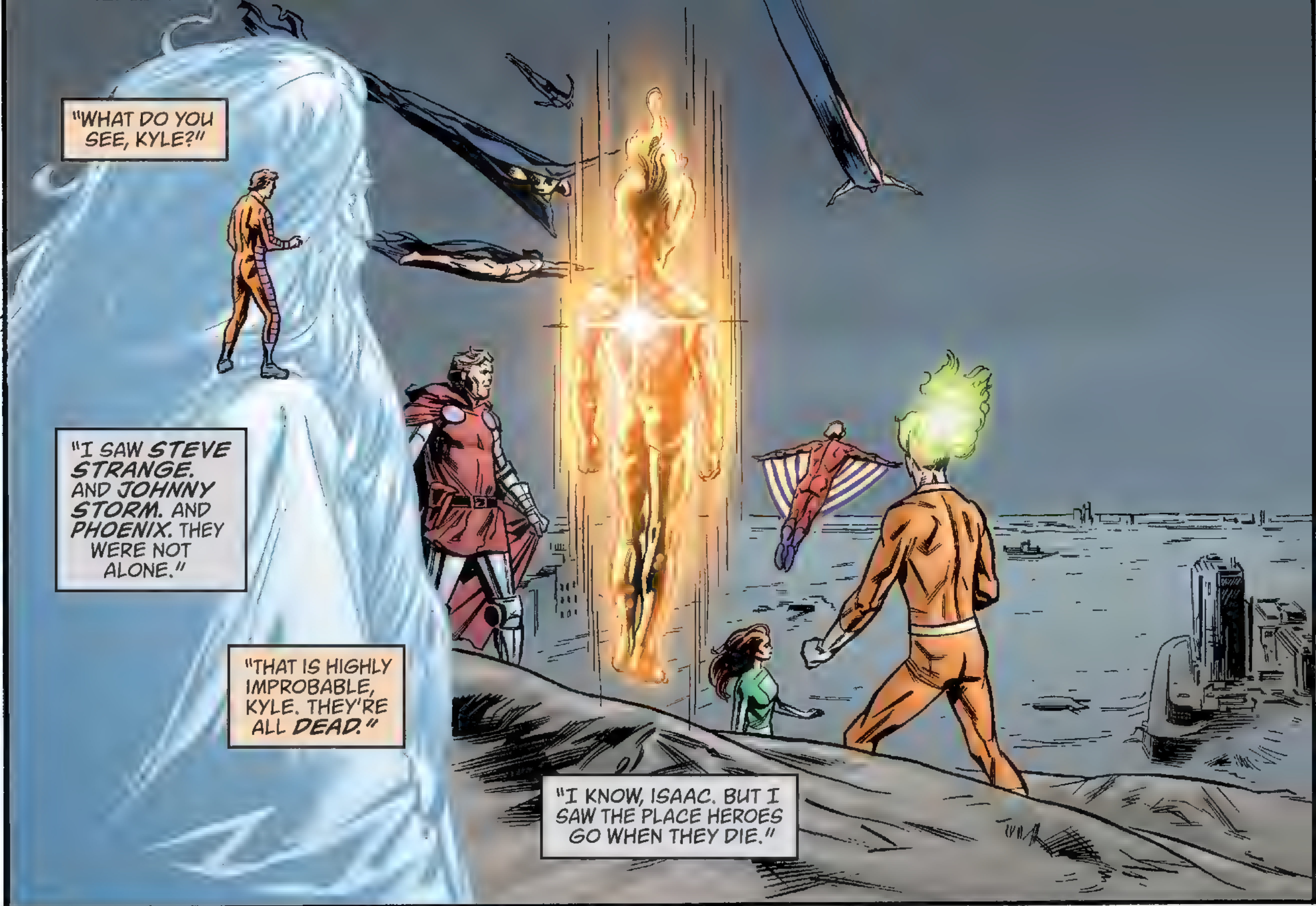
HE'S
STILL
ALIVE,
BRIAN.

HOW DO
YOU KNOW
THAT?

I KNOW
EVERYONE
WHO IS IN THE
REALM OF THE
DEAD. KURT IS
NOT ONE OF
THEM.

HOW?

BECAUSE
I'M THERE
NOW.



"WHAT DO YOU SEE, KYLE?"

"I SAW STEVE STRANGE. AND JOHNNY STORM. AND PHOENIX. THEY WERE NOT ALONE."

"THAT IS HIGHLY IMPROBABLE, KYLE. THEY'RE ALL DEAD."

"I KNOW, ISAAC. BUT I SAW THE PLACE HEROES GO WHEN THEY DIE."



HAVE YOU FOUND HIM YET?

NO, STEPHEN. BUT HE AND I NEVER REALLY MET. MAYBE RICH WOULD BE MORE APT TO FIND HIM.

IT'S OKAY, BOB. YOU'RE DOING FINE. WE'LL FIND HIM.



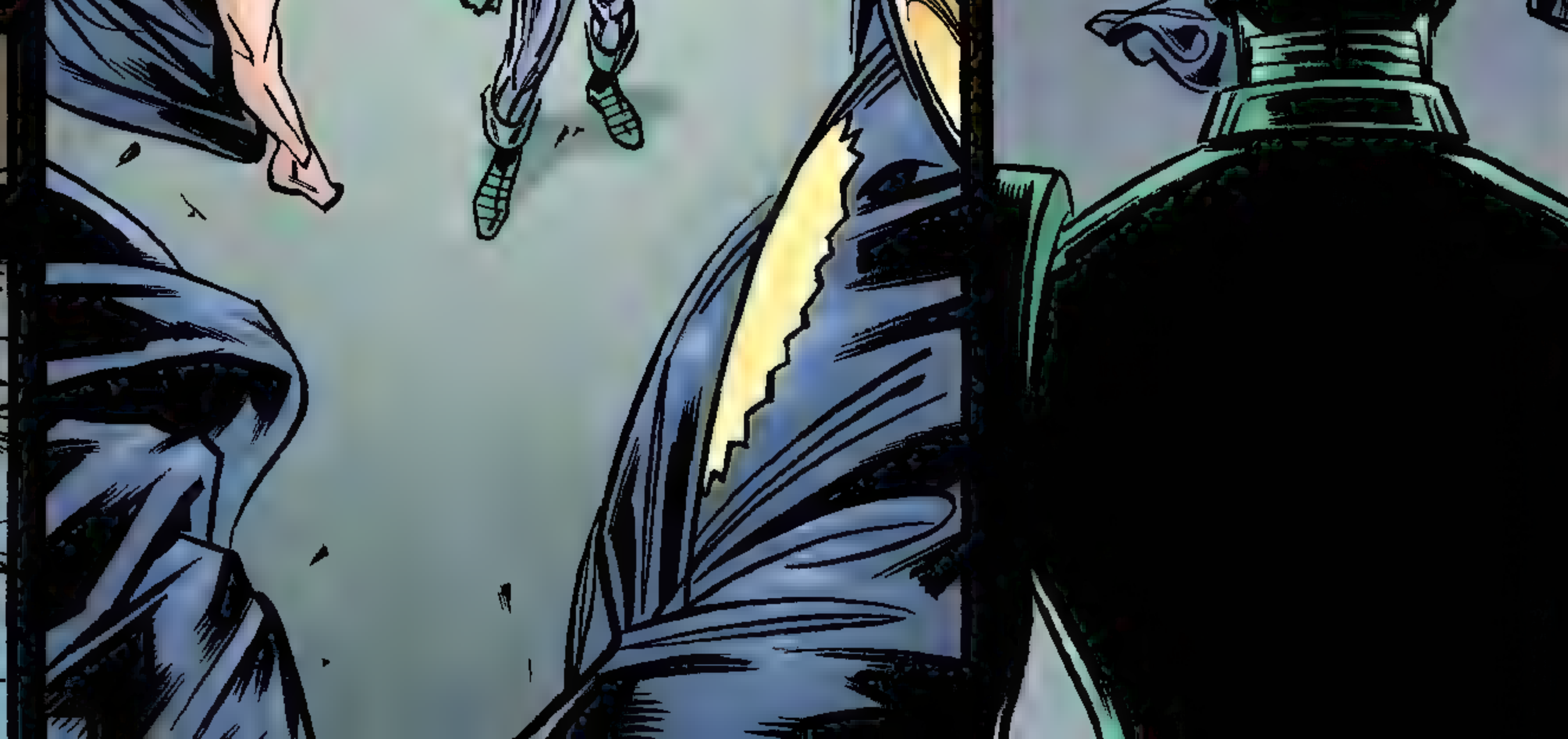
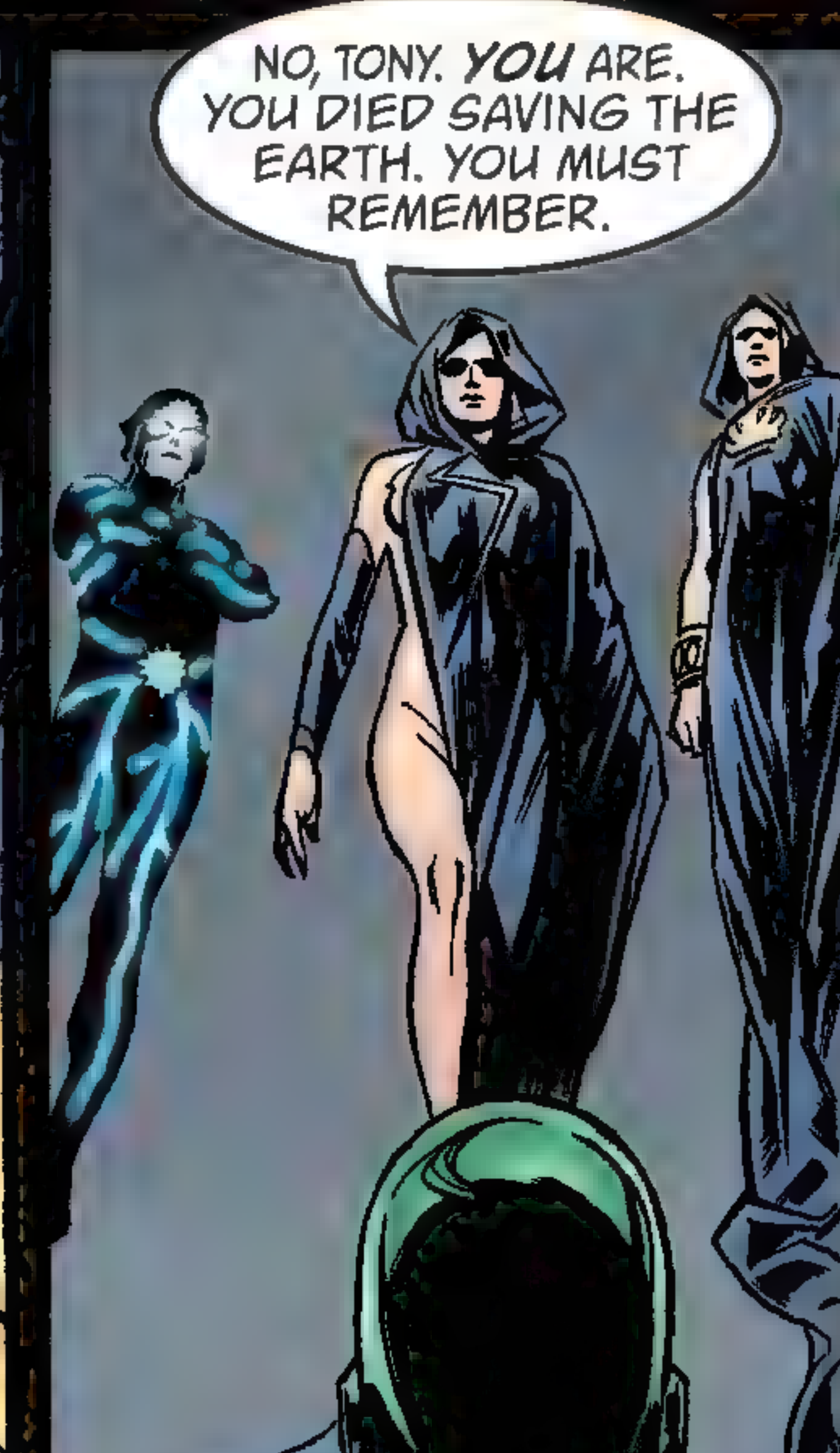
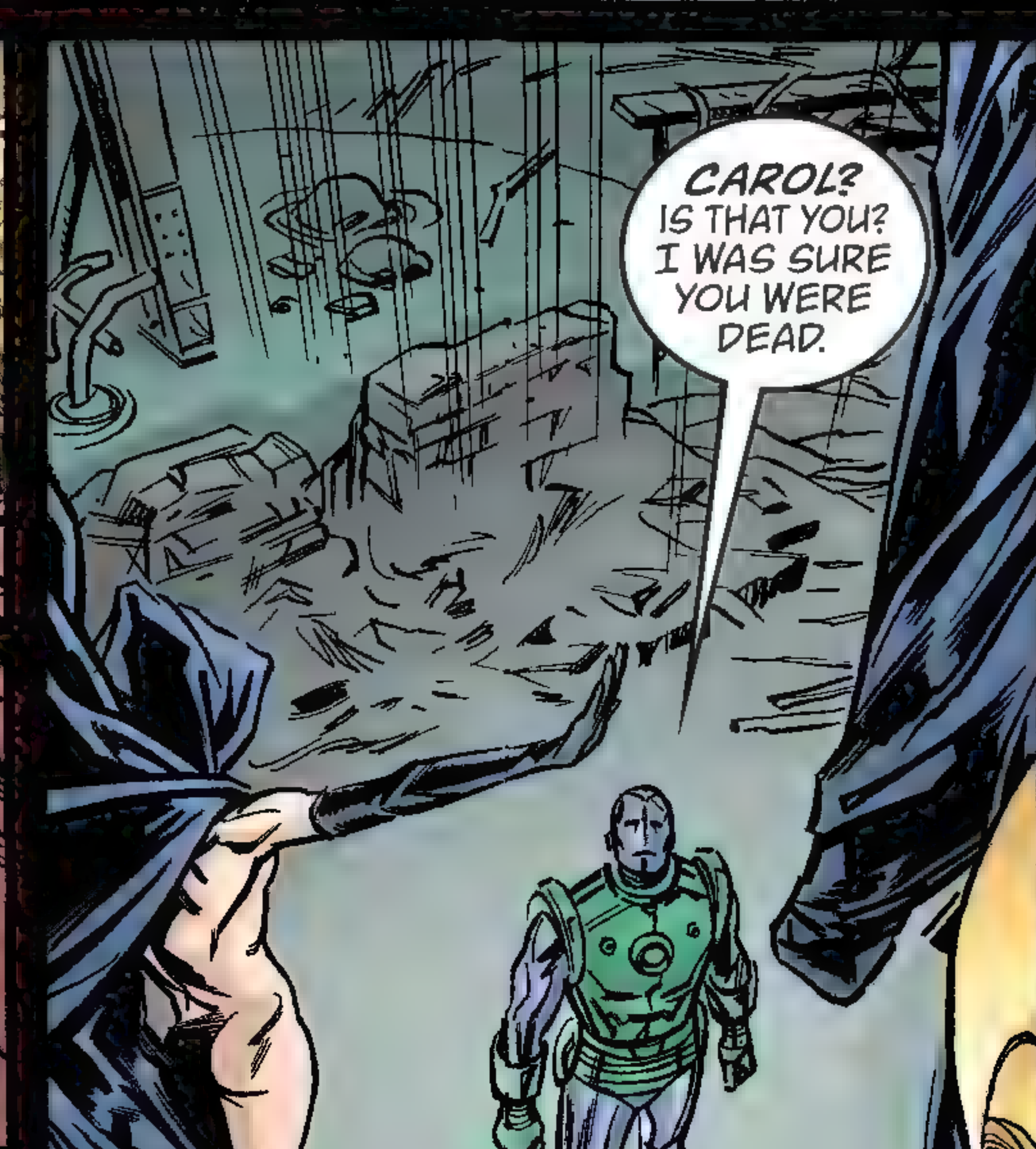
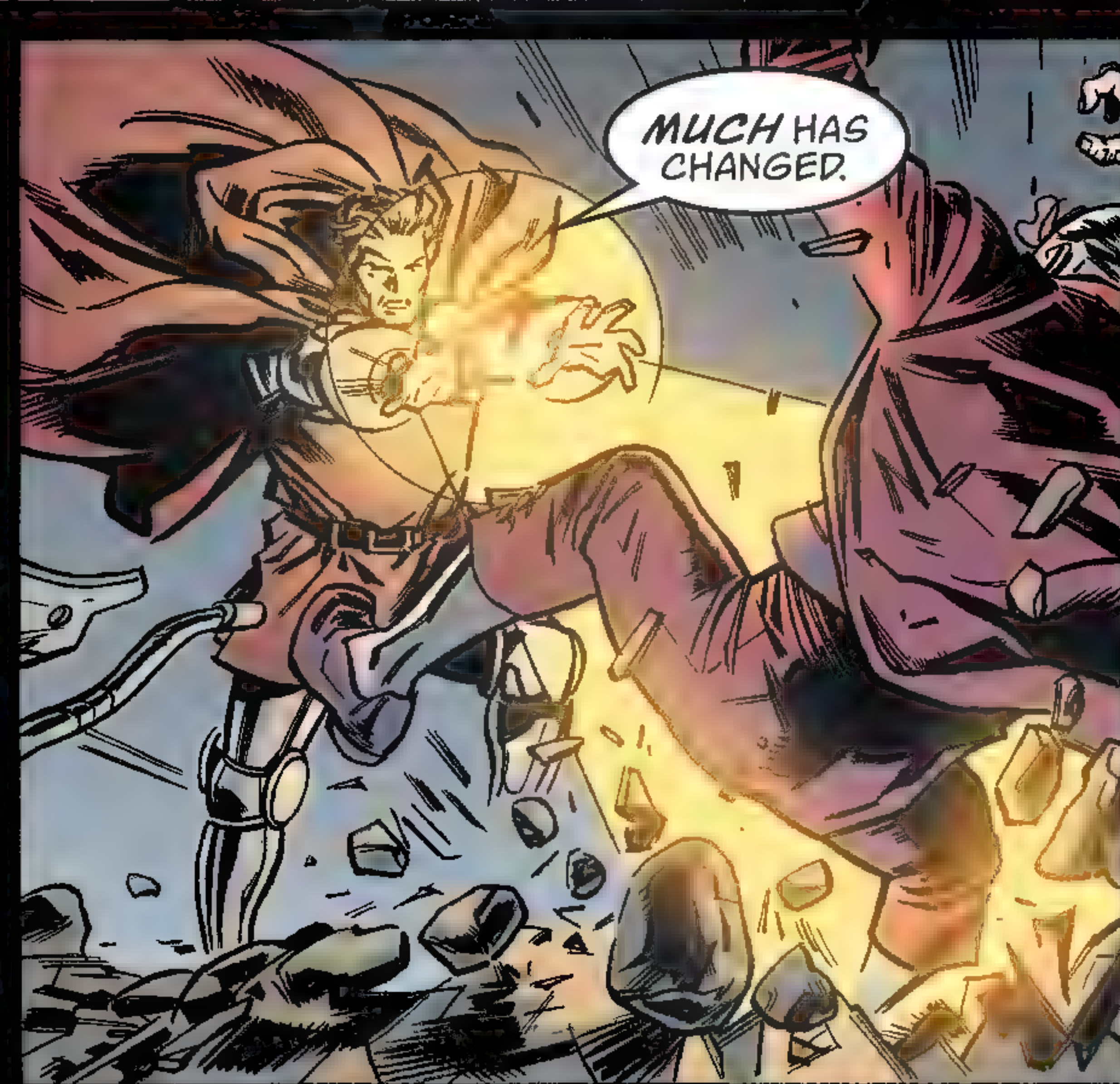
ANOTHER CITY.



ARE YOU CERTAIN SHE CAN'T SEE THEM?

WE SHOULDN'T SPEAK OF THIS. SHE CAN'T SEE THEM...BUT SHE CAN HEAR US.







THEY'RE STILL COMING, DARLING. ARE THEY ENEMIES OF LATVERIA?

NO, SUE. THEY'VE COME TO DOUSE THE TORCH. THIS IS WHAT *IMMORTUS* WARNED ME ABOUT.

YOU WANT ME TO *CLOBBER* 'EM, STRETCH?

NO, OLD FRIEND. AT LEAST, NOT YET.



"ARE THESE THE EVENTS YOU SPOKE OF, KYLE?"

"IS THE CHURCH OF IMMORTUS BEGINNING ITS ATTEMPT TO SHUT DOWN RICHARDS' *HUMAN TORCHES*?"

"YES. ALL AROUND THE WORLD, FROM LATVERIA TO JAPAN TO THE ANTARCTIC TO CANADA..."

WHAT DO THEY WANT, MICHAEL?

WENDIGO WISH TO REMAIN *WENDIGO*. IT'S PART OF THE CURSE THAT MAKES THEM FLESH DEVOURERS.

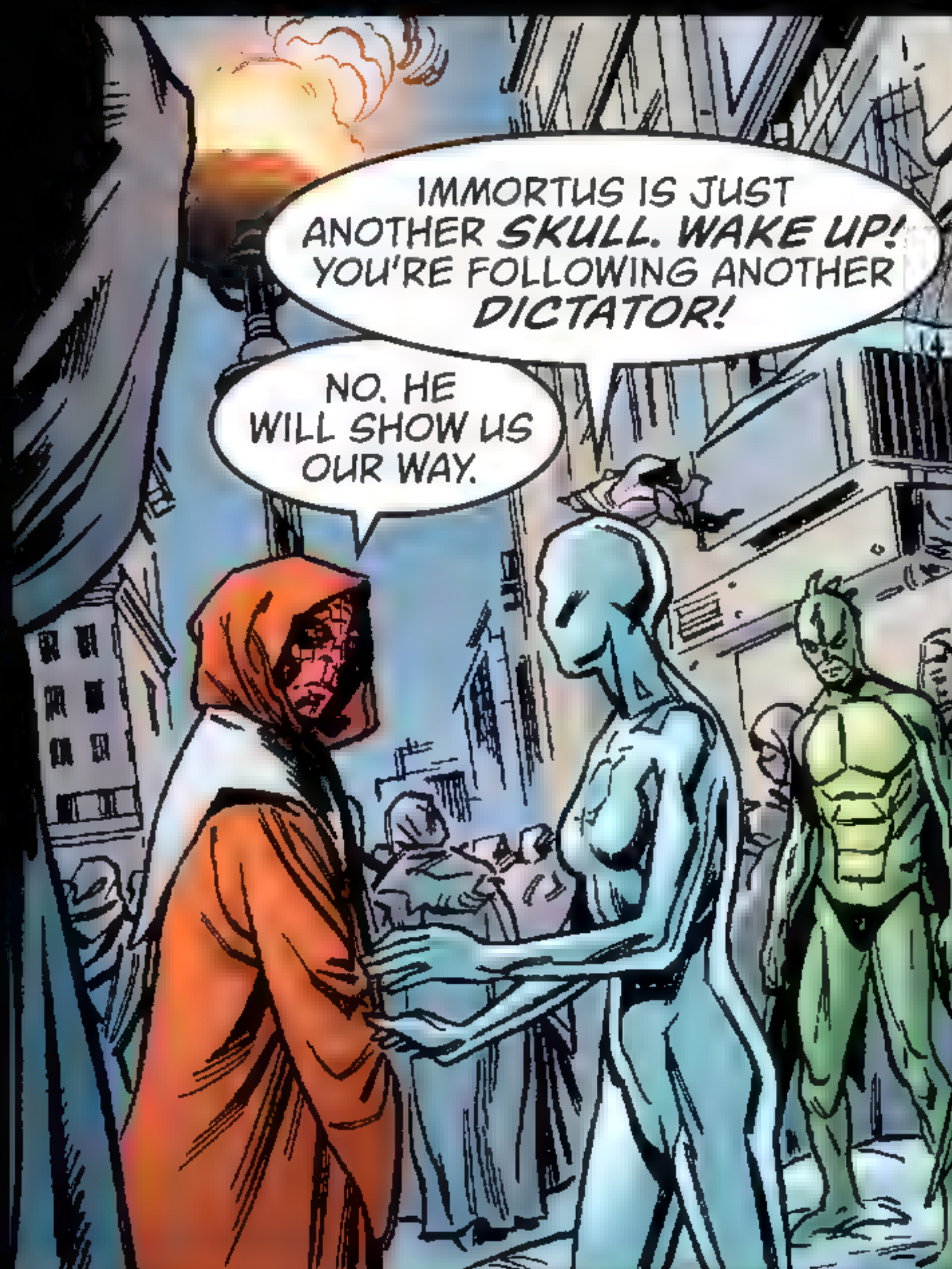


"...TO GREAT BRITAIN TO RUSSIA TO NEW YORK."



EVE? ARE YOU HERE?

WHERE ARE YOU?



IMMORTUS IS JUST ANOTHER **SKULL**. WAKE UP! YOU'RE FOLLOWING ANOTHER **Dictator!**

NO. HE WILL SHOW US OUR WAY.



NOT MINE.



WAIT. I'M COMING, TOO.



THINGS ARE STARTING TO GET KIND OF **SPOOKY**, MARSHAL MULDOON.

MAY'S RIGHT. MY **SPIDER-SENSE** IS...

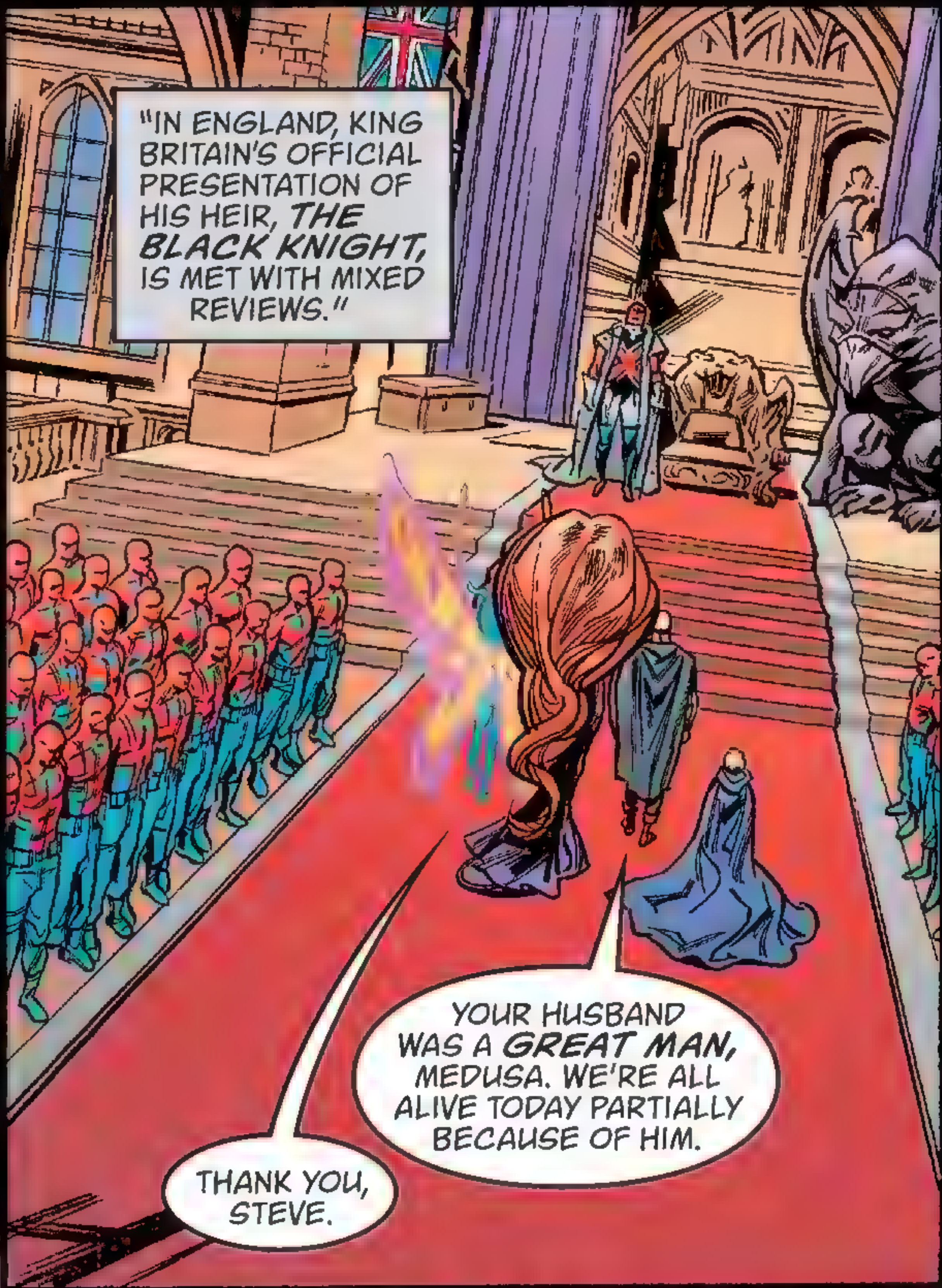
THEY HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHIN' **WRONG**, PARKER. CAN'T LOCK 'EM UP FER DOIN' NOTHIN'!



SURE YOU CAN. IT'S BEEN DONE TO ME.



STILL, MISTUH CAGE, AH'D FEEL A WHOLE LOT BETTER IF N I KNEW WHERE YER FRIEND **THE SILVER SURFER** WAS. WE COULD USE THAT KIND OF POWER RIGHT ABOUT NOW.



"IN ENGLAND, KING BRITAIN'S OFFICIAL PRESENTATION OF HIS HEIR, **THE BLACK KNIGHT**, IS MET WITH MIXED REVIEWS."

YOUR HUSBAND WAS A **GREAT MAN**, MEDUSA. WE'RE ALL ALIVE TODAY PARTIALLY BECAUSE OF HIM.

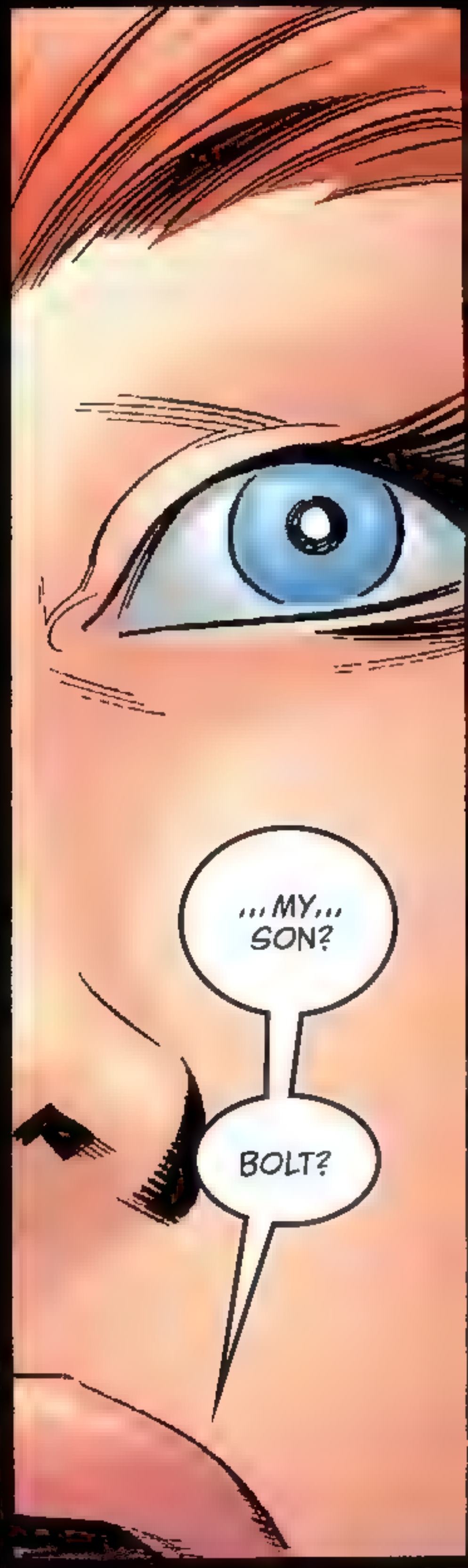
THANK YOU, STEVE.



I THINK BOLT FELT A **KINSHIP** OF SORTS WITH YOU, MAR-VELL. WE'VE BOTH BEEN MANIPULATED BY THE **KREE**.

NOW, IF YOU'LL FORGIVE ME...

...I WISH TO SEE THE PRESENTATION OF MY SON...



...MY... SON?

BOLT?



MEDUSA? WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

MOTHER.



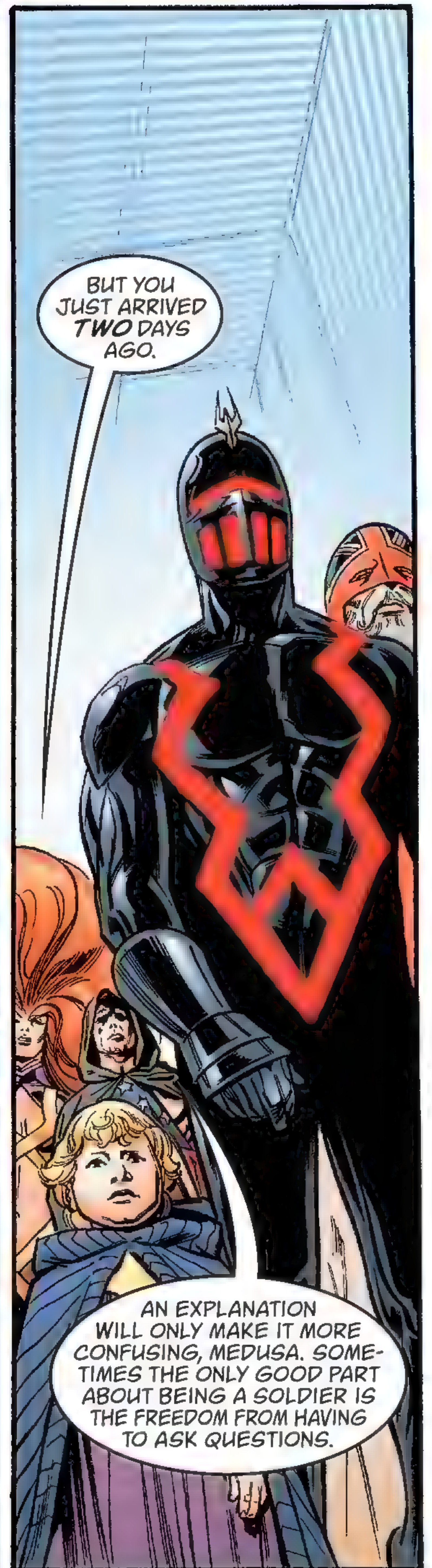
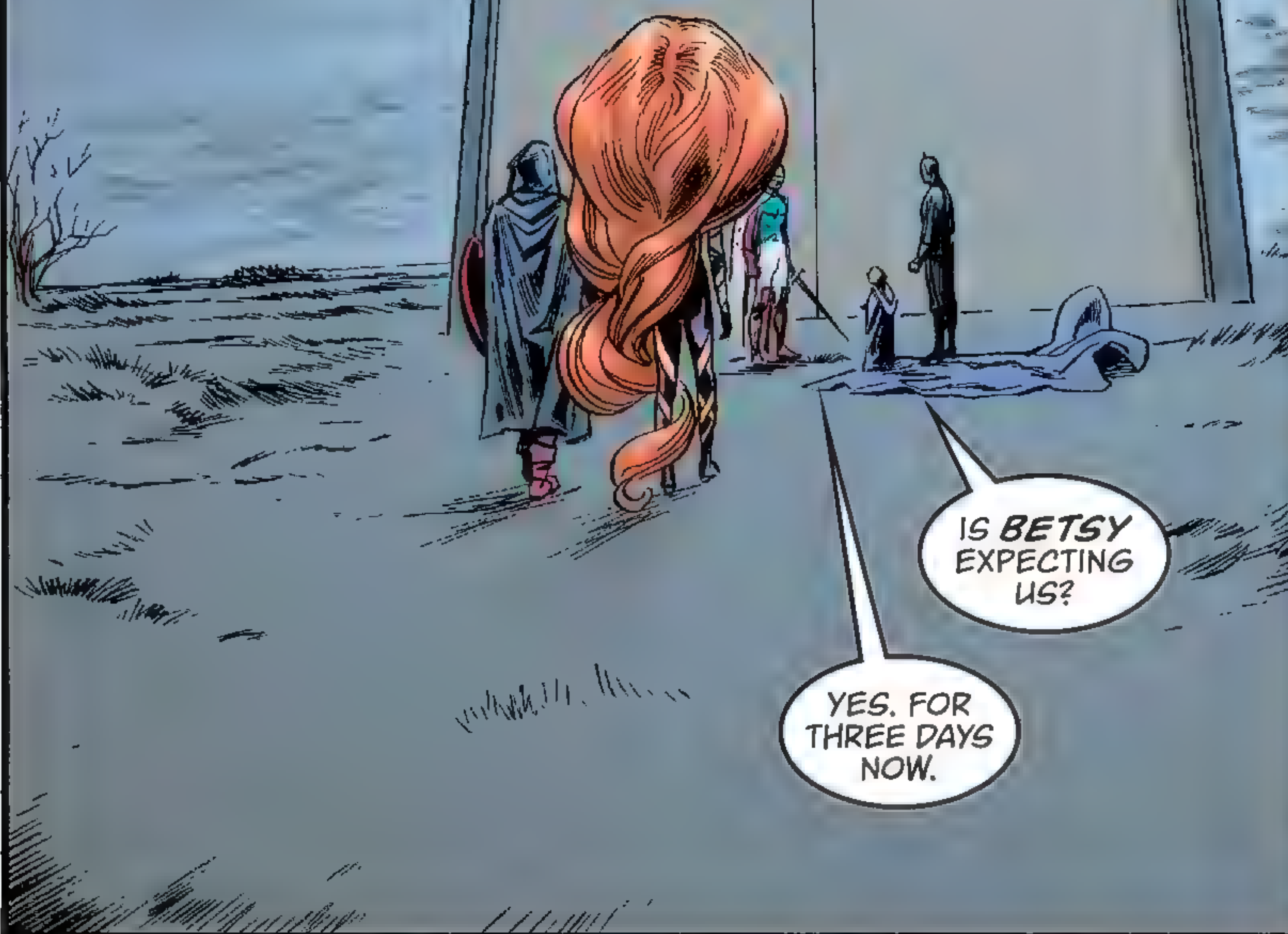
"ONE DAY LATER, THEY LEFT FOR DARKMOOR WITH THE PURPOSE OF ENTERING THE **SIEGE PERILOUS**, IN SEARCH OF THE TWO MYTHIC BOOKS.

"THE STRAIN ON MEDUSA WAS SHOWING. HER HUSBAND LEFT A SON WHO HAD **NO INTEREST** IN BECOMING KING OF THIS INHUMAN WORLD.

"SHE KNEW THAT HE WAS A **PERFECT MAN**, LIKE HIS FATHER HAD BEEN. AND SO HIS DECISIONS WERE PERFECT, AS WELL.

"SO SHE SEARCHED FOR A PART OF HERSELF IN HIM, LIKE ANY MOTHER WOULD. AND GRIEVED WHEN SHE FOUND **NOTHING**.

"SHE GRIEVED AGAIN, KNOWING THAT IF SHE HAD FOUND SOMETHING, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED A **FLAW**."





WELCOME TO THE
OMNIVERSE.

I NEVER
DREAMED...

HELLO,
BRIAN.

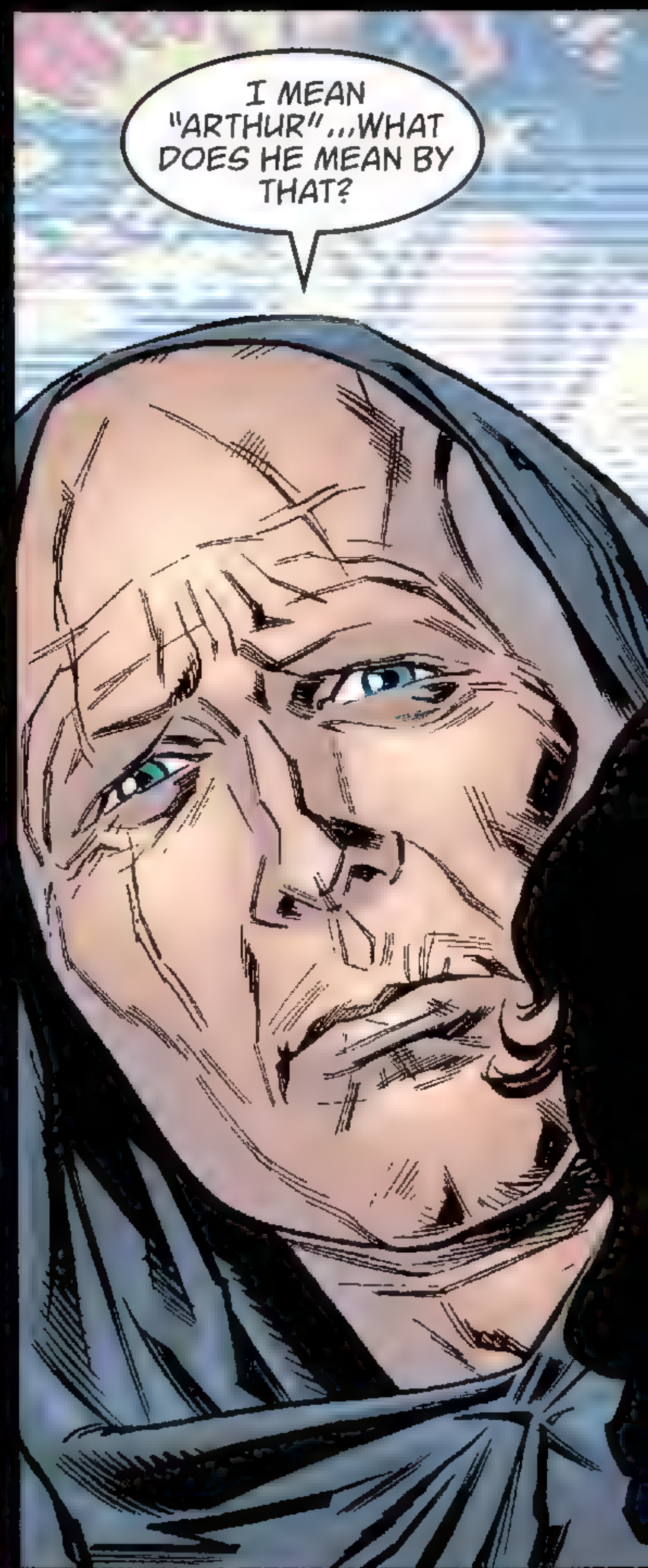
BETSY?

DO YOU SEE
IT, ROMA? IT RESTS
UPON HIM AS IT DID
ARTHUR.



WHAT'S HE TALKING ABOUT?

THE *COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS*.



I MEAN "ARTHUR"...WHAT DOES HE MEAN BY THAT?



THIS LAD WAS NOT THE *FIRST* TO RECEIVE A PIECE OF OMNISCIENCE, KNIGHT.

A *PIECE*? I HAD THE *FULL* COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS.

"COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS"? WHAT DID YOU THINK IT *WAS*, YOUNG SQUIRE?



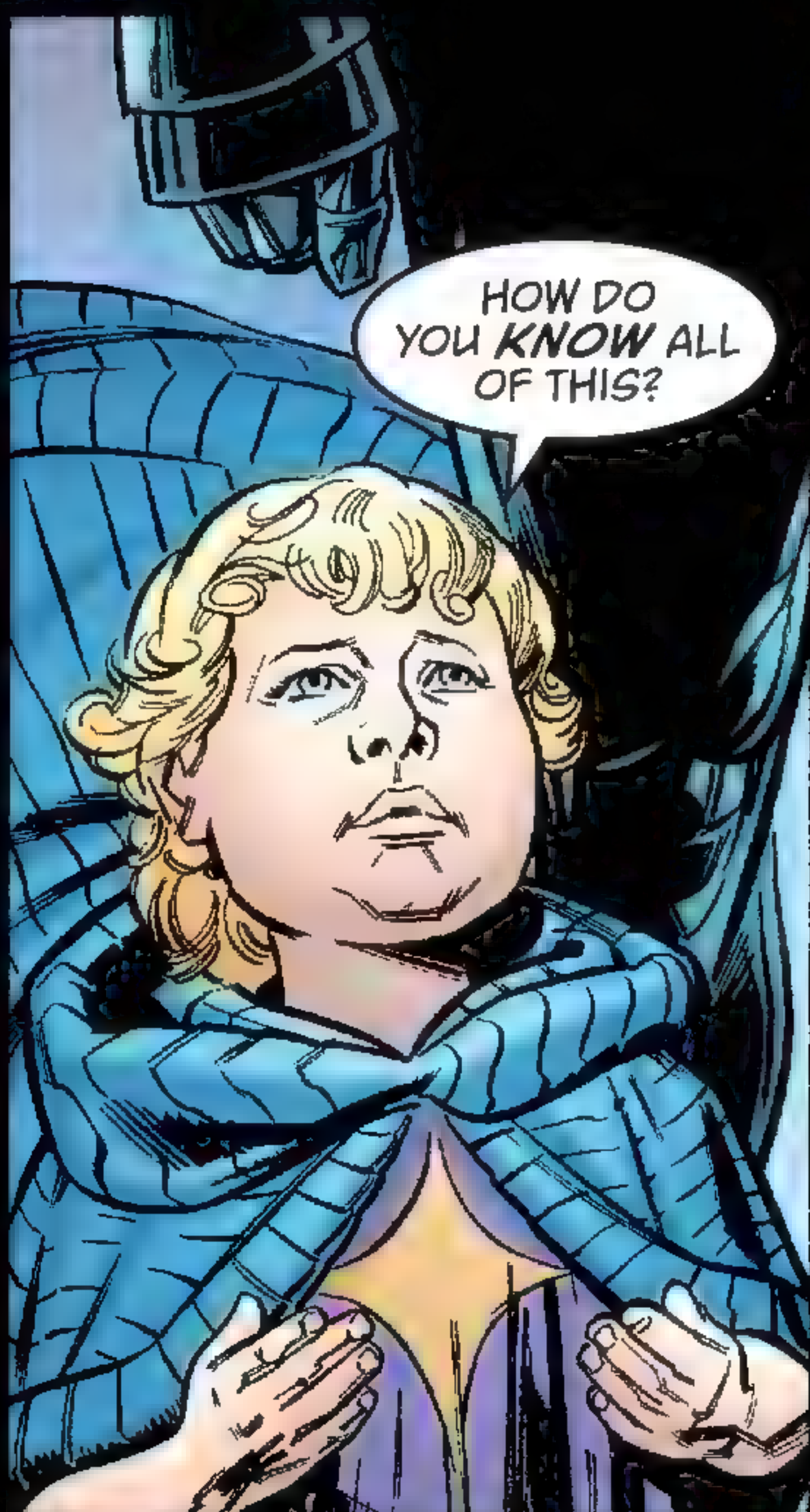
WE HAVE THE *BOOKS* YOU REQUIRE. THAT IS, UNTIL YOU YOURSELF HAVE BEEN MADE *COMPLETE*.

BUT BE WARNED, CHILD. IF YOU TRULY HAD THIS OMNISCIENCE YOU SPEAK OF, YOU WOULD HAVE KNOWN HOW TO CURE THE *CANCER* THAT STOLE YOUR LIFE THE *FIRST TIME*.



YOUR REALM'S NOVICE
HID THE BOOKS HERE WHEN HE
LEARNED HIS MISTRESS WAS GOING
TO **BETRAY** HIM.

THE ORB OF
AGAMOTTO IS IN
JAPAN UNDER THE
CARE OF A MEMBER
OF LORD SUNFIRE'S
XEN.



HOW DO
YOU **KNOW** ALL
OF THIS?



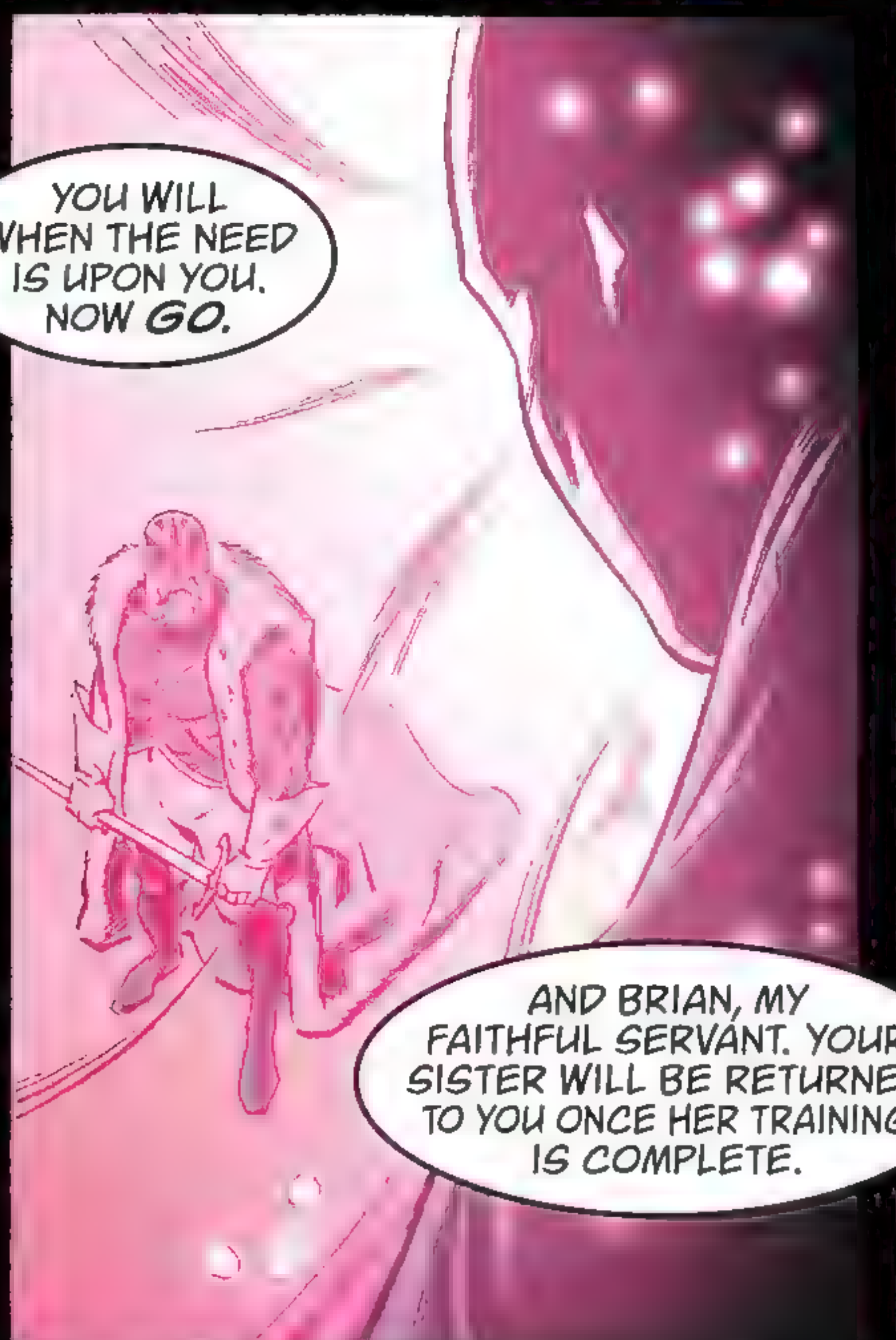
MY FATHER,
MANY BELIEVE, IS THE **SON**
OF THE **DEVIL**!



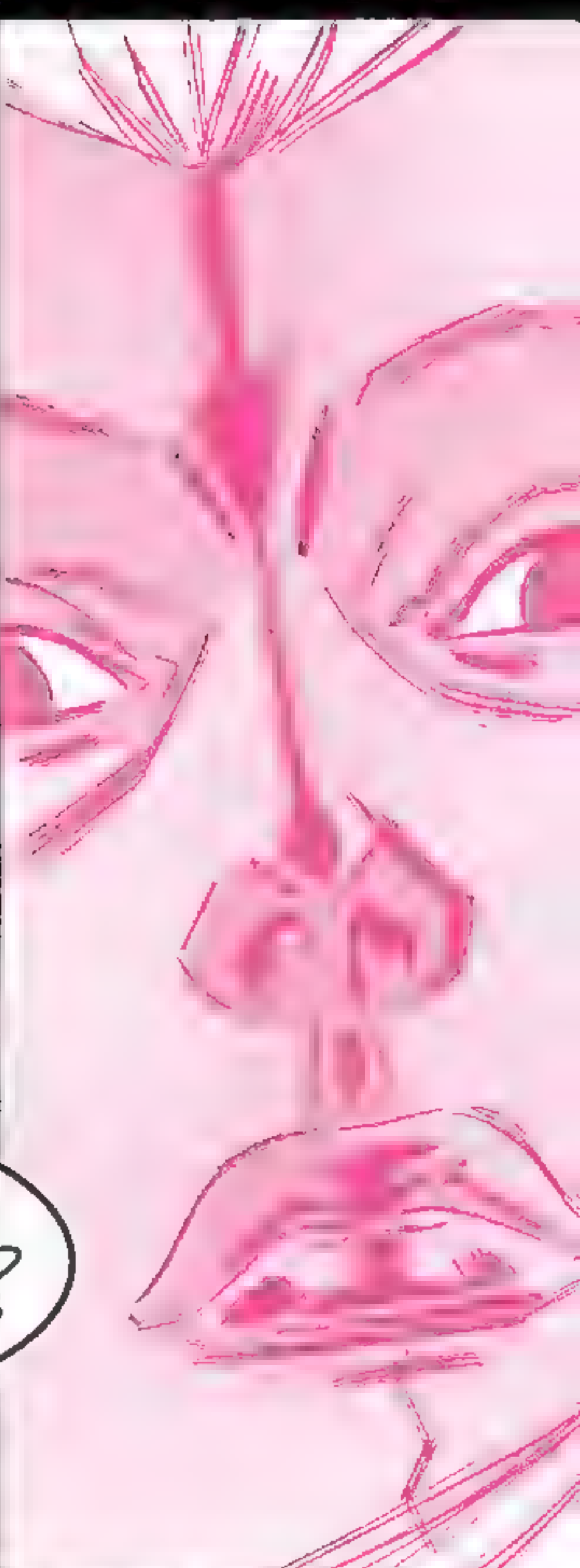
CHILD, I KNOW
BECAUSE **I TOO** HAVE BEEN
A STEWARD TO A PIECE OF
OMNISCIENCE.



I
DON'T **FEEL** ANY
DIFFERENT.



YOU WILL
WHEN THE NEED
IS UPON YOU.
NOW **GO**.



AND BRIAN, MY
FAITHFUL SERVANT. YOUR
SISTER WILL BE RETURNED
TO YOU ONCE HER TRAINING
IS COMPLETE.



MEN WANTED FOR A HAZARDOUS JOURNEY
Small wages, bitter cold, long months in complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in case of success.
—Advertisement written before mounting the National Antarctic Expedition in 1900 by Sir Ernest Shackleton

U N I V E R S E X

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER TWO

W R I T T E N B Y
J I M K R U E G E R

"Uatu?"

"Yes, robot?"

"What's in the Kree ruins?"

"Why do you ask?"

"There's someone on Earth who is capable of seeing the future. His visions include my digging through the Kree ruins. What will I find there?"

"Ah, yes. Kyle Richmond. Are his visions now governing your actions? Are your actions now assured because one earth-man has seen you dig in the ruins? Are your actions truly so easily controlled?"

"Stop it, Uatu. Stop it. What's there? Or must I dig to find out?"

"You must not do this thing, robot. You must not dig."

"You forget, Uatu, that though I look it, I am no robot. Your commands are as meaningless to me as your opinions."

"Did your father include 'self-righteous, moralistic ass' to your programmed personality, robot. Listening to you is like being forced to endure a vinyl recording of country music with a skip in it."

"Fine, Uatu. Make your judgements. What I learned from Kyle Richmond's visions was this. There is not one reality, as I'd believed, but many. And somehow these multiple realities fit together. There is a place known as the Siege Perilous in which these realities join. Something known as the Captain Britain Corps is the sole protectors of these realities."

"Anything else?"

"Yes. There is a realm that your machinery is incapable of seeing within, Uatu. It's the place where heroes go when they die -- The realm of the dead."

"Have you seen Black Bolt yet? Have you seen...?"

"I don't know. I can't actually see into the realm. All I can do is hear what Richmond says. Tell you what he sees."

"Well, I don't see because of Black Bolt."

"And he would never have received the power to hurt anyone if it weren't for the mutations your masters caused. So do you really want to complain to me?"

"No, robot. I simply wish that the pompous ranting of victory that you have tortured me with would end. You have won nothing."

"I am afraid, Uatu, that you may be right. Something is wrong with the world. And I can't quite put my finger on it."

"You don't have fingers."

"Why, Uatu? Why must you continually attack my humanity?"

"Because it does not exist. And my defeat has been as a result of that lie you embrace and nurture like a 'human' mother."

"Defeat?"

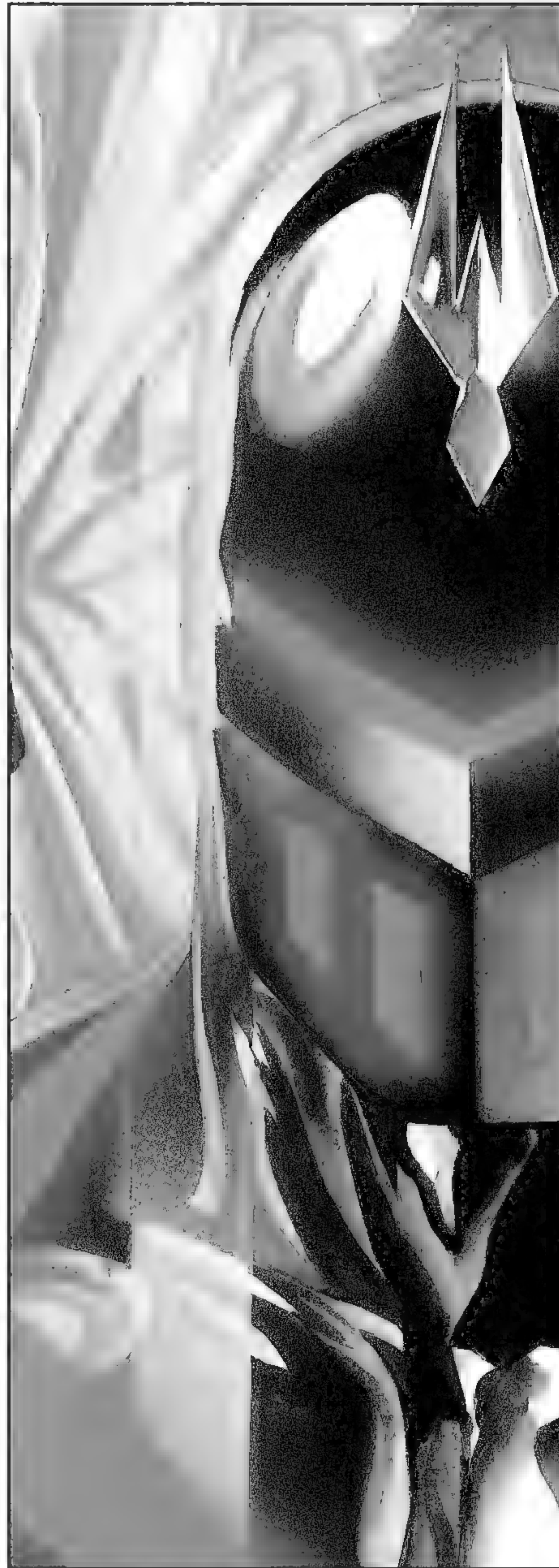
"The absence of victory does not mean there is no presence of defeat."

"What is in the ruins?"

"The Supreme Intelligence."

"All I know is the little I heard Captain Mar-Vell speak of it while he lived on Earth the first time... and the brief history Richmond exposed. The Supreme Intelligence... who is he?"

"He... robot... is an it, not a he. It is a collective depository of the brightest minds in the Kree empire. It was the Supreme Intelligence's manipulations that led Mar-Vell to be joined to Rick Jones. It was the Supreme Intelligence who orchestrated the murder of



Mar-Vell's intended mate. The Supreme Intelligence is the strategist behind the Kree's attacks on the Skrull empire. It is responsible for..."

"It's a lot like you, isn't it, Uatu?"

"No, X-51. My role was to catalogue history, not to manipulate it. Not to change it."

"Then tell me about the Supreme Intelligence. What is it? Where does it come from?"

"The Supreme Intelligence is a hybrid construction composed of both organic and cybernetic material. It is, for lack of a better term, a living computer."

"A living computer? Like me?"

"No, X-51. Not like you. It lives. You do not. It is composed of a matter that has not been subjugated to another's will as you have been. You are 'alive' only because you were programmed to believe that you had any worth apart from your composite parts."

"It is a 5000 cubic foot computer. It is a composite collection of the disembodied brains of the greatest members of the alien Kree race, the greatest brains who ever... died. It is a collective consciousness."

"A collective? Then does it have a personality?"

"Of course. But it is a collective personality. A democracy of sorts."

"Isn't that a problem?"

"How so, robot?"

"Well, it's the same problem Captain America faces right now on Earth. What happens to a collective body when their choice is one of destruction? Whether it is their own destruction or that of another people... or race or civilization for that matter? Steve Rogers, even now, is fighting against one of the axiom's of his nation's being -- the right to bear arms. Yet he and Mar-Vell encircle the globe, trying to disarm the mutated mankind of the weapons that have the potential to destroy it."

"Again you assert a morality upon a power struggle, robot."

"Would you please stop calling me that? I almost prefer X-51."

"No. I will not stop referring to you as robot."

"Why not?"

"Because that is what you are -- a robot. Your thoughts are not your own. Your actions are not, even to the smallest degree, your actions. Your 'programmed humanity' is all that you are. You are obedient to it -- even to the point, I believe, of your own disassembly. You are a robot because you lack the ability to choose any action apart from your programmer's background and genetic heritage. You speak of freedom, as does your Captain America. But the painful truth is that there is no freedom. It is as mythic as the notions of good and evil you cling to. Freedom, by definition, precludes and denies all of the factors that mold any decision you might make. There is no freedom. There is no choice."

"I don't believe that."

"Of course not. You are not free to believe it. Your every choice was determined long before the man who built you was born. The choice was decided with his parents nationality before their immigration. It was decided by their inability

to educate themselves. It was determined by their own culture's superstitions."

"But that's not true, Uatu. How can you claim, of all people, that all there is, is what can be seen. What does something like that say for the blind, Uatu?"

"Very well, robot. Your argument has some merit though it does not change the hypocrisy of your being."

The Supreme Intelligence was originally built... created by the Science Council of the Kree. It was created for the purpose of creating the cosmic cube, a weapon the Kree hoped to use against the Skrulls."

"But according to what Richmond said, the Kree wouldn't have even had a science council if it weren't for the technology they stole from the Skrull."

"Yes."

"What happened?"

"The Supreme Intelligence decided that the Cosmic Cube was too powerful for the Kree. It refused to create the weapon for them. It ultimately rose to take control of the Kree race."

"How?"

"By affecting the minds of the nation -- through mental suggestion and manipulation. And through growth."

"Growth?"

"Every five sun-cycles in the Kree empire, one of the Kree is given, what is a considered the ultimate honor, the opportunity to join the Supreme Intelligence. As a result, the Supreme Intelligence, or Supremor as he has come to be called, has grown. Its influence has grown more and more powerful. The Kree people, though, had no power of their own. Unlike their enemy, the Skrulls, they were not given the key to genetic mutation and adaptation by the Celestials."

"How noble you make them, Uatu."

"Supremor knew that the Kree would never advance beyond their physical being, so it began to suggest both mentally and overtly the inbreeding of the Kree with other races. This resulted in a number of different races within the Kree nation. And all the time, Supremor continued to grow more and more powerful, until..."

"Until he was separated from the Kree and left here on the moon."

"Yes. In truth, the Skrull/Kree war has all but burned itself out. Yet still, Supremor has become more powerful."

"How?"

"I don't know."

"What will happen if I search the ruins?"

"You will free it."

"Could it save the earth?"

"Yes."

"Would it?"

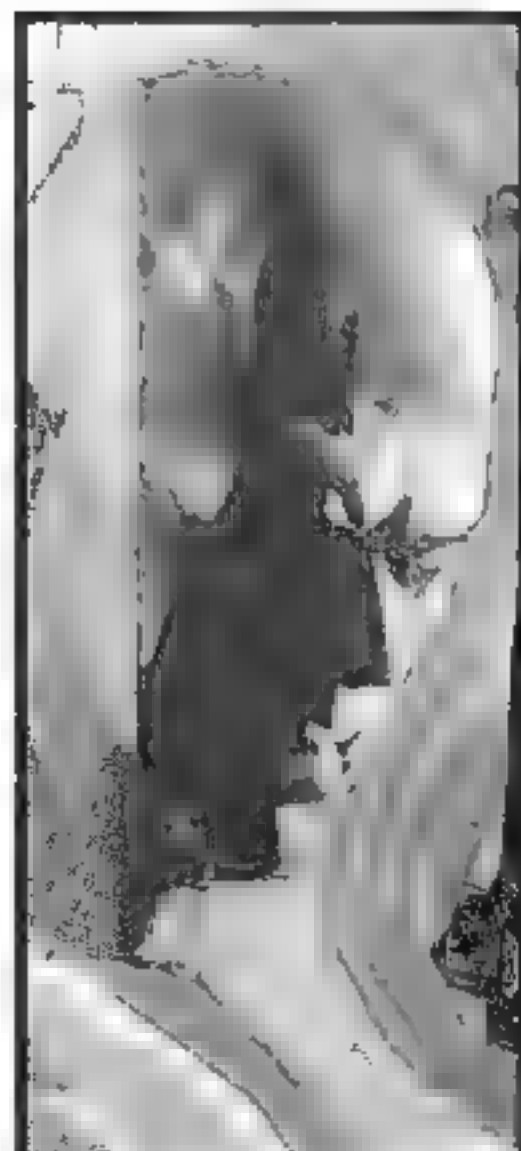
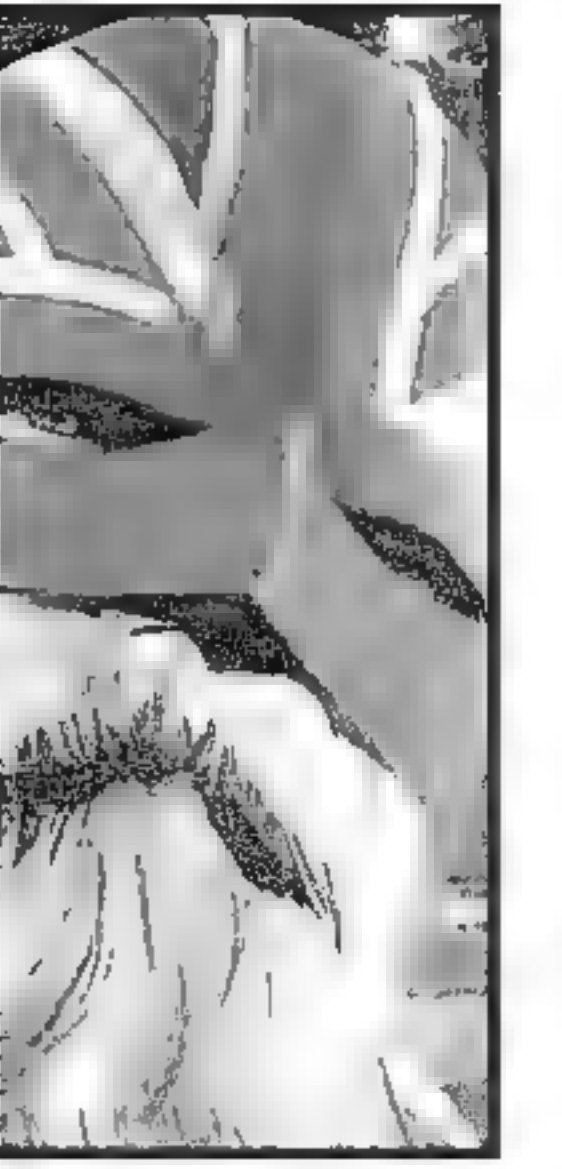
"Perhaps."

"Will you help me?"

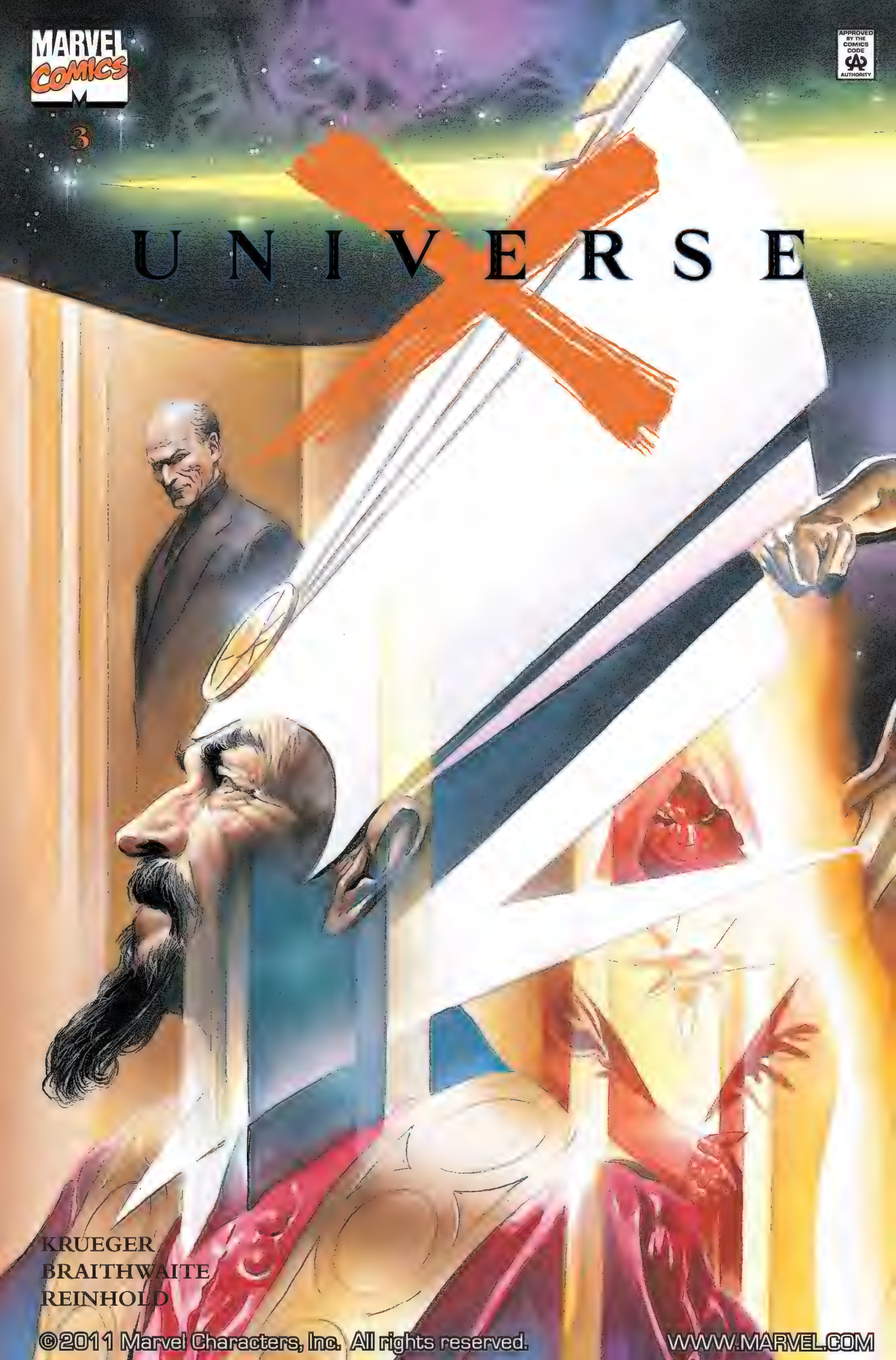
"You would like me to help you save the Earth?"

"Yes."

"Now who's blind, robot?"



UNIVERSE



KRUEGER
BRAITHWAITE
REINHOLD

"I have had enough talk about mutants, Kyle."

"But theirs is the seed through which the devil will come."

"...or *devils* for that matter. Now that these miraculous eyes of yours can see the past as well as the future, speak to me of the past, of the things which made one feel human."

"You don't understand, Isaac. The devil is coming out of the *mutant* race."

"Hardly. Classic myth shows the devil existing *before* mutants even appeared on the planet. The devil came out of God."

"Perhaps the devil *you* know. But the devil is timeless. And what is the past or future to someone that is not measured by time? Who's to say that the state of timelessness which myth speaks about hasn't happened yet?"



UNIVERSE X

I S S U E 3

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"I SEE AN INHERITANCE OF ANTI-METAL GIVEN TO TWO SONS."

"A RARE MEDALLION TAKEN FROM A TIME-LOST PLACE IN THE ANTARCTIC KNOWN AS **THE SAVAGE LAND**. THE MAN WHO CLAIMED THIS LAND WAS NAMED **PLUNDER**."

"HOW APPROPRIATE. I ASSUME THIS ANTI-METAL YOU SPEAK OF IS ANOTHER INGREDIENT IN **MAR-VELL'S QUEST**?"

"I DON'T KNOW. BUT I DO KNOW THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT THE LAND WHERE THE METAL IS FOUND. SOMETHING **WRONG**."

"DO YOU BELIEVE A LAND CAN BE **ALIVE**?"

"THAT A LAND WILL BRING PEOPLE TO ITSELF TO **PROTECT** IT?"

"THE DEATH OF KEVIN PLUNDER'S FATHER LEFT HIM TO BE RAISED BY THE LAND."

"AND WHEN HE BECAME A MAN, THE LAND BROUGHT THE PERFECT MATE FOR HIM IN **SHANNA O'HARA**."

"A WOMAN WHO--?"

"DESCRIBE HER."

"AMAZINGLY BEAUTIFUL. BUT WHY THE PERFECT MATE, ISAAC? WAS IT TO KEEP KA-ZAR THERE?"

"AND WHY CHOOSE KA-ZAR FOR ITS PROTECTOR? WHY SOMEONE TOTALLY **OBSESSED** WITH NEW YORK AND THE MODERN MODELS OF MATERIALISM?"

"AND OF ALL THE HEROES TO BRING TO THE SAVAGE LAND, WHY THE **X-MEN**?"

"PERHAPS PLUNDER'S OBSESSION WITH MANHATTAN WAS A LINK...OR PERHAPS ACTED AS **BAIT** FOR THE X-MEN."

"THE SAVAGE LAND'S **APPLE** IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN?"

"THINK ABOUT IT, ISAAC. IN THE SAVAGE LAND THERE WOULD BE NO BIGOTRY AGAINST MUTANTS."

"NO BIAS. NO PREJUDICE. THEIR MUTATIONS MADE THEM THE SAVAGE LAND'S **PERFECT CITIZENS**."

"FOR WHAT REASON WERE THEY DRAWN?"

"FOR **SACRIFICE**. BUT I CANNOT SEE THE PURPOSE."

"THIS IS THE REASON TIME HAS NO HOLD OVER THE SAVAGE LAND. HOW SO MANY ERAS CAN COEXIST IN **ONE PLACE**?"

"THE SAVAGE LAND IS A CONDUIT POINT TO **LIMBO**."

"WHEN KA-ZAR AND SHANNA ACCIDENTALLY FREED **BELASCO** FROM HIS FROZEN STATE, THEY FREED THE LORD OF LIMBO."

"DANTE DEPICTED THE FINAL LEVEL OF HELL NOT AS FIRE... BUT AS **ICE**."

"LORD OF LIMBO? BUT WHAT OF IMMORTUS? I WAS UNDER THE IMPRESSION THAT HE WAS THE LORD OF THE TIMELESS REALM. IS THERE MORE THAN ONE LIMBO?"

"NO. BUT NOT EVEN IMMORTUS, OR KANG AS HE ONCE WAS CALLED, KNEW THE EXTENT OF LIMBO."

"LIKE THE SAVAGE LAND AND LORD PLUNDER, IMMORTUS THOUGHT HE COULD LAY CLAIM TO IT."

"NOT KNOWING AT ALL THAT IT HAD ALREADY LAID CLAIM TO HIM."

"LIMBO...LIMBO...WHERE HAVE I HEARD...OF COURSE."

"WASN'T THIS ALSO WHERE THE SPACEKNIGHTS BANISHED THE DIRE WRAITHS?"

"YES. REMEMBER WHEN I SAID THAT I BELIEVED THAT EARTH WAS INDEED THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE?"

"I DON'T UNDERSTAND."

"IF A RACE IN AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT SOLAR SYSTEM CAN CREATE A WEAPON TO BANISH ANOTHER RACE TO LIMBO, AND LIMBO IS HERE--"

"THEN SOMEHOW THE SAVAGE LAND IS FAR MORE THAN A NEXUS OF TIME, BUT A NEXUS TO OTHER WORLDS AS WELL."

"THE QUESTION THAT STILL TROUBLES ME IS WHY THESE DIRE WRAITHS LEFT THEIR HOME? WHY?"

"AND WHY ARE OTHERWORLDLY INVADERS ALWAYS SHAPE-SHIFTERS? THE WRAITHS, THE SKRULLS, THE IMPOSSIBLE MEN FROM PLANET POPPU, THE BROOD."

"THE X-MEN FACED THEM ALL. BUT WHY? WHY WAS THEIR NATURE AS MUTANTS LINKED TO THAT OF VARIANT FORM?"

"WE'LL BE UNABLE TO CONTINUE OUR CHRONICLING, KYLE, IF THE REASON FOR THINGS IS CONSIDERED TOO CLOSELY. YOU WERE SPEAKING OF THE X-MEN?"

"BELASCO STOLE ILLYANA RASPUTIN FROM HER BROTHER, PETER."

"CZAR PETER? THE COLOSSUS OF NEW RUSSIA?"

"BELASCO MADE HER HIS DISCIPLE AND INSTRUCTED HER IN THE DARK WAYS."

"BELASCO WAS WAITING, IN FACT, FOR THE X-MEN TO RETURN. HE HAD ILLYANA. AND HE KNEW THE X-MEN WOULD STOP AT NOTHING TO GET HER BACK."

"HOW DO YOU KNOW THIS?"

"BECAUSE IT WAS THE EXACT SAME WAY WITH BELASCO WHEN HE WAS THE VICTIM IN NEED OF HIS OLD ALLIES' HELP."

"ARE YOU SUGGESTING THAT ONE OF THE X-MEN WILL BECOME THAT DEVIL?"

"NO, I'M SAYING ONE OF THEM ALREADY IS."

"WHY STEAL AND TRAIN HER?"

"IT'S AN OLD TRICK, ISAAC. THE KIDNAPPER TURNS HIS VICTIM TO HIS SIDE. THAT'S HIS TRUMP--THE CARD HE PLAYS AGAINST THE VICTIM'S FAMILY."

"CONFUSION WAS BELASCO'S WAY...AS IT WAS MEPHISTO'S BEFORE HIM."

"YES. WHEN THEY WERE TRAPPED IN BELASCO'S REALM, THEY EVEN FOUGHT VERSIONS OF THEMSELVES. SOMETIMES, THEY DIDN'T EVEN KNOW WHO THEY WERE."

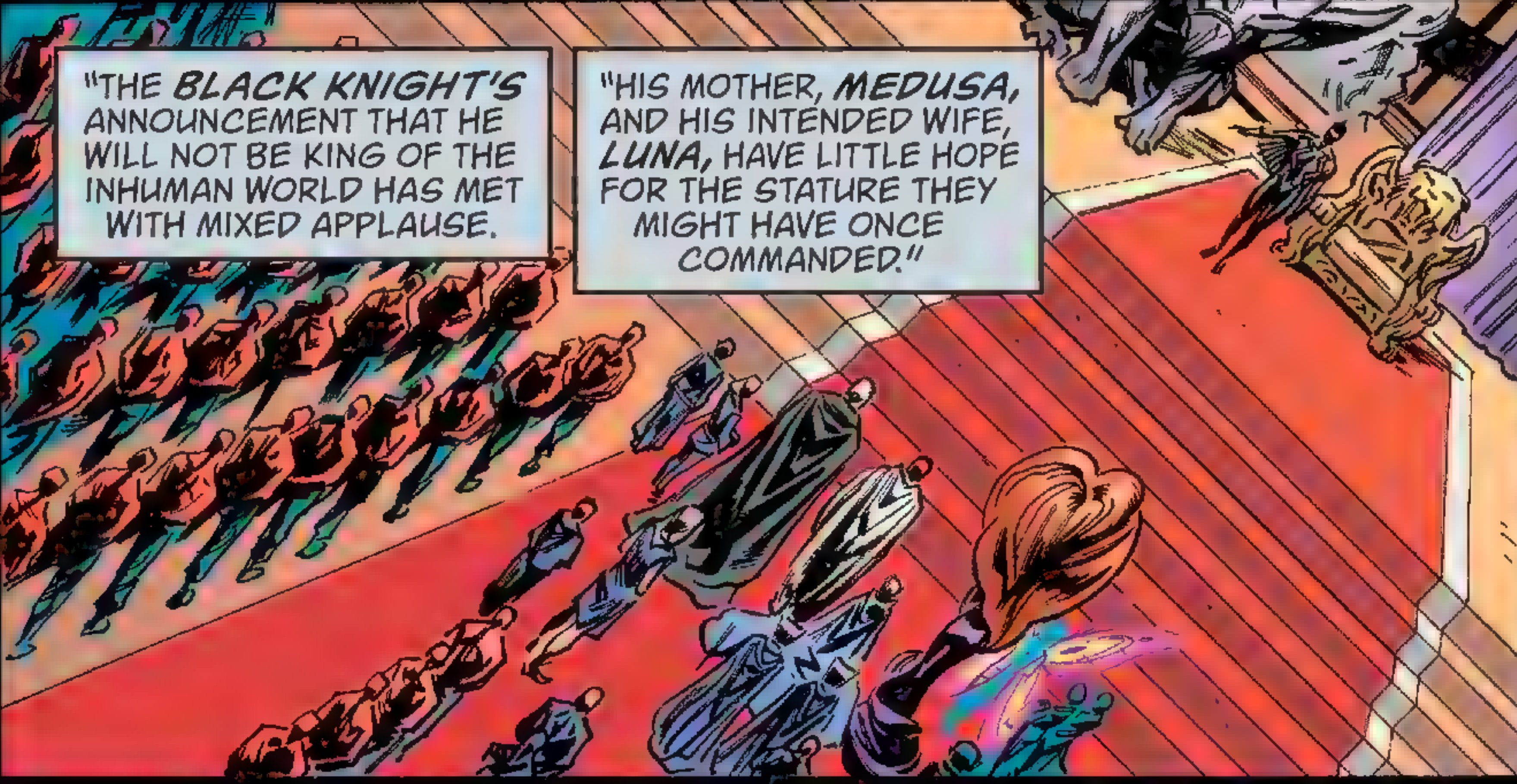


"BUT THAT'S ANOTHER PAGE, ISAAC. SOMETIMES I WONDER IF THIS IS ALL WORTH IT."

"OF COURSE IT IS, KYLE. YOU AND I ARE JUST FORTUNATE THAT THERE'S A **BOOK BINDER** THAT LIVES BELOW US."

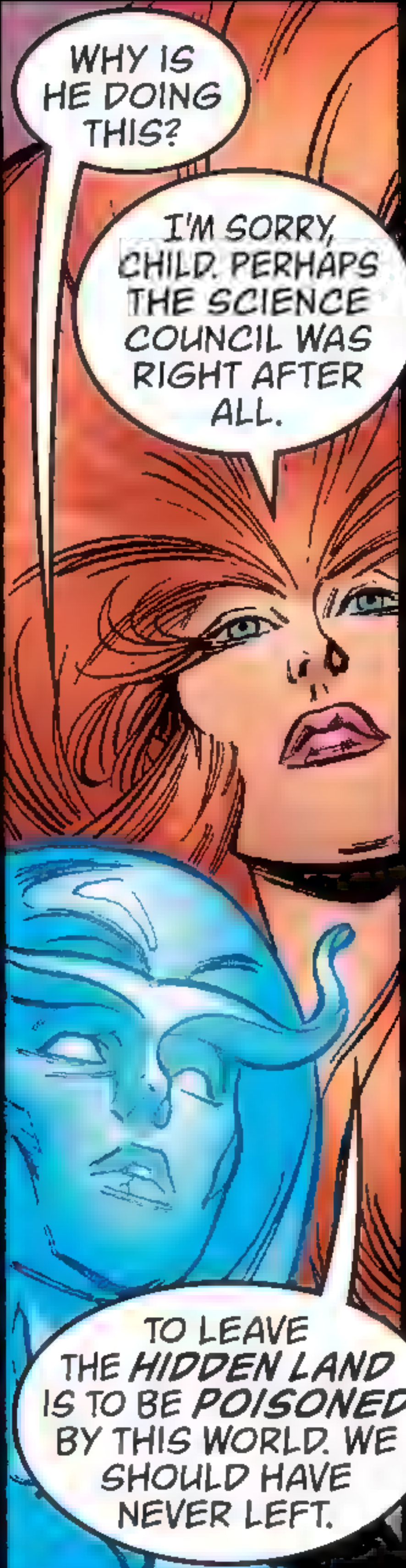


"A GOOD PORTENT, I WOULD HAVE TO SAY."



"THE **BLACK KNIGHT'S** ANNOUNCEMENT THAT HE WILL NOT BE KING OF THE INHUMAN WORLD HAS MET WITH MIXED APPLAUSE."

"HIS MOTHER, **MEDUSA**, AND HIS INTENDED WIFE, **LUNA**, HAVE LITTLE HOPE FOR THE STATURE THEY MIGHT HAVE ONCE COMMANDED."



WHY IS HE DOING THIS?

I'M SORRY, CHILD. PERHAPS THE SCIENCE COUNCIL WAS RIGHT AFTER ALL.

TO LEAVE THE **HIDDEN LAND** IS TO BE **POISONED** BY THIS WORLD. WE SHOULD HAVE NEVER LEFT.



OFF TO THE **SAVAGE LAND**, IS IT?

STEVE, WHAT'S **WRONG?**

IT WAS ONLY A LITTLE MORE THAN **THREE YEARS AGO** THAT I TOOK A CHILD'S LIFE, BRIAN.



AND NOW I'M SUPPOSED TO BE WATCHING OVER THE CHILD OF ALL OF HUMANITY'S FUTURE CHILDREN.

I'M NOT SURE IF I'M UP TO THIS.



YOU CANNOT DO THIS, MY SON.

CANNOT?



SPEAK TO ME OF THE OLD WAYS, MOTHER. AND OF THE SCIENCE COUNCIL'S LAWS ALLOWING A MOTHER TO COMMAND HER KING.

OR SPEAK TO ME, IF YOU MUST, OF MY BIRTH.



YOU *IGNORED* THE DICTATES OF TRADITION *THEN*. YOU FLED FROM THE MOON TO THE EARTH *DESPITE* OUR NATION'S DECREE.

YOU DID WHAT WAS *RIGHT* DESPITE YOURSELF.



WOULD YOU HAVE *ME* DO LESS THAN YOURSELF?

I WILL *NOT* RECREATE A NATION IN NEED OF REVOLUTION.



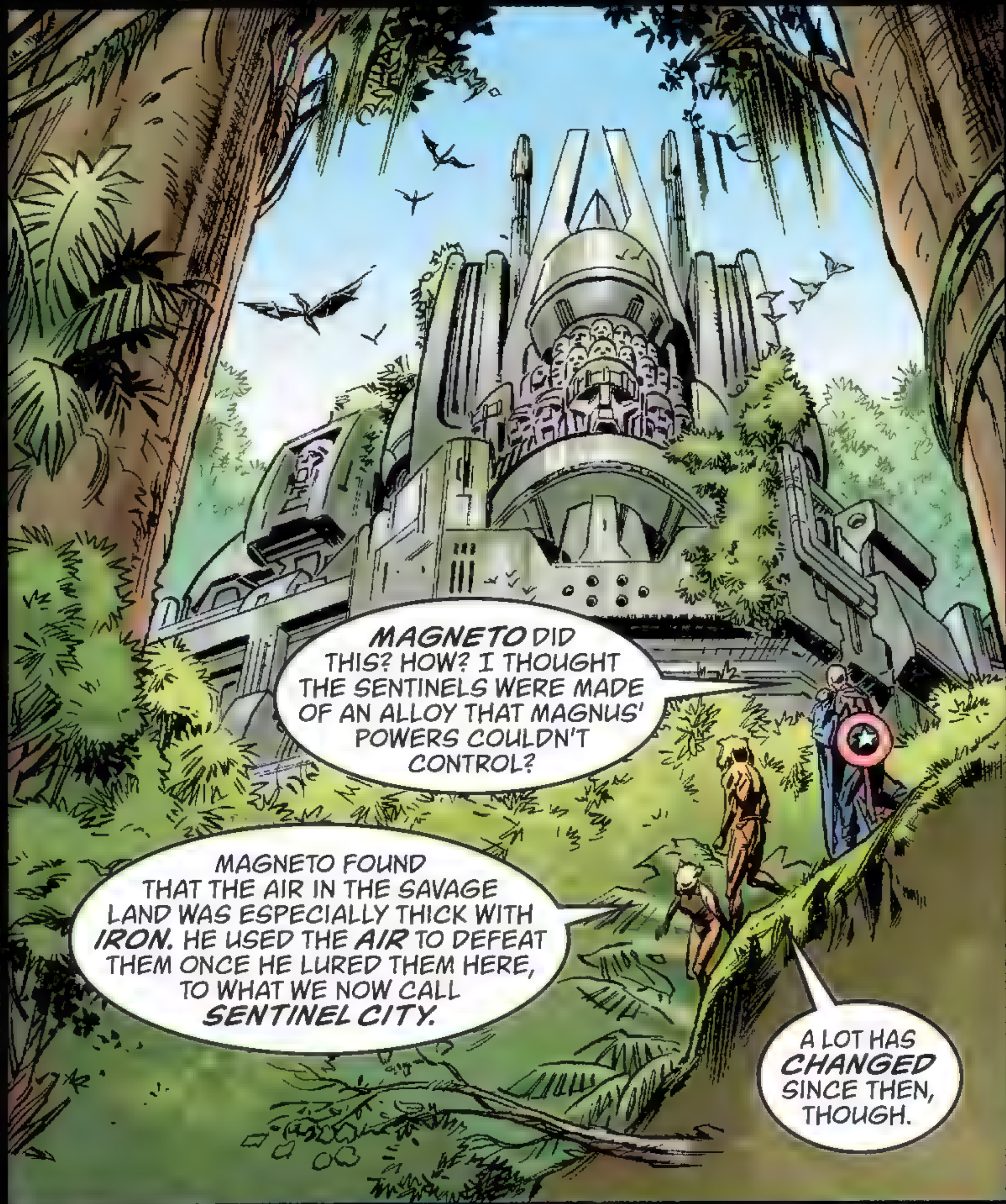
HELLO, STEVE.

YOU DIDN'T TELL ME YOU HAD A KID.



"MAR-VELL EXPLAINS TO THE FORMER LORD OF THE SAVAGE LAND THAT THEY HAVE COME IN SEARCH OF THE POTENTIAL POWER FOUND IN THE *ANTI-METAL* DEPOSITS FOUND THERE."

"FORMER LORD?"



MAGNETO DID THIS? HOW? I THOUGHT THE SENTINELS WERE MADE OF AN ALLOY THAT MAGNUS' POWERS COULDN'T CONTROL?

MAGNETO FOUND THAT THE AIR IN THE SAVAGE LAND WAS ESPECIALLY THICK WITH IRON. HE USED THE AIR TO DEFEAT THEM ONCE HE LURED THEM HERE, TO WHAT WE NOW CALL SENTINEL CITY.

A LOT HAS CHANGED SINCE THEN, THOUGH.



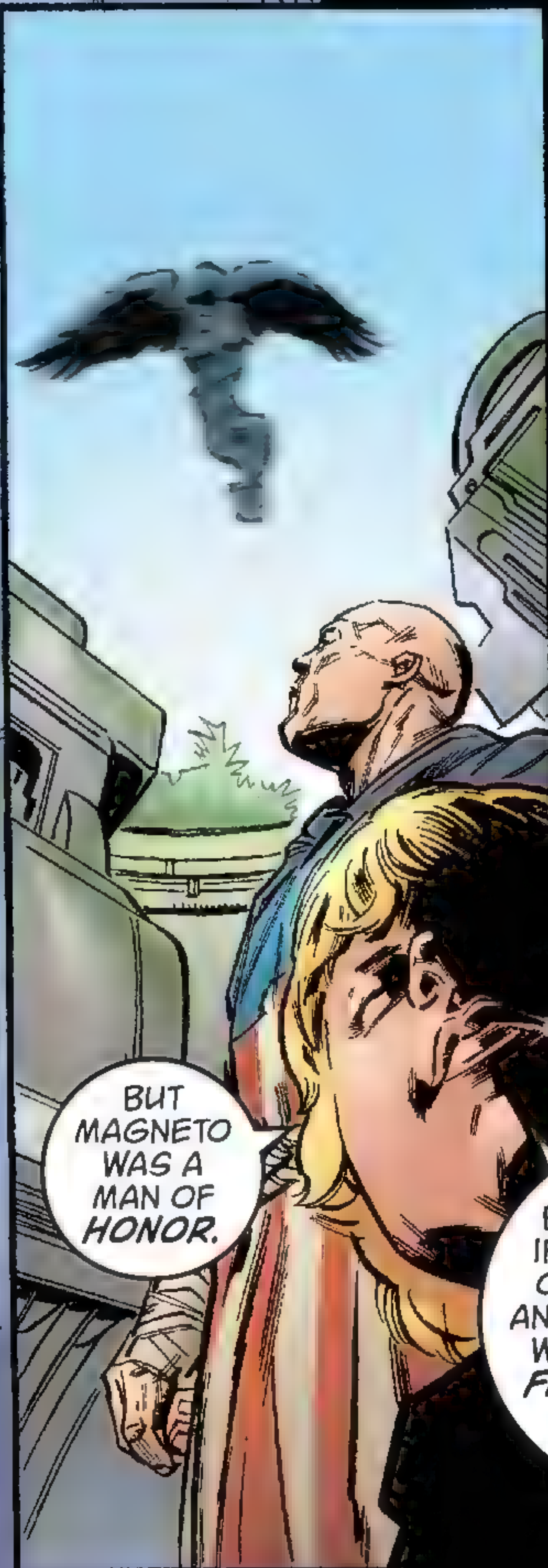
READY TO DEAL WITH THE DEVIL?



NO ONE'S HERE?

NO. THEY ALL LEFT TO TAKE THEIR CHANCES IN THE SAVAGE LAND.

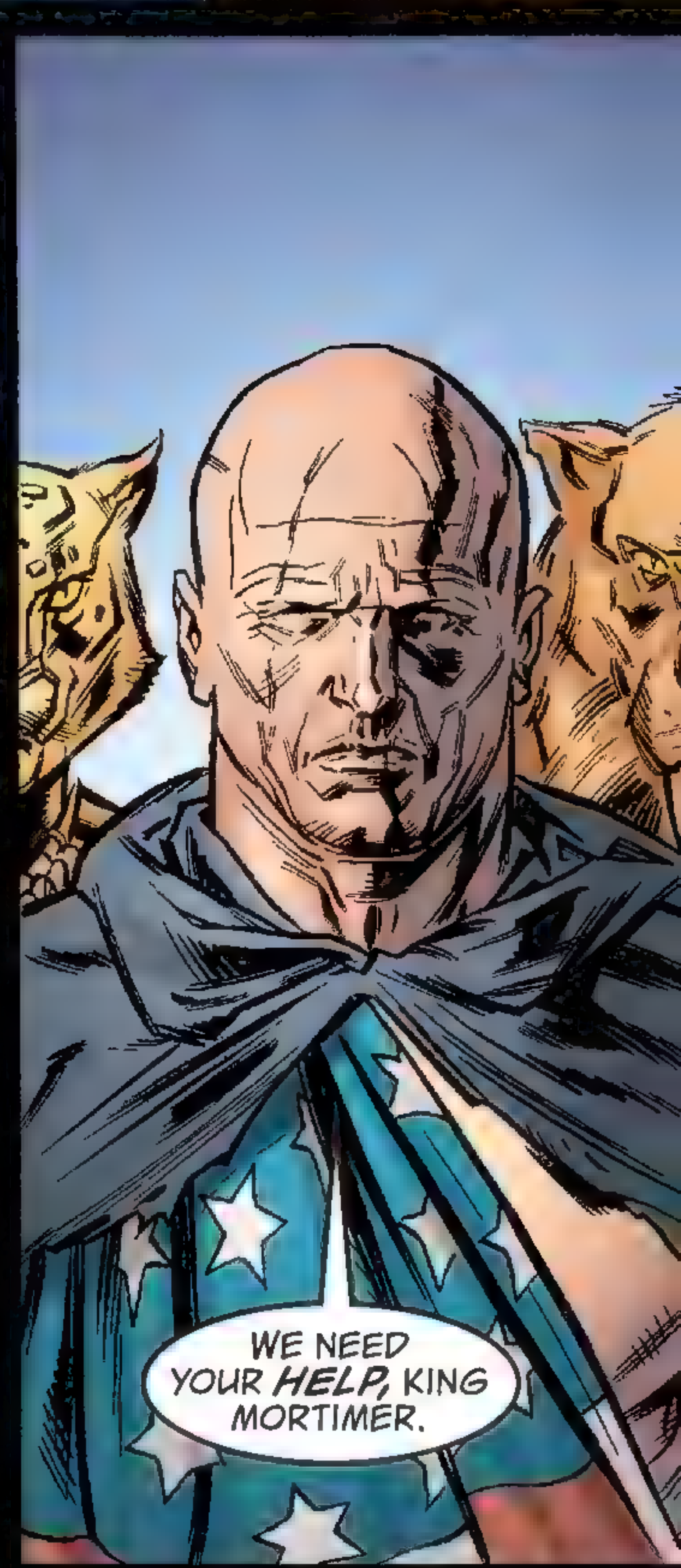
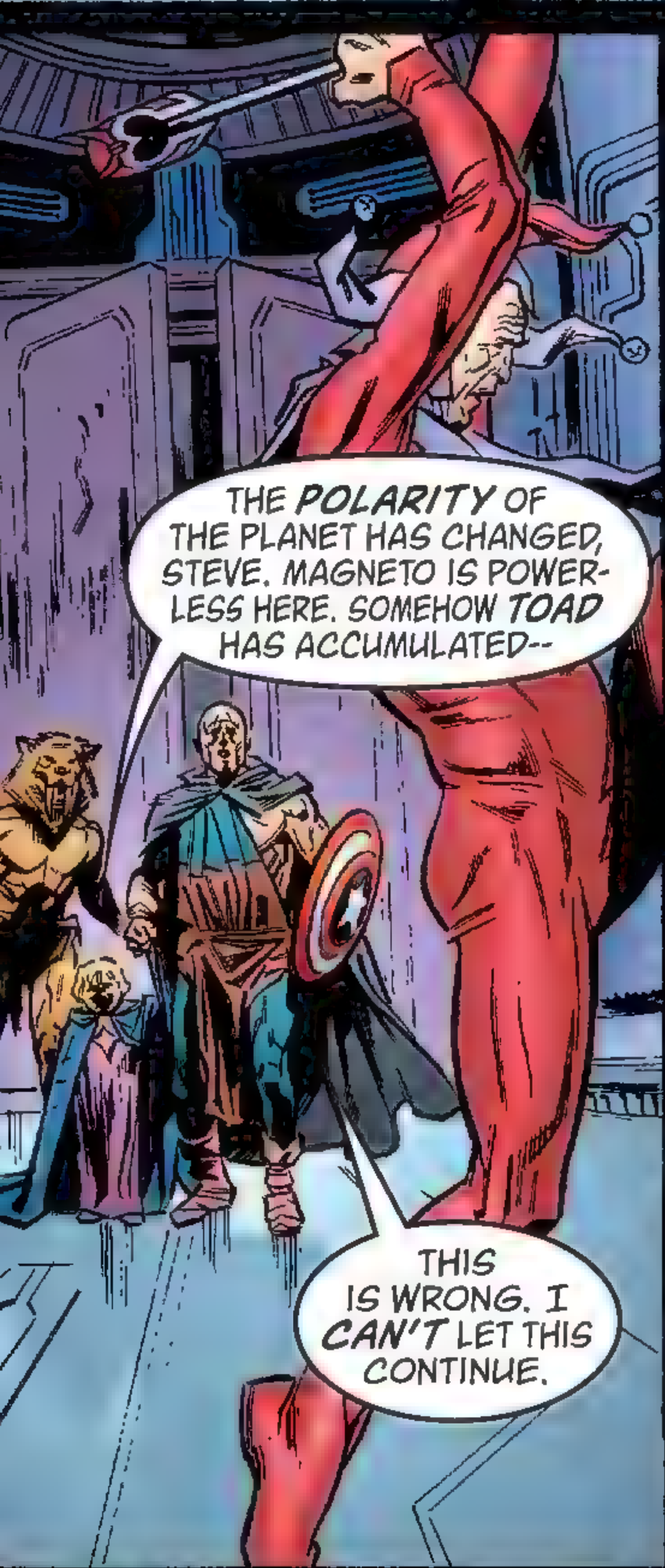
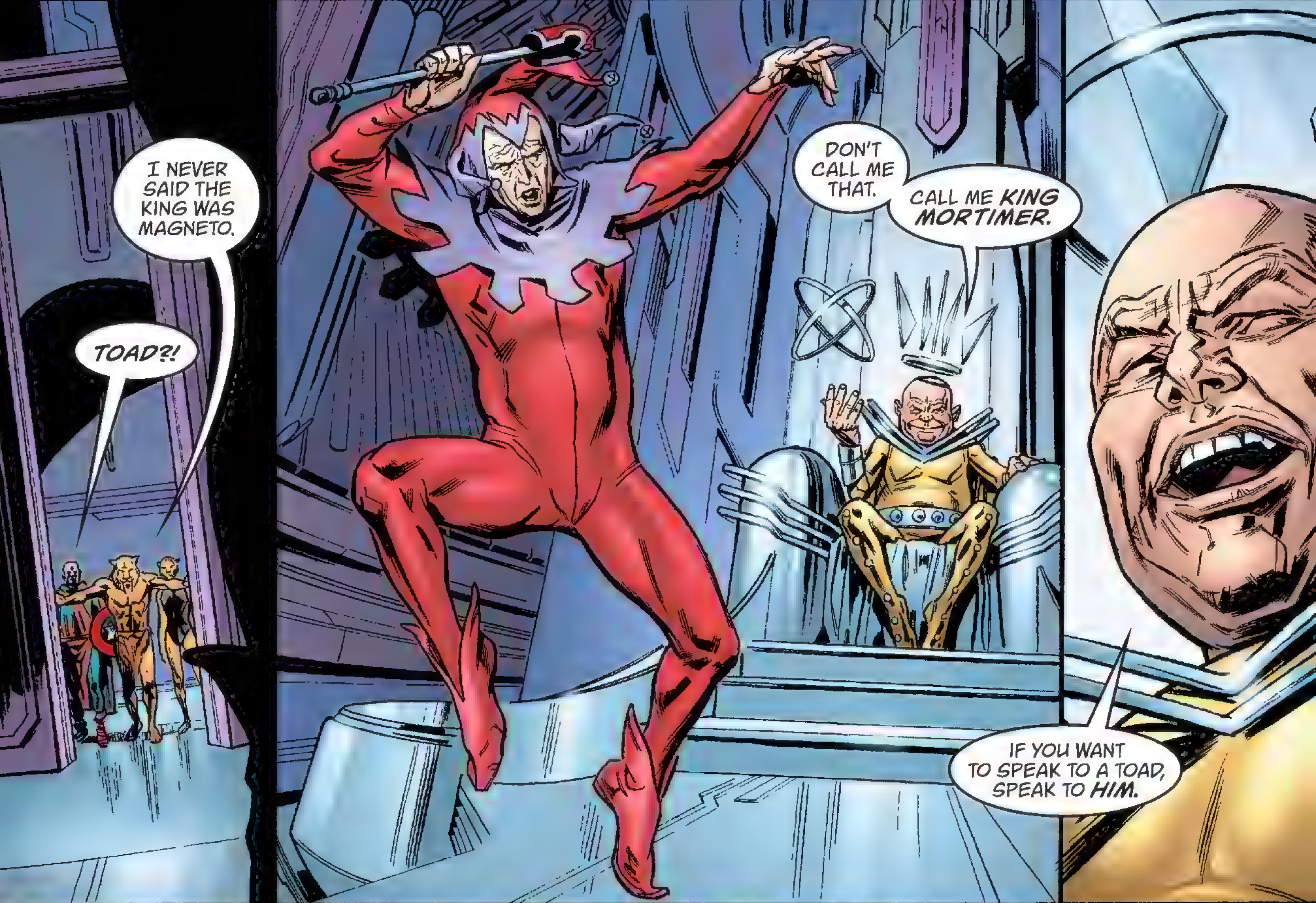
WAIT TILL YOU MEET THE KING. YOU'LL UNDERSTAND.



BUT MAGNETO WAS A MAN OF HONOR.



I ALWAYS BELIEVED THAT IF GIVEN A ROLE OF LEADERSHIP AND AUTHORITY, HE WOULD BECOME FAR MORE THAN HE WAS EVER CREDITED.



"THE TOAD LEADS THEM DOWN INTO THE HEART OF SENTINEL CITY...TO A PLACE ONCE CONSIDERED AN ATLANTEAN AMUSEMENT PARK FASHIONED AFTER DANTE'S INFERNO."

"STILL OTHERS SUGGEST IT *INSPIRED* DANTE."

"BUT SINCE IT IS A DOORWAY INTO THE REALM OF LIMBO, WHO CAN SAY WHICH CAME FIRST?"

I SWORE I'D NEVER COME HERE AGAIN.

SHOULDN'T IT READ "ALL HOPE ABANDON YE WHO ENTER HERE"?

EVERYONE SAYS THAT THE FIRST TIME THEY SEE THIS PLACE.

REBUNDON HOPE ALL YE WHO ENTER HERE

I'M SORRY, KEVIN. I CAN'T FACE HIM AGAIN. CAN'T LET HIM PUT HIS HAND ON ME AGAIN.

ONE HAND IS ALL HE'S GOT, SHANNA. BUT, S'OKAY BY ME.

THE ELDER GODS ARE JUST GOING TO HAVE TO MANIFEST WITHOUT YOU.

WHAT DID SHANNA MEAN?

BELASCO WAS CONVINCED THAT SHANNA WAS *BEATRICE*...YOU KNOW, FROM DANTE'S INFERNO. HE TRIED TO *SACRIFICE* HER TO THE ELDER GODS.

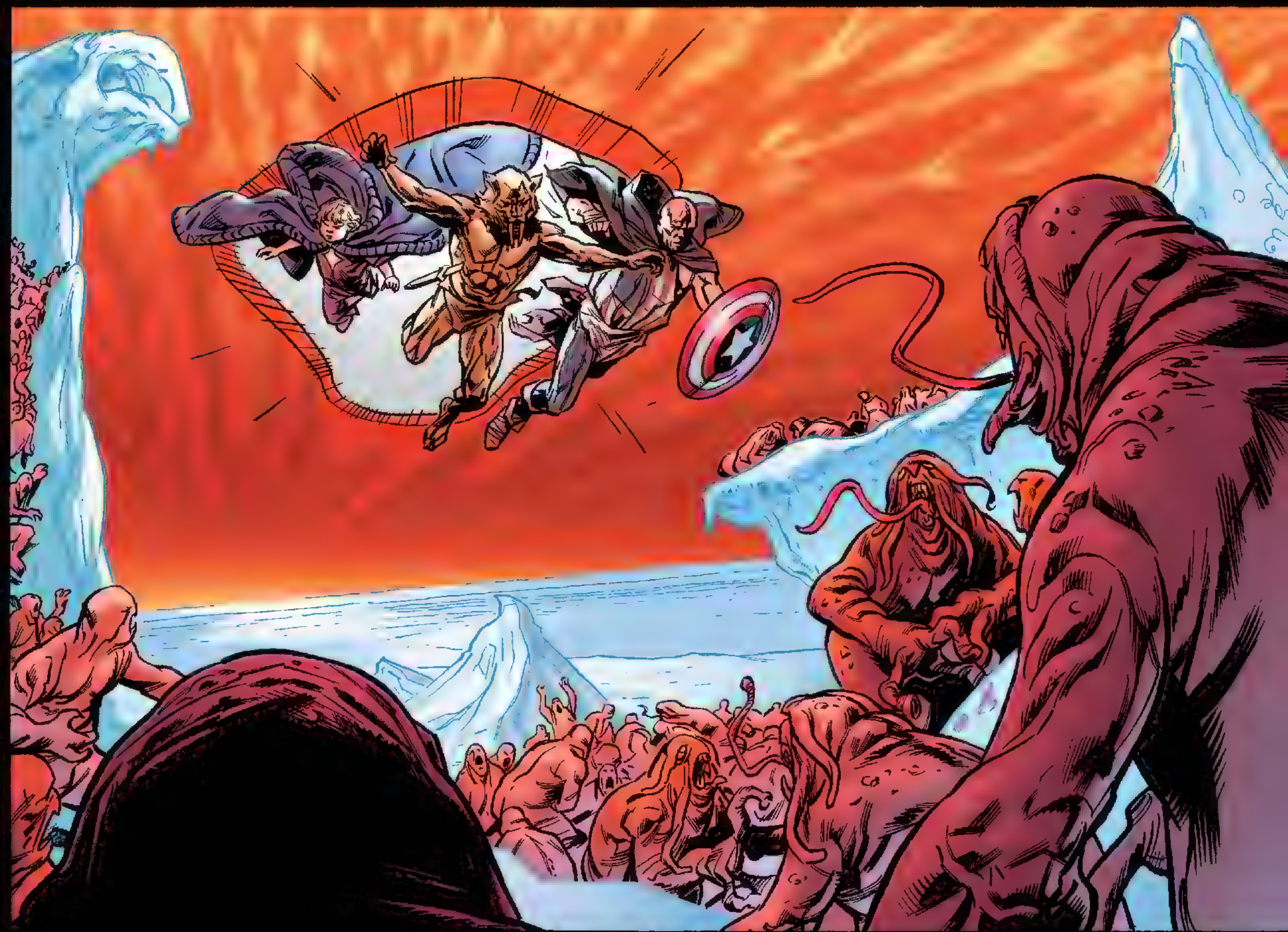
IT CAN BE PRETTY SCARY TO FIND OUT YOUR MYTHS ARE *REAL*.

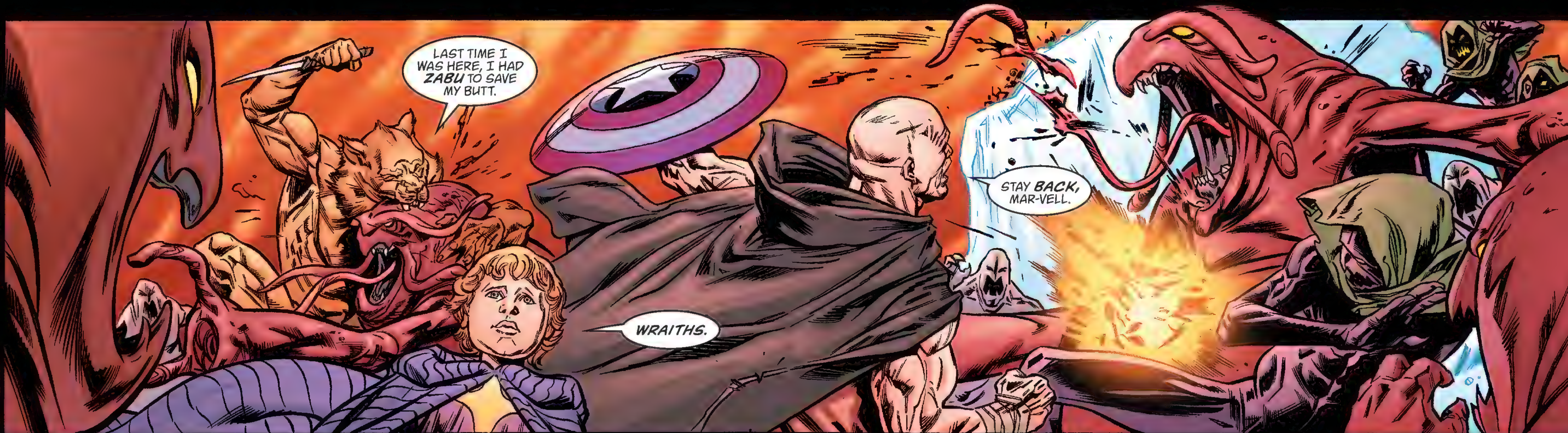
READY?

JUMP!

WE'RE NOT FALLING?

KIND OF MAKES YOU WANT TO CHANGE THE WAY YOU LOOK AT *HELL*, HUH?





LAST TIME I WAS HERE, I HAD ZABU TO SAVE MY BUTT.

STAY BACK, MAR-VELL.

WRAITHS.

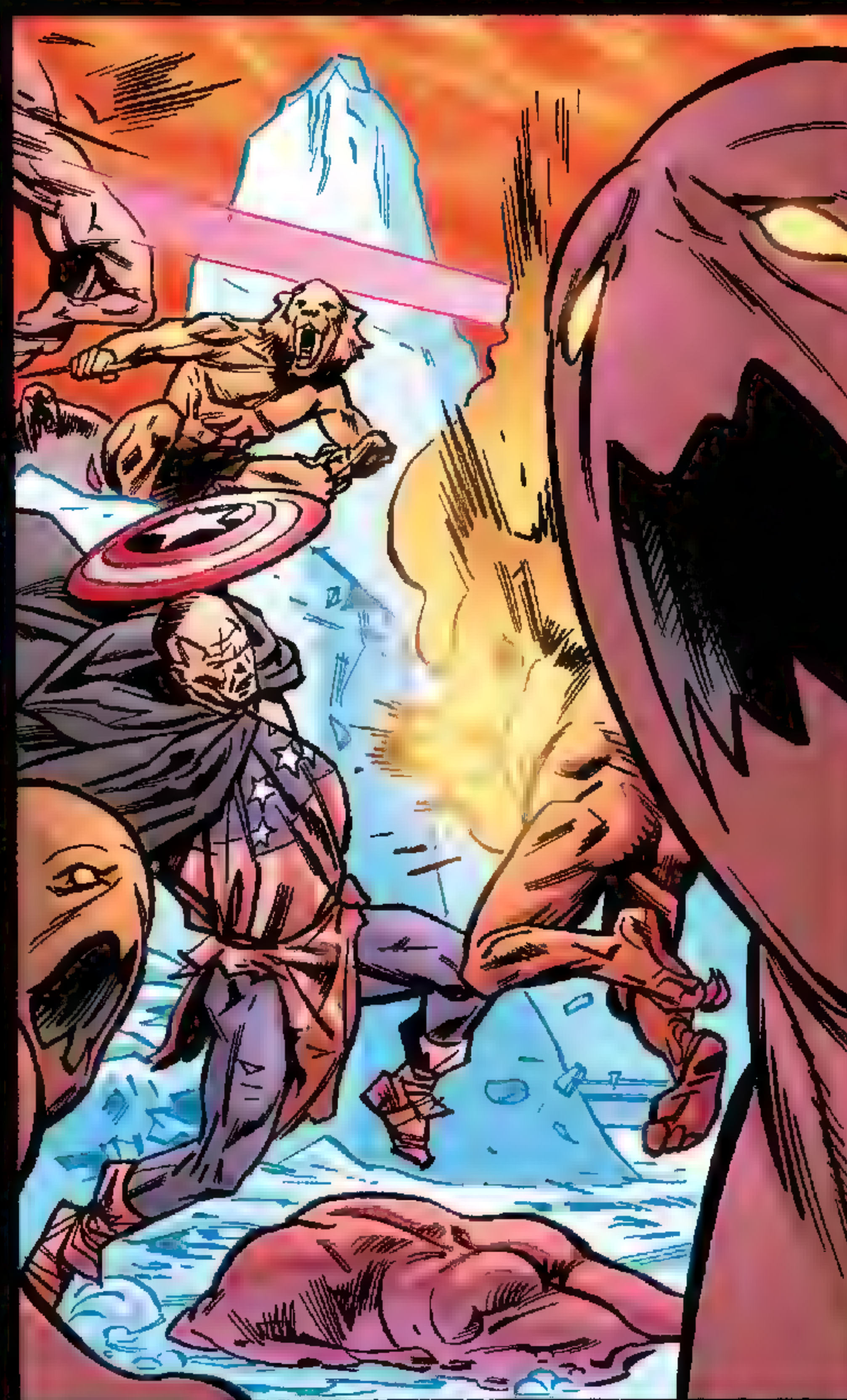


TAKE CARE, WARRIORS! CONSERVE YOUR STRENGTH!

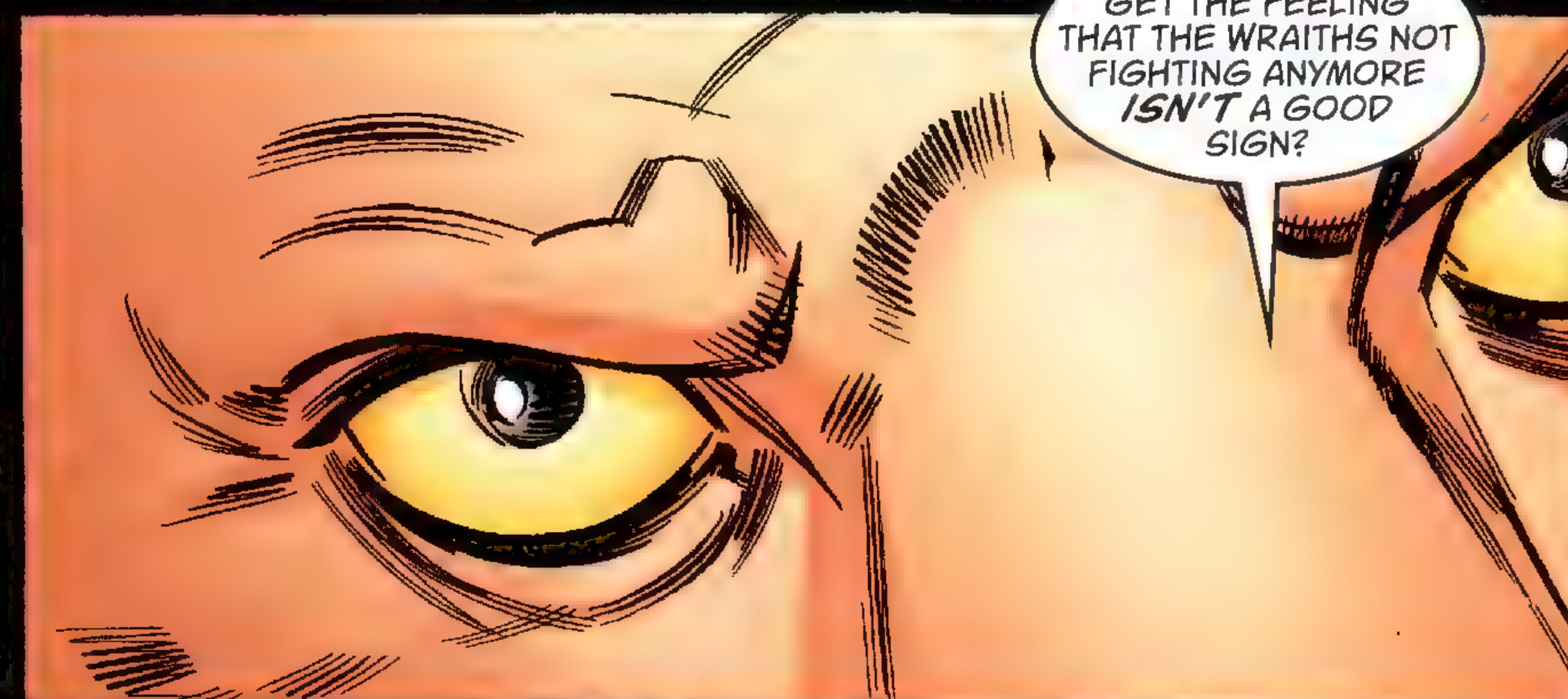
THE GREATEST OF THE SPACE-KNIGHTS!

IS THIS THE REALM OF THE DEAD?

NO... BUT THIS WILL BE HELL.



WHY DO I GET THE FEELING THAT THE WRAITHS NOT FIGHTING ANYMORE ISN'T A GOOD SIGN?



NO BELASCO, HUH? I GUESS SHANNA COULD HAVE COME ALONG AFTER ALL.

WE ARE SO DEAD.

MEPHISTO?





DO YOU
ACTUALLY BELIEVE YOU
CAN ACCOMPLISH ANY-
THING IN MY MISTRESS'
REALM?

YOU'RE *DEAD*
MEN WALKING. ALL THIS
WILL EARN YOU IS *MORE*
DEATH.

AND YOU WILL
DIE *OVER AND OVER*
AGAIN UNTIL MY MISTRESS
IS SATISFIED THAT YOU ARE
UNWILLING TO DIE
AGAIN.

LIKE
EVERYONE ELSE
HERE IN HER
KINGDOM.

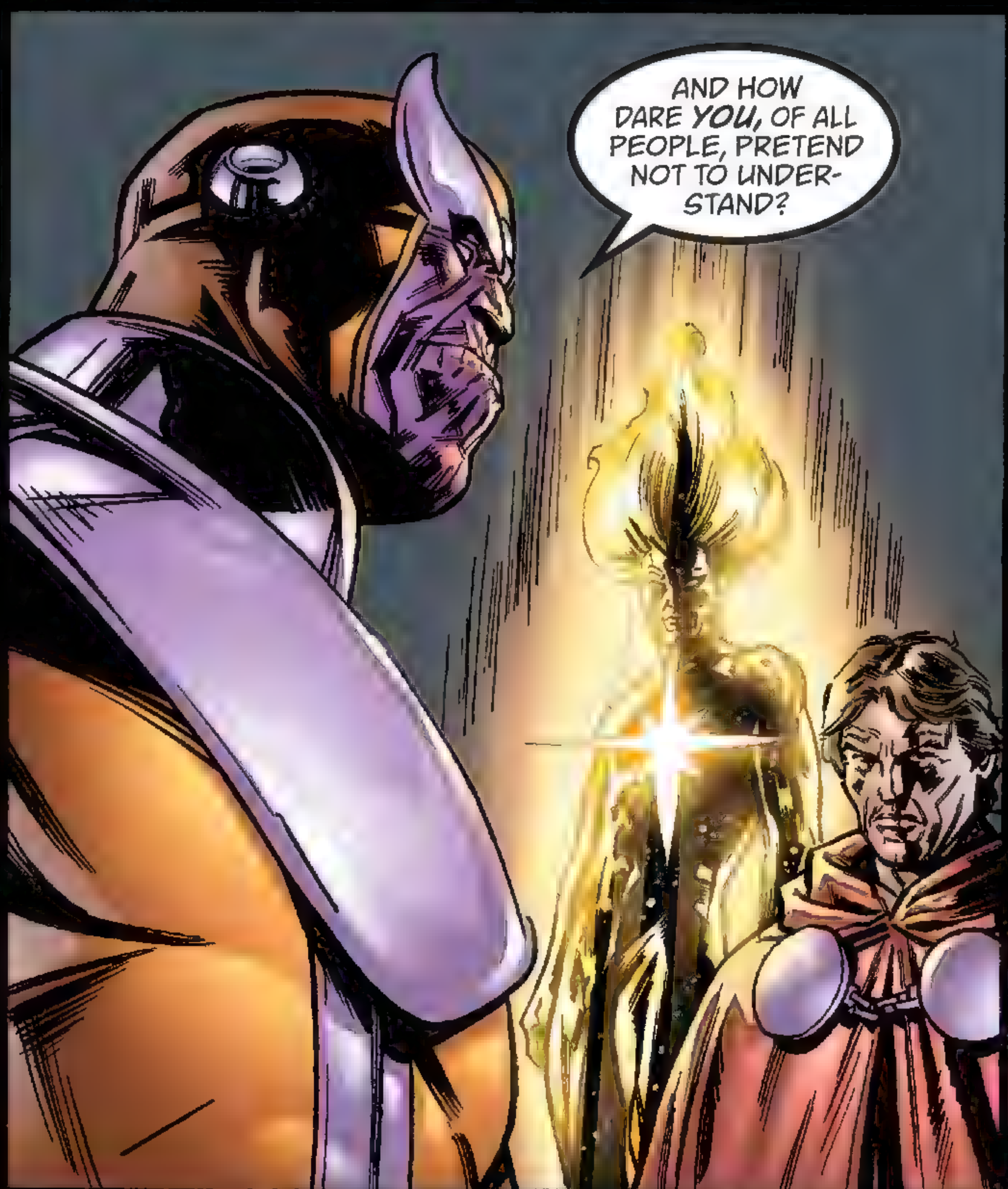


I SPOKE
ONCE AS YOU DO
NOW. THIS POWER
YOU SEEK WILL HAVE
OTHER SUITORS.
YOUR MISTRESS
WILL BE **UN-
FAITHFUL.**

I DON'T
GET YOU, THANOS.
ALL THIS 'CAUSE
YOU'VE GOT THE
HOTS FOR
DEATH?



THIS IS **SO
MUCH MORE** THAN
EROTIC STIMULATION,
PUP.



AND HOW
DARE **YOU,** OF ALL
PEOPLE, PRETEND
NOT TO UNDER-
STAND?



SHUT UP,
THANOS.

DEATH
CARES **NOTHING**
FOR YOU.

"WHY ARE YOU *SILENT*, KYLE? AT TIMES, I HAVE COME TO BELIEVE THAT YOU ARE NO LONGER EVEN HERE."

"SOMETIMES, I DON'T KNOW WHERE I AM... SOMETIMES, ISAAC, I THINK I'M *DEAD*."

"IN HELL'S KITCHEN, NEW YORK, THE *TONG OF CREEL* CONTINUE TO PIECE TOGETHER THE SHATTERED PARTS OF THE MAN WHO DESTROYED WASHINGTON."



"THEY ARE BEING WATCHED BY *LOKI*."

"WHY WOULD A NORSE GOD WATCH THE ASSEMBLAGE OF CREEL?"

"THIS IS RATHER LIKE A *PUZZLE*, IS IT NOT?"

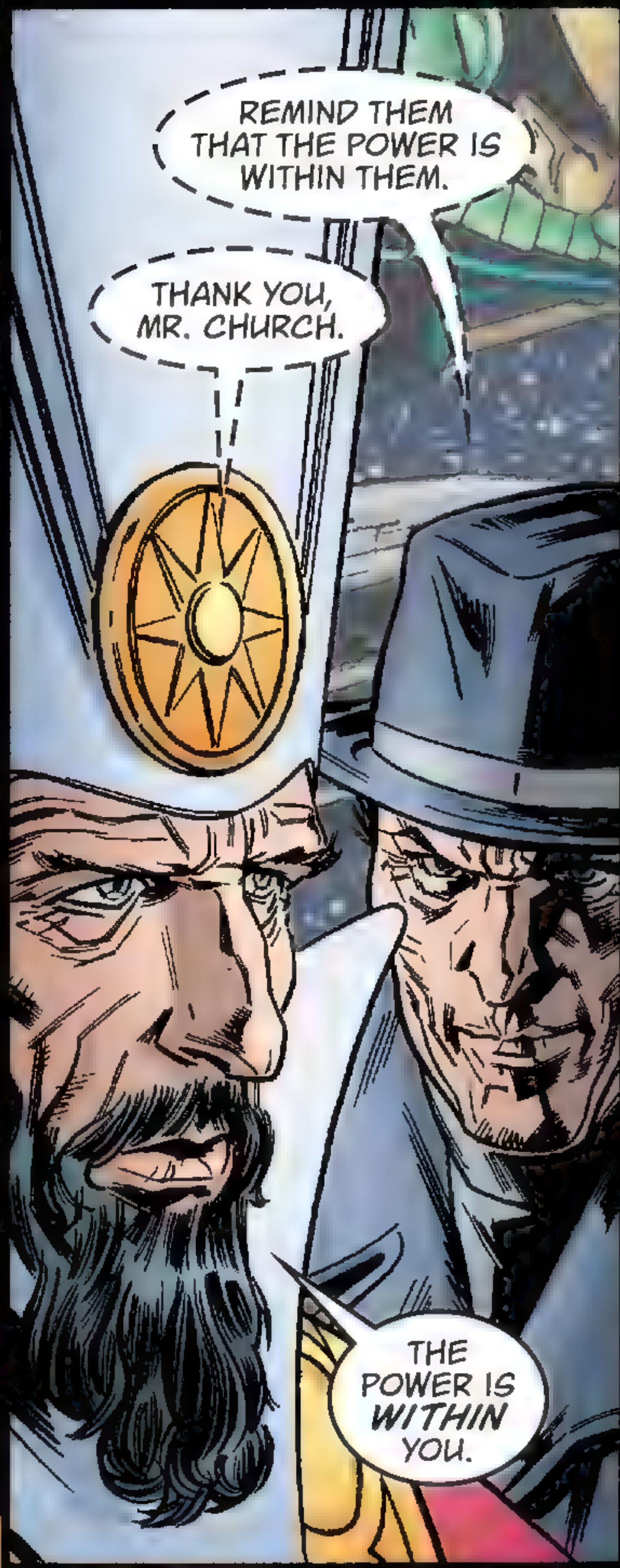




"HERE IN NEW YORK, THE CHURCH OF IMMORTUS **HUNGERS** FOR A GREATER VISION OF THEIR **DESTINY** AMONGST THE STARS."

YOU MAY SEE YOURSELVES AS **MUTANTS** AT THIS POINT. BUT BELIEVE ME WHEN I TELL YOU THAT YOU ARE **GODS**.

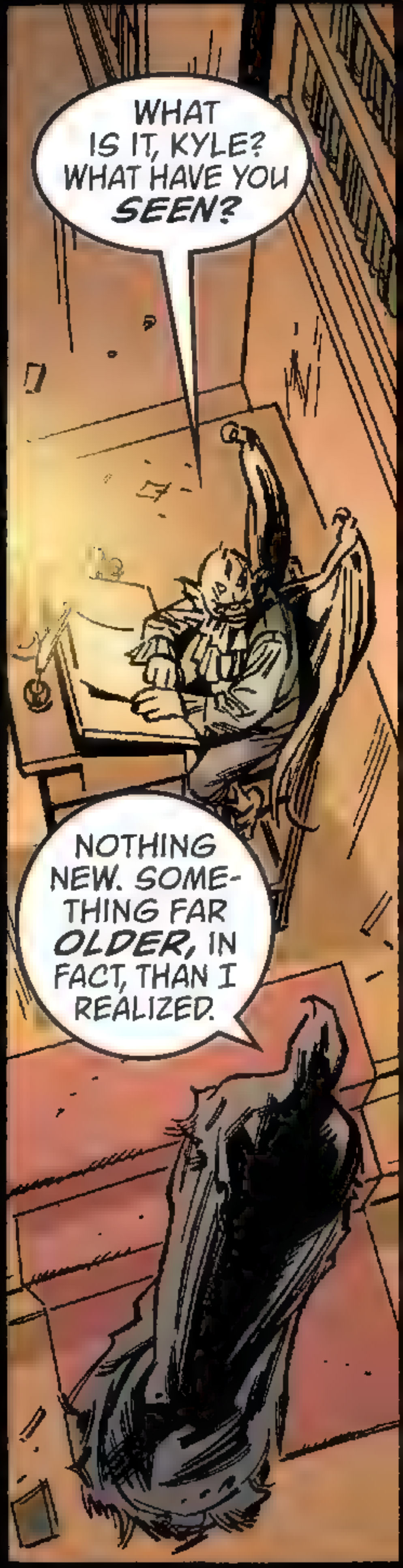
THE **HUMAN TORCHES** ARE A WAY TO **UNDERMINE** YOUR POWER...TO **UNRAVEL** YOUR DESTINY.



REMAND THEM THAT THE POWER IS WITHIN THEM.

THANK YOU, MR. CHURCH.

THE POWER IS **WITHIN** YOU.



WHAT IS IT, KYLE? WHAT HAVE YOU **SEEN**?

NOTHING NEW. SOMETHING FAR **OLDER**, IN FACT, THAN I REALIZED.



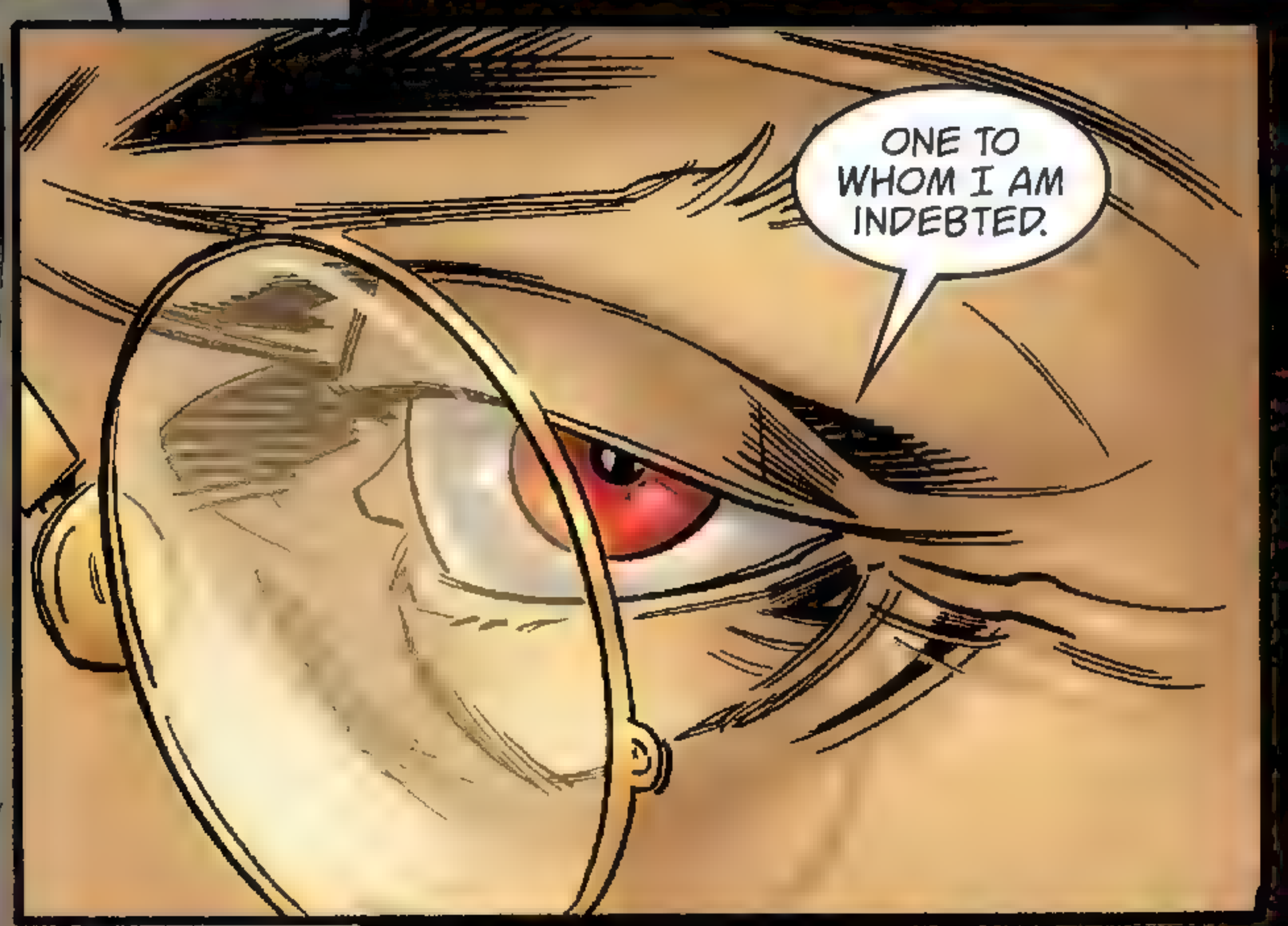
THAT'S ANOTHER PAGE FOR THE BINDER, ISN'T IT?

THIS MATERIAL HASN'T HAPPENED YET. ARE YOU CERTAIN WE CAN **TRUST** HIM?

OF COURSE.



HE'S AN **OLD FRIEND**.



ONE TO WHOM I AM **INDEBTED**.



"I AM READY, KYLE. WHAT WILL BE THE NEXT OCCURRENCE?"

"STEVE ROGERS, MAR-VELL AND KA-ZAR WILL FACE MEPHISTO IN LIMBO. IT'S NOT GOING TO GO VERY WELL."



BELASCO?

HE'S FROZEN AGAIN.

WHY ARE YOU HERE IN LIMBO, LORD OF LIES?



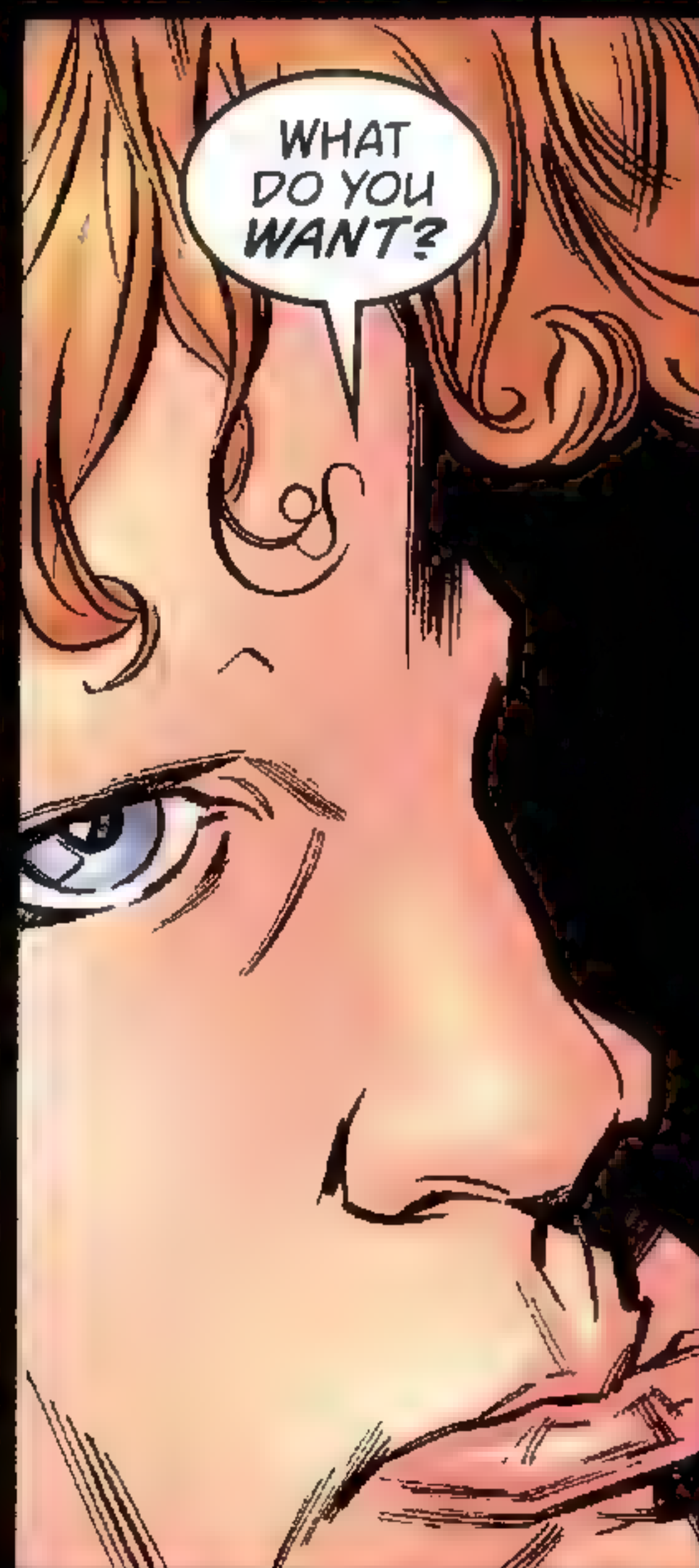
TO PROVE A POINT, CHILD. THAT IS ALL.

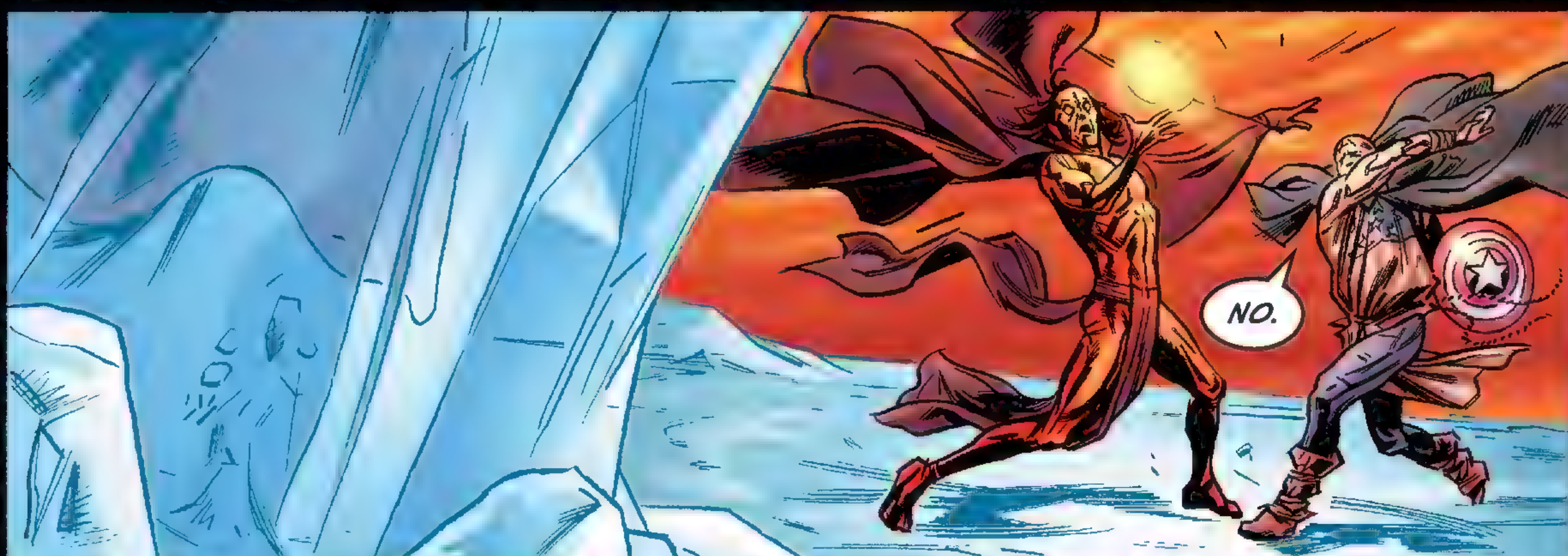


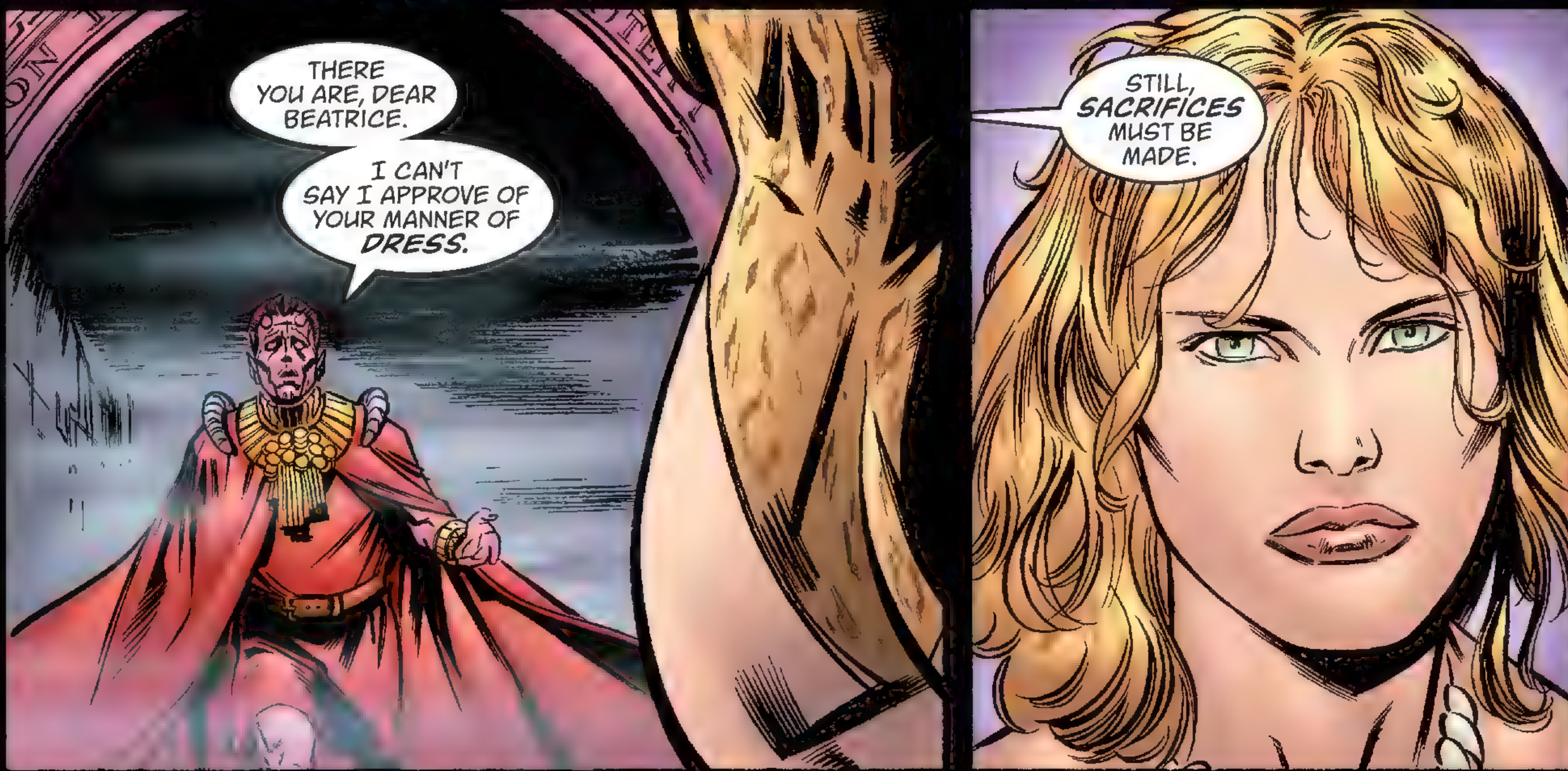
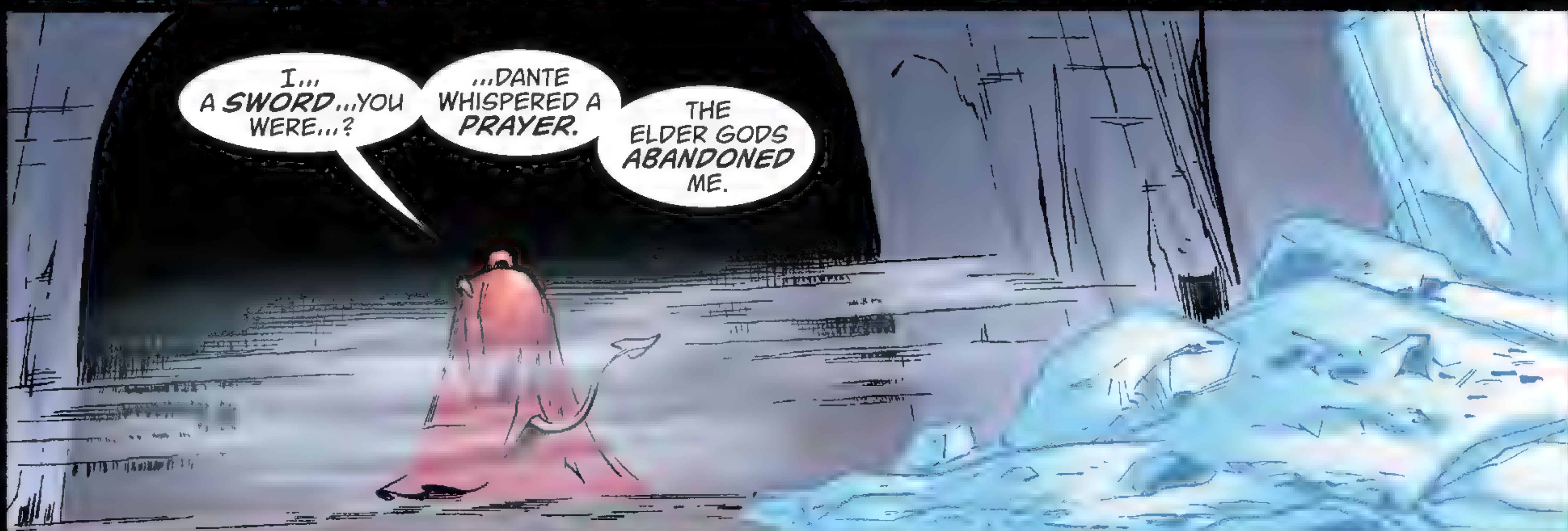
I HAVE THE KEY TO LIMBO. THIS REALM IS MINE. AND THEREFORE, SO IS THE PAST.

I CAN OPEN THE DOOR JUST AS EASILY AS I CAN LOCK IT.

AND I WANT TO MAKE A DEAL.

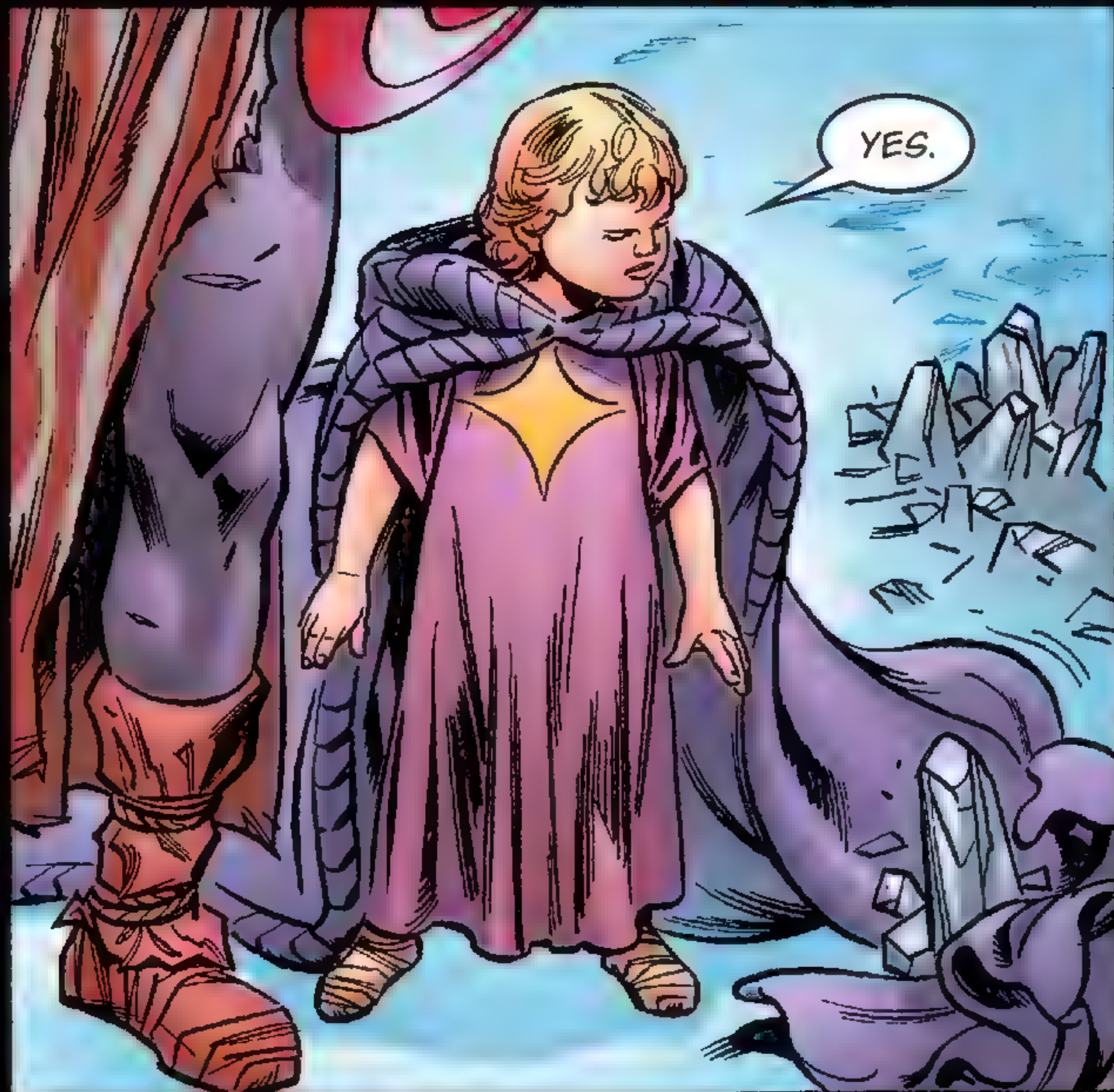








WILL
THAT BE ENOUGH
ANTI-METAL?



YES.



BEFORE
YOU LEAVE,
CAPTAIN, TAKE
THIS.

IT CAN
BANISH ALL OF
YOUR ENEMIES TO
THIS PLACE.



I'M NOT CERTAIN
IF YOU WOULD CONSIDER
THIS A KINDNESS...BUT AN
ALTERNATIVE.

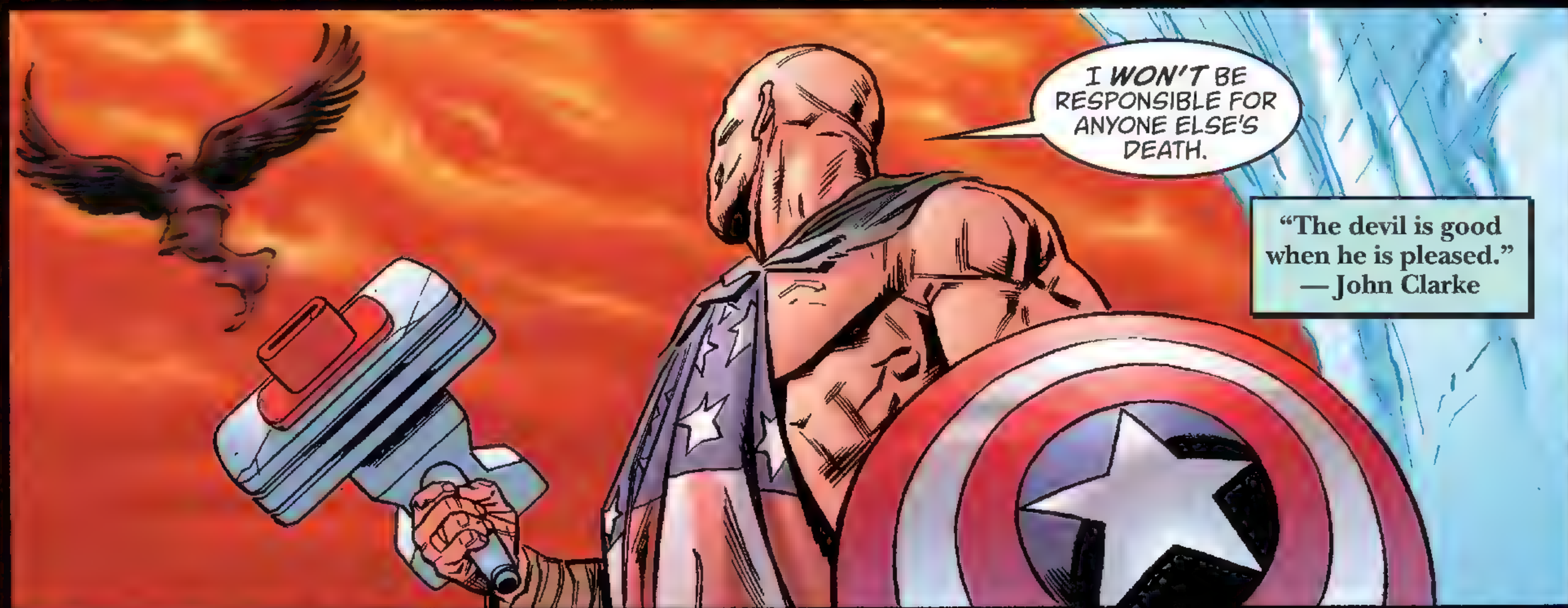
THANK
YOU.



REED
RICHARDS
GAVE ME A
DEVICE TO
CALL FOR
HELP.

PERHAPS
WE SHOULD...

IF DEATH
WANTS TO STOP
YOU, CALLING ANYONE
ELSE WOULD ONLY
ENDANGER *THEM*,
AS WELL.



I WON'T BE
RESPONSIBLE FOR
ANYONE ELSE'S
DEATH.

"The devil is good
when he is pleased."
— John Clarke

U N I V E R S E X



APPENDIX TO CHAPTER THREE

W R I T T E N B Y J I M K R U E G E R

"I would like to speak with you about the places your equipment cannot see into, Uatu"

"I was certain you would, robot. I cannot see into Limbo. As there are other worlds I am not privy to. In the past, I have looked upon Asgard through the eyes of another robot, known as the Recorder. But it was destroyed long ago."

"Is that why you thought I would comply with your wishes? Why you chose me?"

"Yes. What have you learned by eavesdropping on the writings of Kyle Richmond?"

"I'm learning so much of what is going on, both in Limbo, and in the realm of the Dead."

"Interesting, isn't it, robot?"

"What?"

"That your only sources of information seems to continue coming from one who has been blinded of sorts?"

"You're a funny guy, Uatu. I wish my father had programmed me with a sense of humor. I might enjoy your company more."

"Hmmm."

"I assume that Mephisto must have taken one of the X-Men and convinced him..."

"Him?"

"Belasco is male."

"As was Thor."

"Okay. Assuming Belasco took one of the X-Men, convinced him... or her that he or she was indeed the demon, Belasco, and sent them back in time, certain that the rivalry between Belasco and Dante still exists. At which point Belasco mistakes Shanna for Beatrice, and his first clash with Ka-Zar begins. The question is why."

"There is a problem with this theory, robot. Where does it begin?"

"I know, according to you machinery Belasco did indeed appear to Shanna, did indeed try to use her to call down the dark gods. "

"Unless."

"Unless we are already in a divergent timeline, changed by Belasco's trip to the past. What if everything from that point is, indeed, part of that divergent timeline? I've been watching Franklin die at the hands of the Sentinels believing that this was the echo of the true reality whereby Franklin goes on to become Galactus. But what if ours is the altered reality? What if Franklin is supposed to be dead? Or what if he's supposed to be alive – and not supposed to be Galactus, either?"

"The race you mock, robot, has through luck despite its own savagery, come to grips with the truth that the manipulation of time, the possibility to creating an alternate reality. For humanity, time is like a river that flows, yet due to certain mechanical manipulations, a tributary from this river leads back into the mainstream, creating a loop."

"What's wrong with that?"

"It assumes only one river. It assumes that it is a river. It assumes that it is a line. Something of merely two dimensions."

"Is it something else?"

"Yes. But what that is, is even hidden from the Watchers. The alternate realities are caused by more than a mutated mankind's manipulations. They are determined by the sum total of possibility."

"Every alternative becomes the recognition of a possibility? It's not our choices that determine us?"

"No."

"So... all of our options create these realities, and then those realities are multiplied by the realities of every other person who has ever lived or met any one else? And the way these realities intermingle creates new realities after this? And that

has nothing to do with the clear manipulation of time as of yet?

"No."

"The time manipulations reconfigures all those combinations. All purpose, all meaning, all reason, then..."

"Exactly, robot."

"All meaning is thrown into question."

"It is unfortunate that it has taken so long, that so much damage has been caused for the sake of you reaching this conclusion."

"But how could?"

"I know what you are thinking – for what reason should I attempt to change anything at all? What purpose can a hero have? After all, in another world, in an alternative existence, the possibility of what you want to alter can already be seen to its conclusion in that reality. And in that reality, the very hope of salvation creates new problems and disasters. You are wondering why you should do anything at all. You are wondering if there is anything better to do than simply to watch."

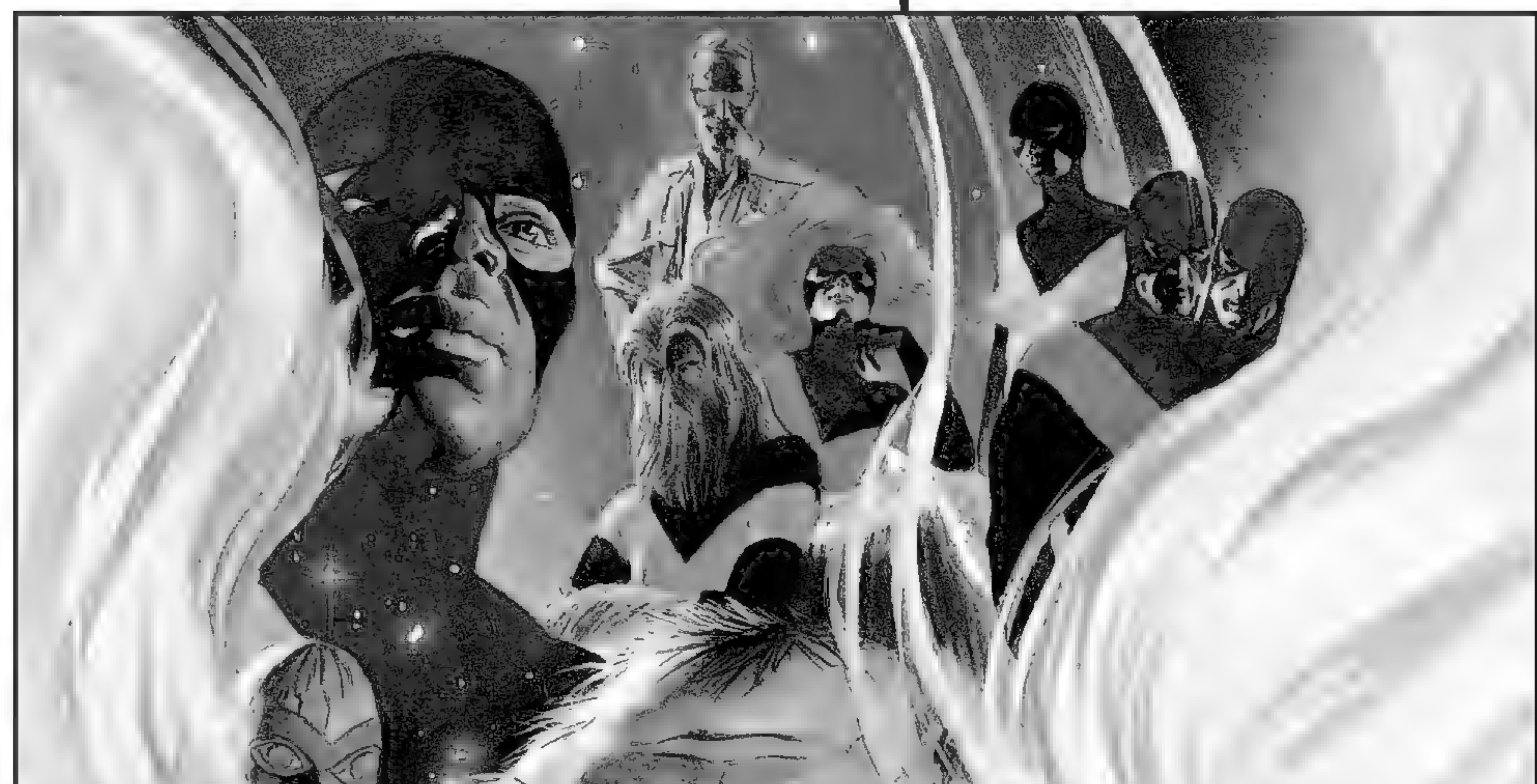
"Watch?"

"Ah. Now we understand each other."

"You're right, Uatu. Our decisions, then, account for nothing, because the entire range of possibilities is given form and substance. For all history, we have wrestled with the possibility that we begin from nothingness, enter nothingness, and in between, I guess, consider the nature of the nothingness. But we were only half-correct. Everything-ness is the same as nothingness. I'm not certain which I prefer. Both result, in the end, to be meaninglessness."

"Yes."

"But then, Uatu, can't the same be said about watching?"





UNIVERSE X: SPIDY

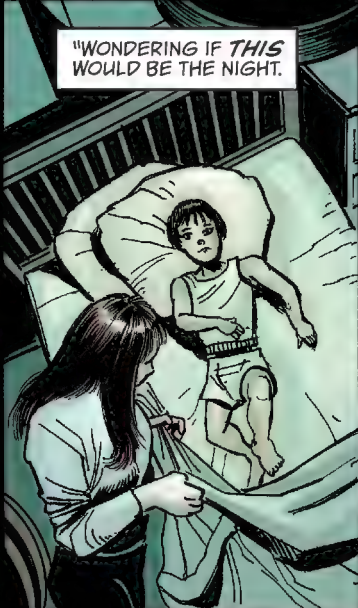


"MY FATHER IS
SPIDER-MAN."

"CAN YOU *IMAGINE*
WHAT IT MUST BE LIKE
TO LIVE WITH THAT?"



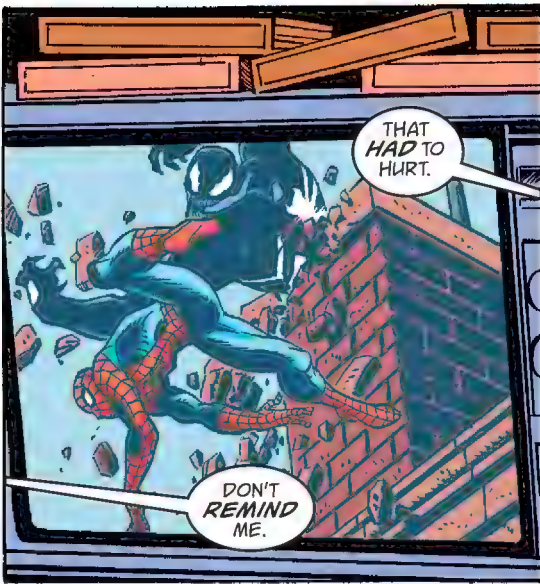
"WAITING *EVERY*
NIGHT HE WENT
OUT."

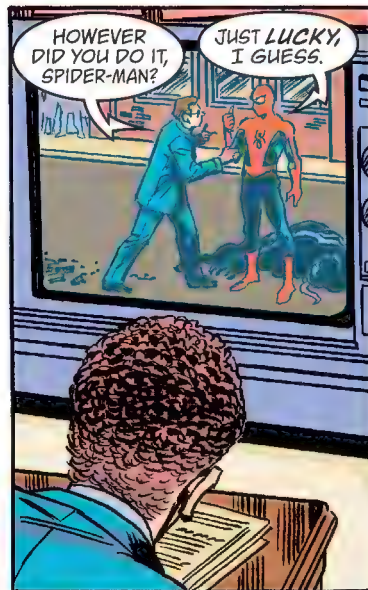
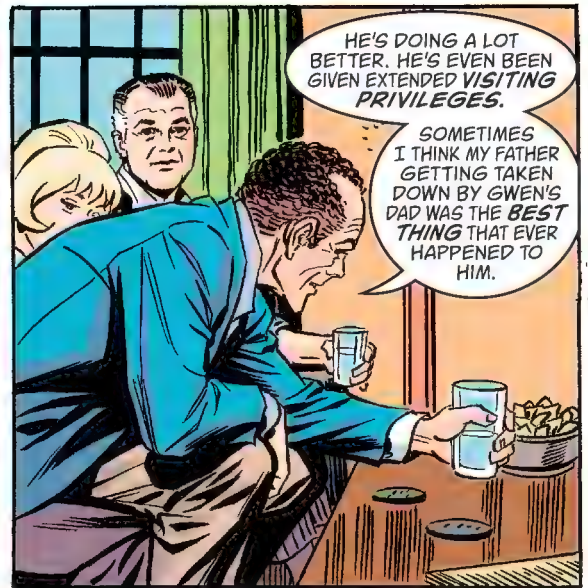


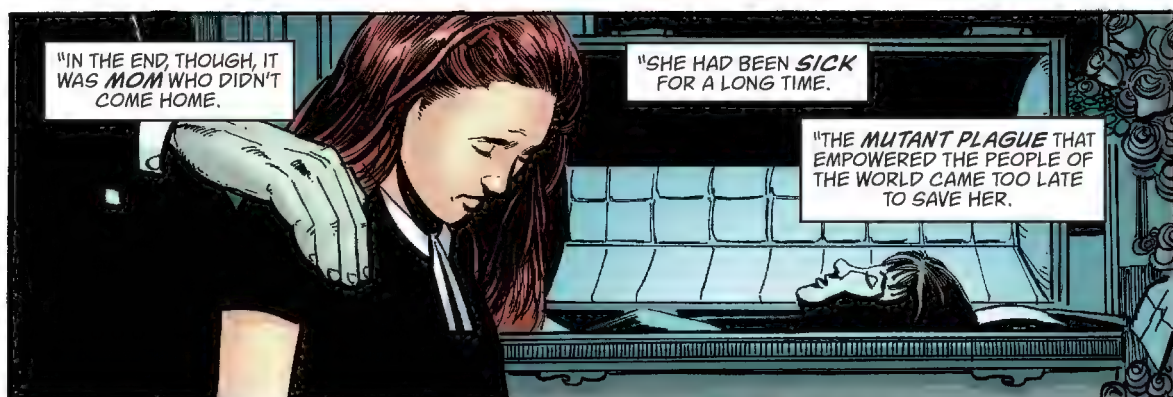
"WONDERING IF *THIS*
WOULD BE THE NIGHT."



"THE NIGHT DAD
WOULDN'T COME
HOME."







"IN THE END, THOUGH, IT WAS **MOM** WHO DIDN'T COME HOME.

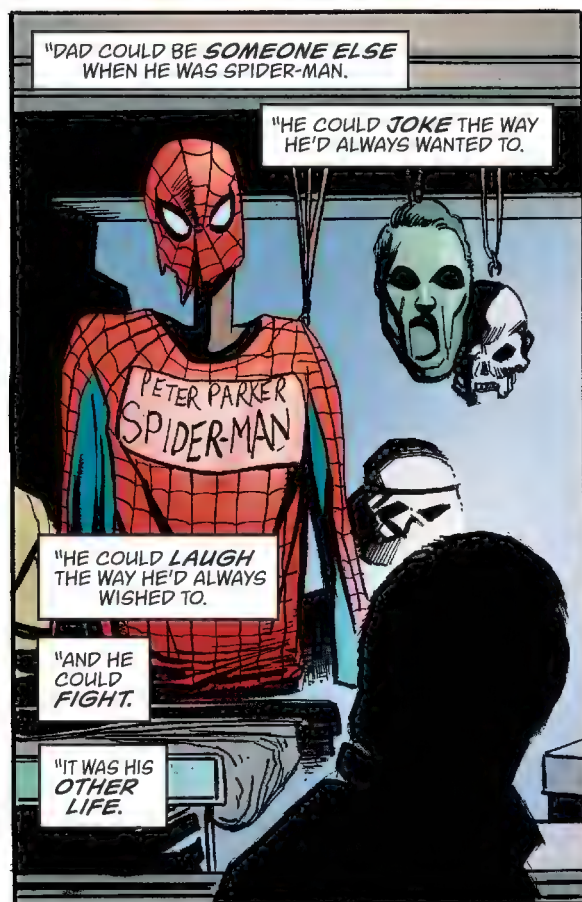
"SHE HAD BEEN **SICK** FOR A LONG TIME.

"THE **MUTANT PLAGUE** THAT EMPOWERED THE PEOPLE OF THE WORLD CAME TOO LATE TO SAVE HER.



"MOM'S DEATH OFFICIALLY **ENDED** THE CAREER OF SPIDER-MAN.

"BUT I REALLY THINK IT WAS THE DISCOVERY THAT HE **WAS** SPIDER-MAN THAT MADE HIM GIVE IT ALL UP.



"DAD COULD BE **SOMEONE ELSE** WHEN HE WAS SPIDER-MAN.

"HE COULD **JOKE** THE WAY HE'D ALWAYS WISHED TO.

"HE COULD **LAUGH** THE WAY HE'D ALWAYS WISHED TO.

"AND HE COULD **FIGHT**.

"IT WAS HIS **OTHER LIFE**.



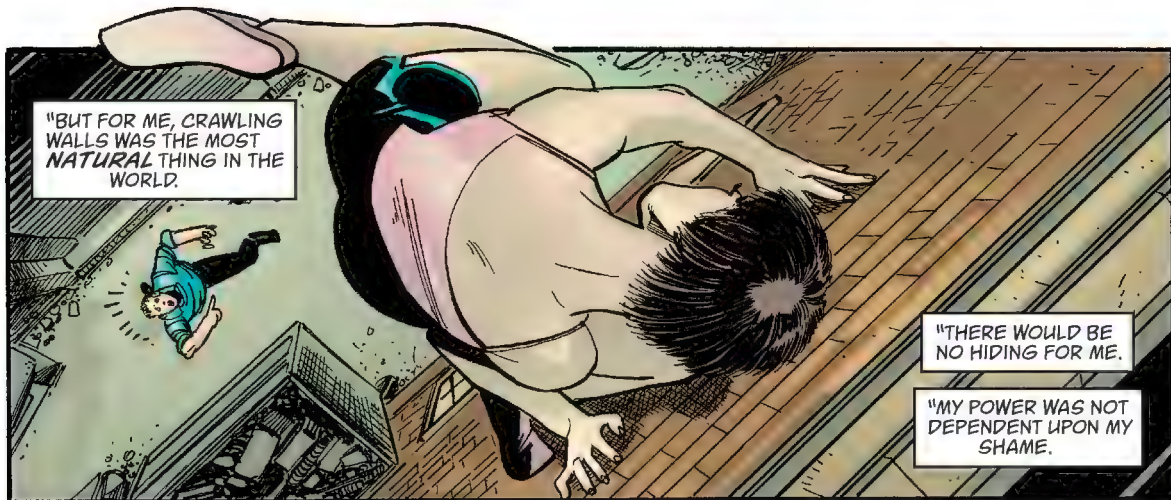
"BUT NOW HE WAS, AS HE ALWAYS HAD BEEN, JUST **PETER PARKER**.

"WHOSE POWER CAME FROM A **FLUKE**. AN **ACCIDENT**.

"WHOSE SENSE OF **RESPONSIBILITY** WAS LINKED TO THE FAILURE AND SHAME HE FELT FOR NOT HELPING A COP STOP AN ESCAPING BURGLAR.

"THE **MASK** GAVE HIM A WAY TO ESCAPE THE RESPONSIBILITY HE FELT WHEN THAT SAME BURGLAR LATER **KILLED** MY DAD'S UNCLE **BEN**.

"THE MASK WAS HIS **HIDING PLACE**."



"BUT FOR ME, CRAWLING WALLS WAS THE MOST NATURAL THING IN THE WORLD.

"THERE WOULD BE NO HIDING FOR ME.

"MY POWER WAS NOT DEPENDENT UPON MY SHAME.

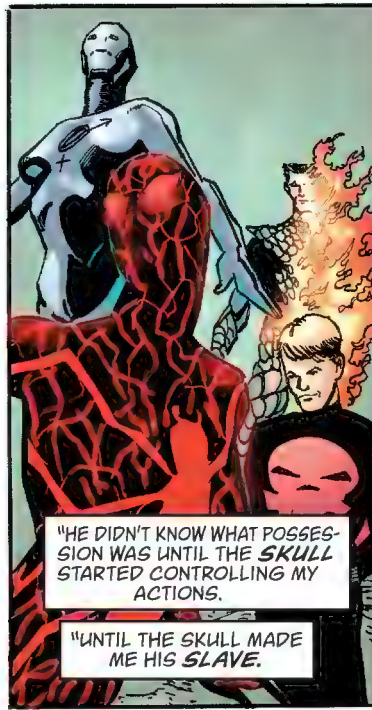


"MY FATHER MADE A LOT OF **ENEMIES**. MANY CAME AFTER ME, AS HE FEARED THEY WOULD.

"WHEN I WAS GRAFTED TO THE **ALIEN SYMBIOTE** MY FATHER HAD BROUGHT BACK FROM ANOTHER WORLD... I **BECAME** ONE OF THOSE ENEMIES IN MY FATHER'S EYES."

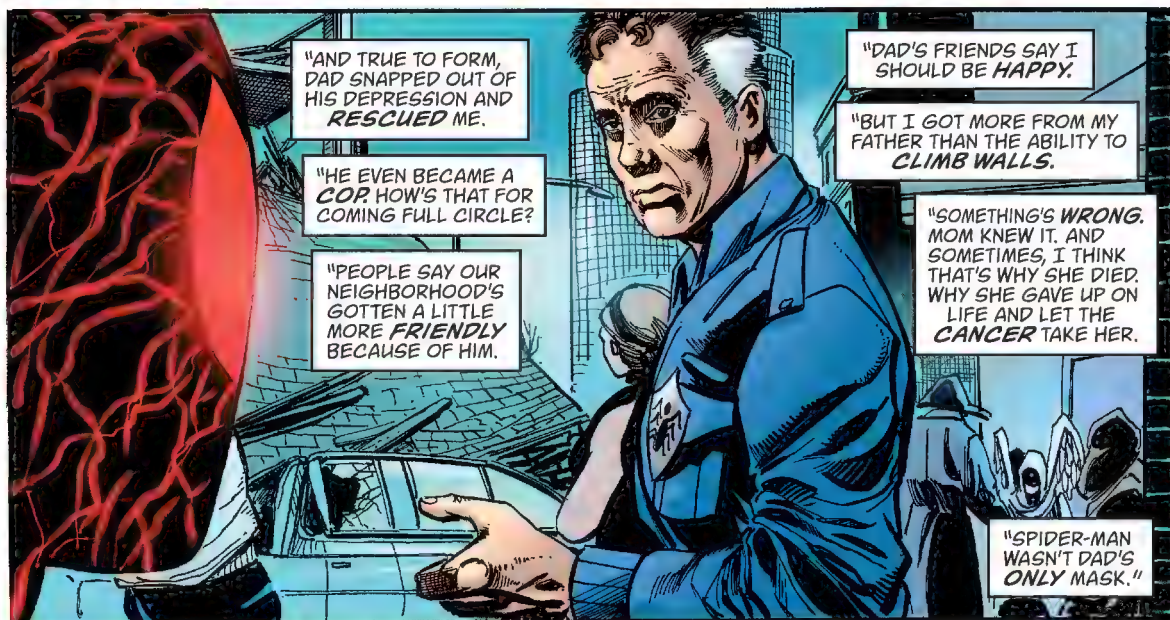


"DAD THOUGHT THE ALIEN WAS **POSSESSING** ME.



"HE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT POSSESSION WAS UNTIL THE **SKULL** STARTED CONTROLLING MY ACTIONS.

"UNTIL THE **SKULL** MADE ME HIS **SLAVE**."



"AND TRUE TO FORM, DAD SNAPPED OUT OF HIS DEPRESSION AND **RESCUED** ME.

"HE EVEN BECAME A **COP**. HOW'S THAT FOR COMING FULL CIRCLE?

"PEOPLE SAY OUR NEIGHBORHOOD'S GOTTEN A LITTLE MORE **FRIENDLY** BECAUSE OF HIM.

"DAD'S FRIENDS SAY I SHOULD BE **HAPPY**."

"BUT I GOT MORE FROM MY FATHER THAN THE ABILITY TO **CLIMB WALLS**."

"SOMETHING'S **WRONG**. MOM KNEW IT. AND SOMETIMES, I THINK THAT'S WHY SHE DIED. WHY SHE GAVE UP ON LIFE AND LET THE **CANCER** TAKE HER.

"SPIDER-MAN WASN'T DAD'S **ONLY** MASK."





THEM SILOS
AIN'T GONNA HAVE
GRAIN IN 'EM
FOREVER.

THEN IT'LL
BE UP TO SPIDERS
MAN TO **CREATE**
THE ILLUSION THAT
THERE'S STILL
FOOD.

STOP HIM,
AND YOU'LL STOP
IMMORTUS'S HOLD
ON THE PEOPLE'S
HUNGER.



I'VE ALREADY
HAD **ONE** RUN-IN WITH
SPIDERS MAN.

I'LL
GET HIM OUT OF
THE PICTURE.

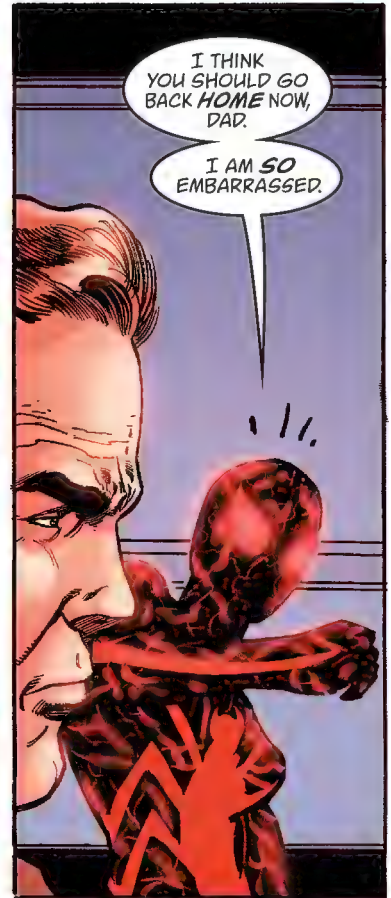


ARE WE
TALKING ABOUT
KIDNAPPING HERE?
ASSASSINATION?
WHAT?

ARE WE
THE **NYPD**? OR IS
THIS **WAR**?

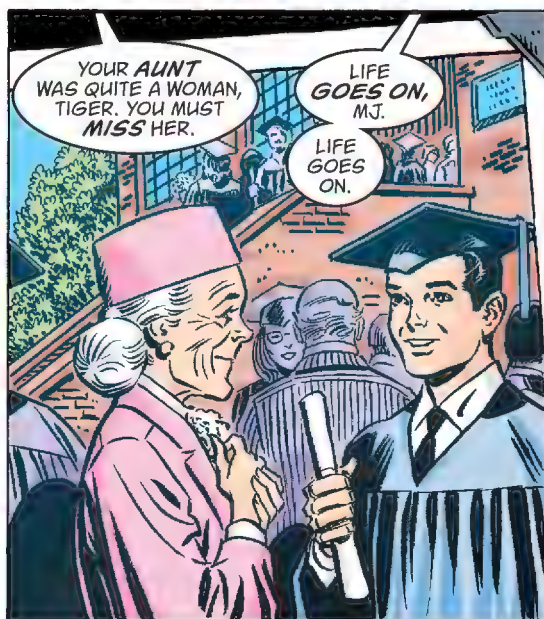
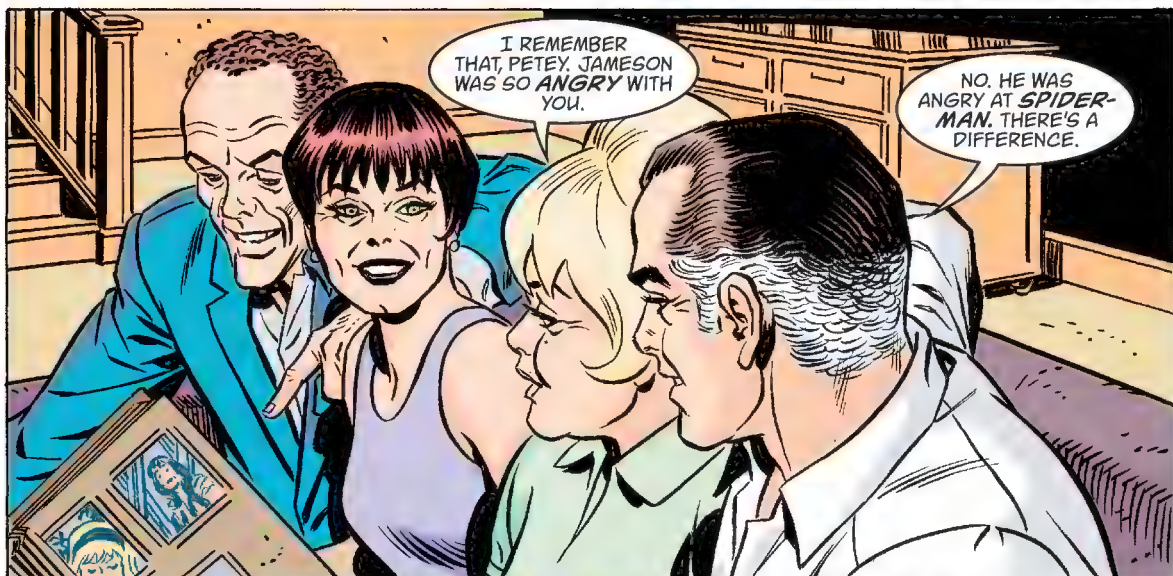


I DON'T THINK
WE SHOULD HAVE ANY
ILLUSIONS ABOUT WHAT
WE'RE DOING.



I THINK
YOU SHOULD GO
BACK **HOME** NOW,
DAD.

I AM **SO**
EMBARRASSED.





WHERE'S MY FATHER?

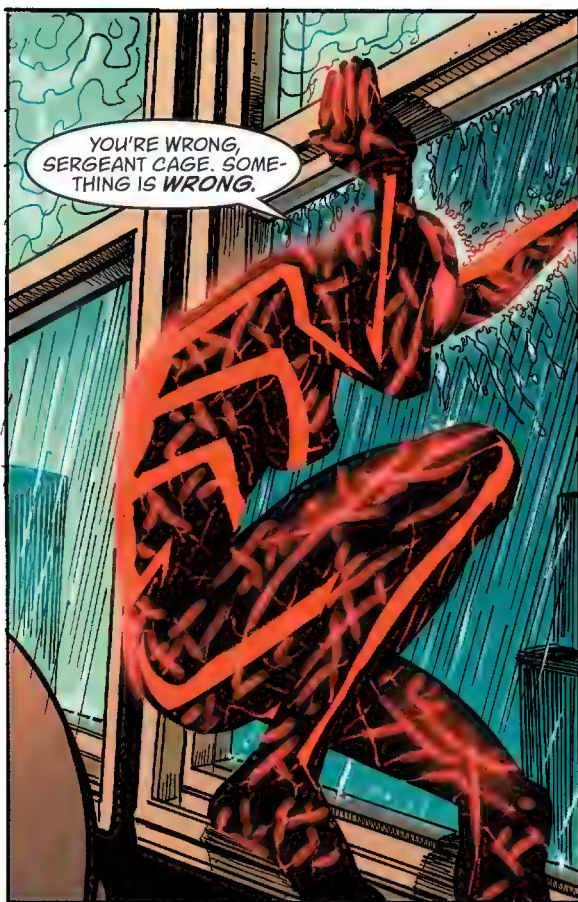
HE WENT AFTER SPIDERS MAN. YOU KNOW THAT, MAY.



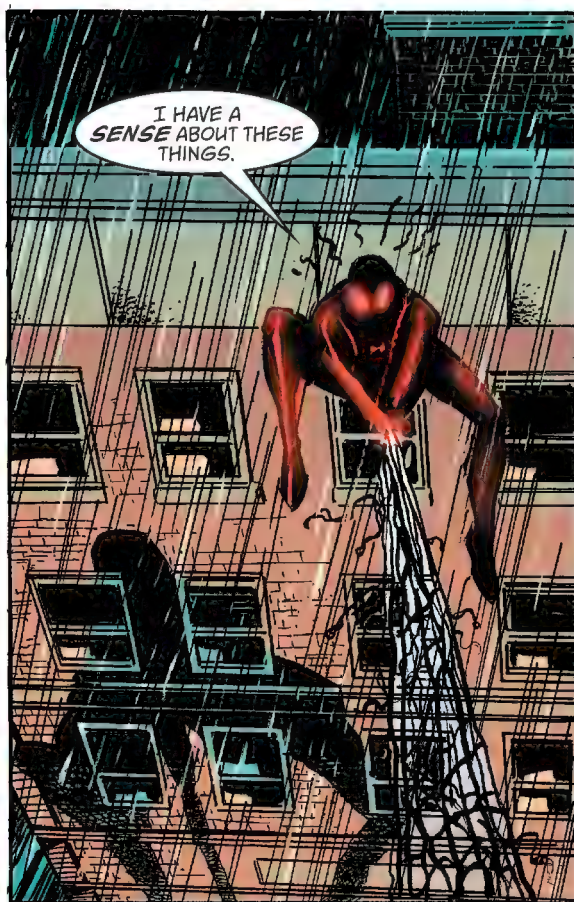
THAT WAS TWO DAYS AGO!

THE WAY YOU AND YOUR FATHER FIGHT, MAYBE YOU SHOULD BE **THANKFUL** FOR THE BREAK.

I THINK IT'S A LITTLE TOO EARLY TO SHOW CONCERN. YOUR FATHER'S GONE THROUGH MORE THAN THIS **ENTIRE PRECINCT** COMBINED.



YOU'RE WRONG, SERGEANT CAGE. SOMETHING IS **WRONG**.



I HAVE A **SENSE** ABOUT THESE THINGS.



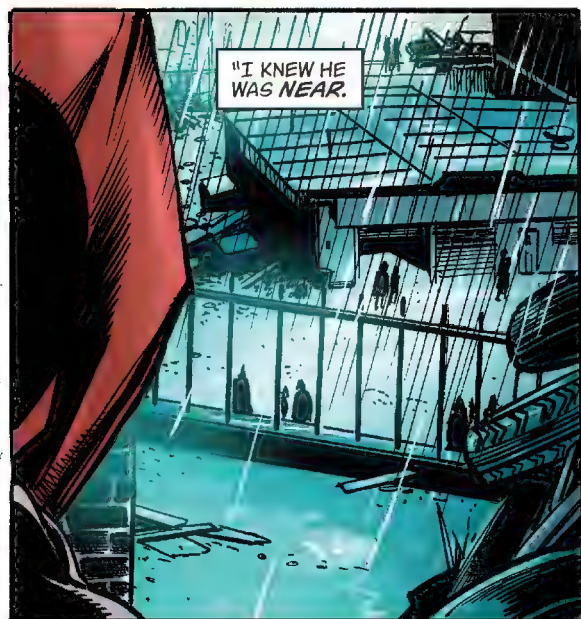
"I LOOKED *EVERY-WHERE* FOR MY FATHER.

"IT WASN'T DIFFICULT TO CHANGE MY APPEARANCE.



"'UNCLE MATT' TAUGHT ME HOW TO USE MY SPIDER-SENSE LIKE *RADAR*.

"I COULD USE IT TO FIND A NEEDLE IN A HAYSTACK.

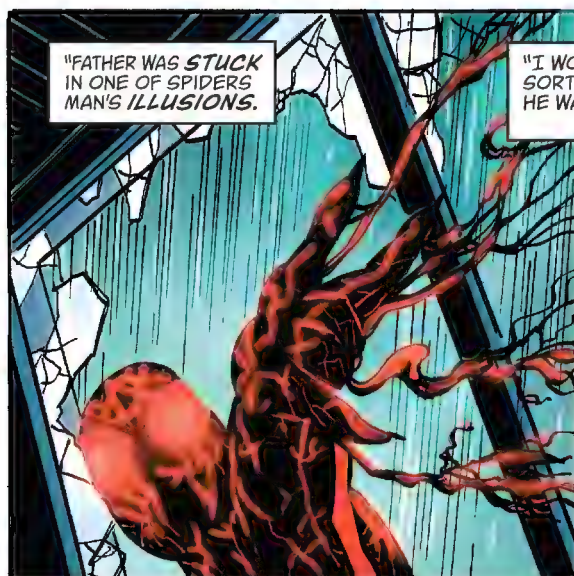


"I KNEW HE WAS *NEAR*.

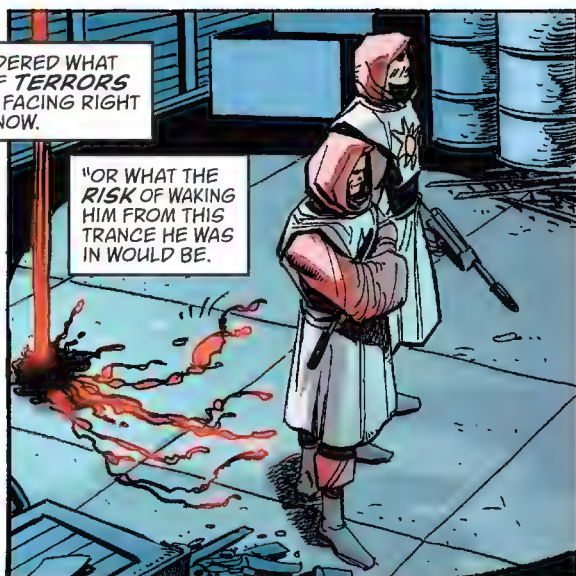


"I *SENSED* MY FATHER BEFORE I SAW HIM.

"I COULD HAVE FOUND HIM EVEN IF I WERE *BLIND*."



"FATHER WAS *STUCK*
IN ONE OF SPIDERS
MAN'S *ILLUSIONS*.



"I WONDERED WHAT
SORT OF *TERRORS*
HE WAS FACING RIGHT
NOW.

"OR WHAT THE
RISK OF WAKING
HIM FROM THIS
TRANCE HE WAS
IN WOULD BE.



"NOT AROUSING IMMORTUS'S
LEGIONS WOULD BE KEY.

"THIS WOULD HAVE TO BE *QUICK*.

"*SILENT*.

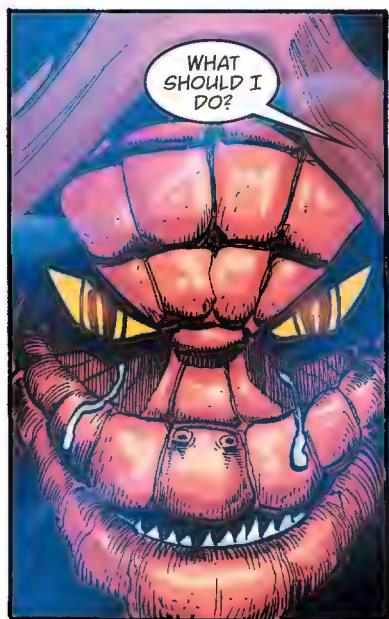


"*OVER* BEFORE IT *BEGAN*.

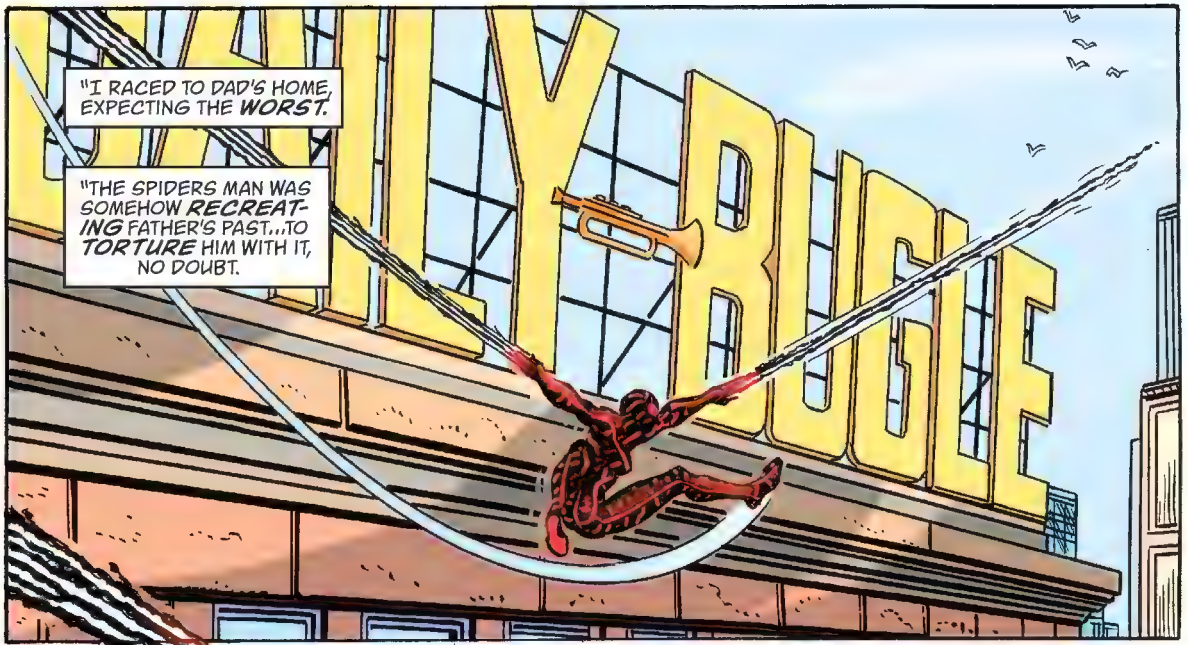


"BUT I WASN'T QUIET
ENOUGH. OTHERS
HAD HEARD. THEY'D BE
HERE *ANY MOMENT*."









"I RACED TO DAD'S HOME,
EXPECTING THE **WORST**."

"THE SPIDERS MAN WAS
SOMEHOW **RECREAT-
ING** FATHER'S PAST...TO
TORTURE HIM WITH IT,
NO DOUBT."



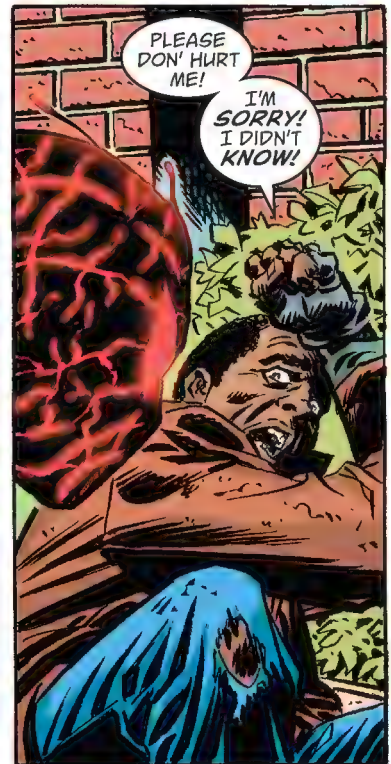
"THE LAST PERSON I EXPECTED
TO SEE WAS **SPIDERS MAN**
HIMSELF."



"IT'S **YOU**, ISN'T
IT?! YOU **TRAPPED**
MY FATHER HERE!"

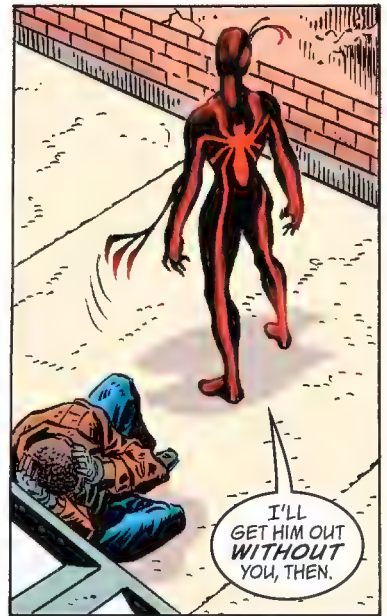
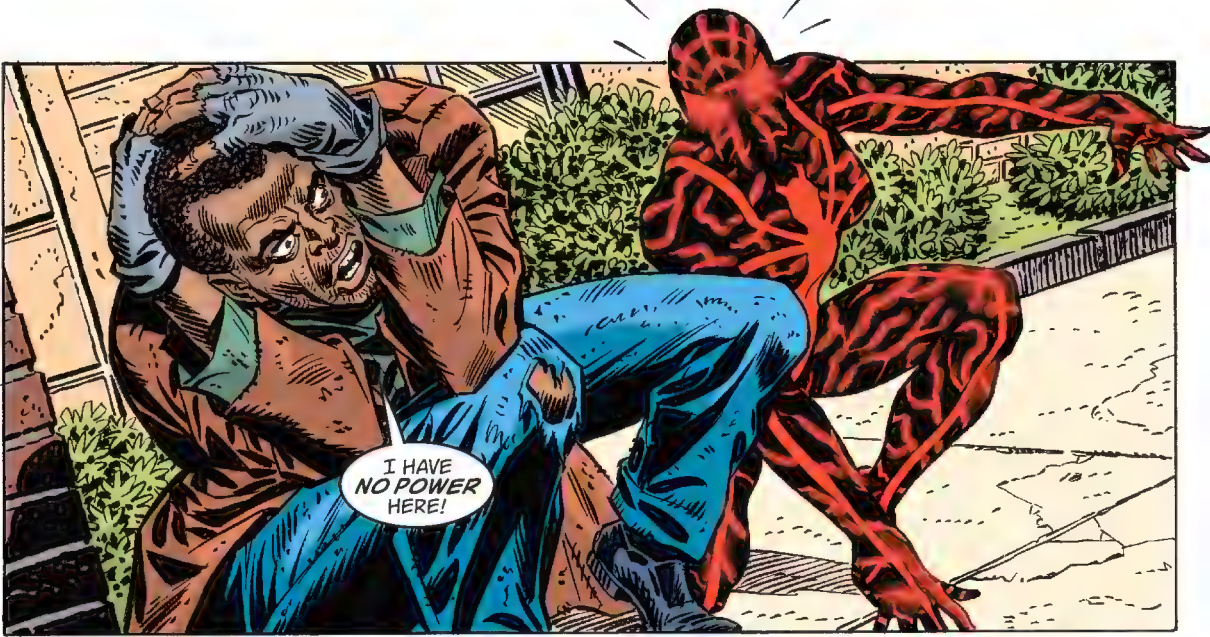


"LET
HIM
GO!"



"PLEASE
DON'T HURT
ME!"

"I'M
SORRY!
I DIDN'T
KNOW!"



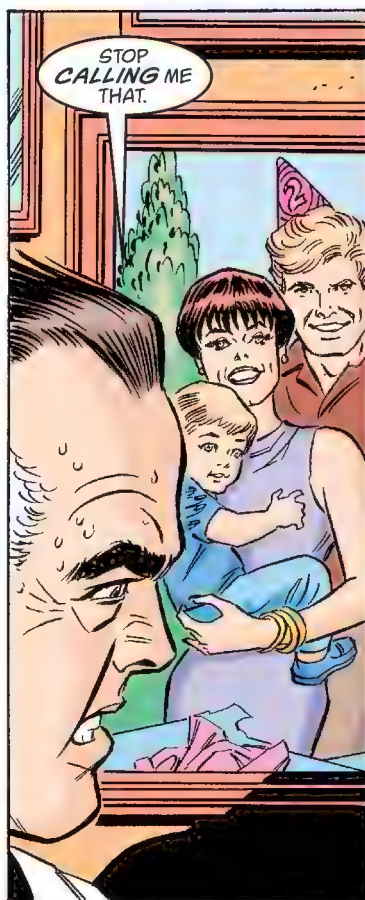


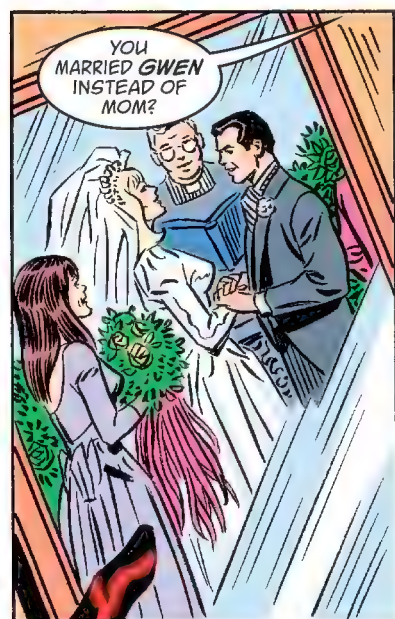
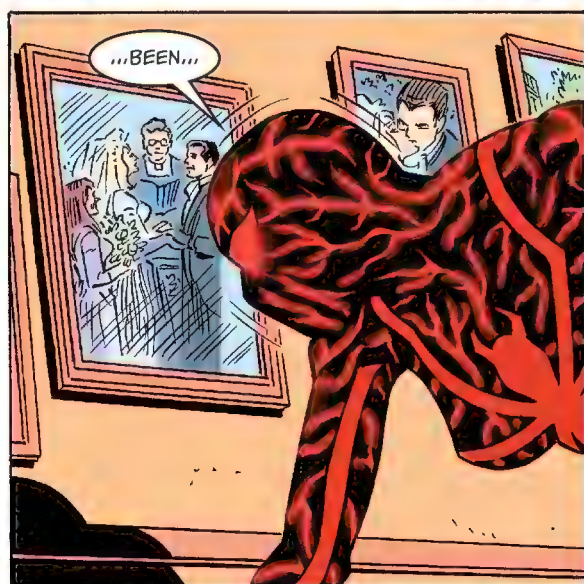
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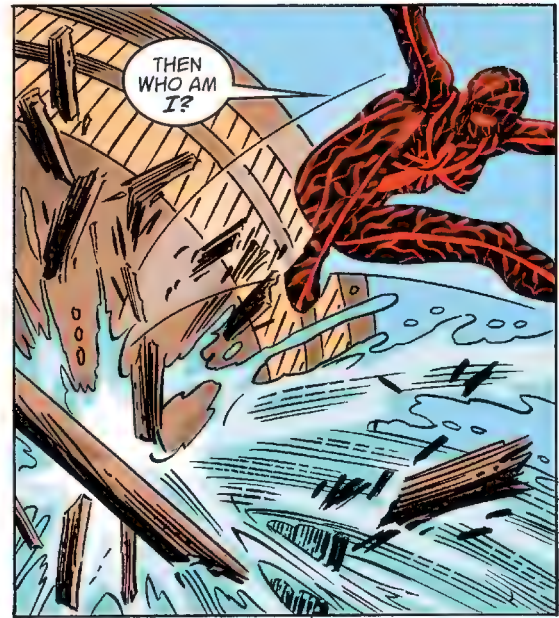


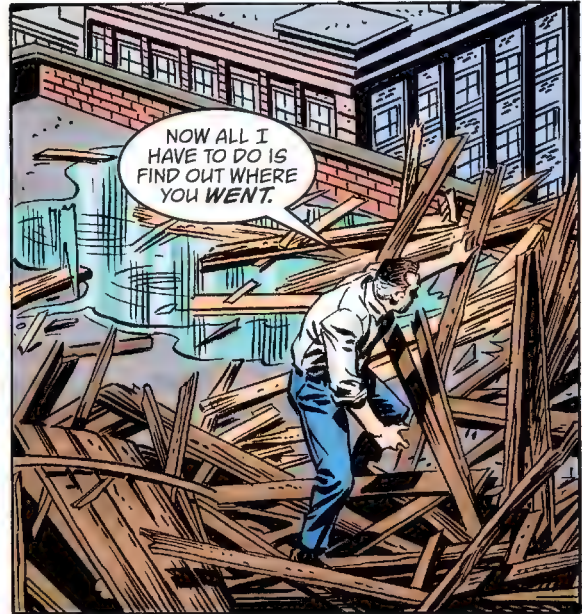
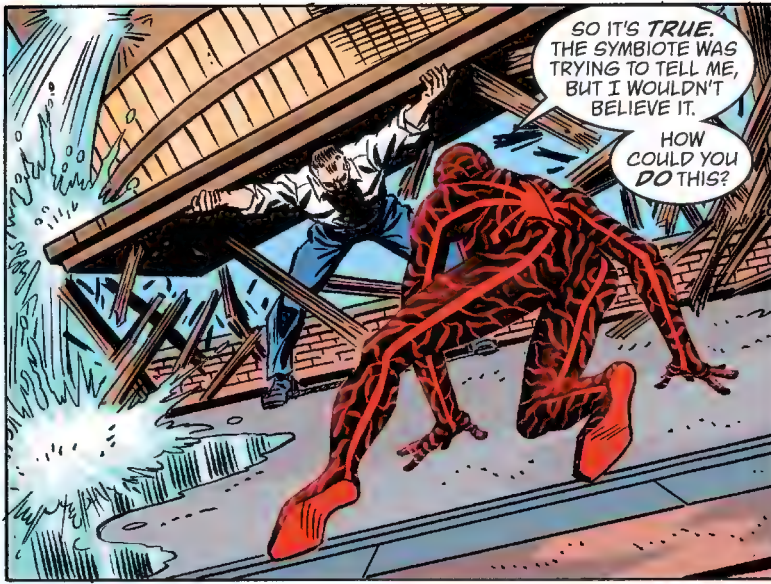


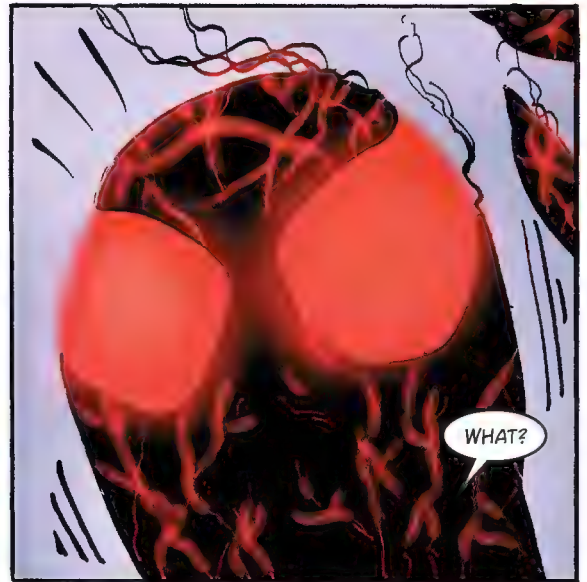














I'M NOT GOING TO FIGHT YOU, DAD.

BUT HOW COULD YOU?

HOW COULD YOU MARRY GWEN?

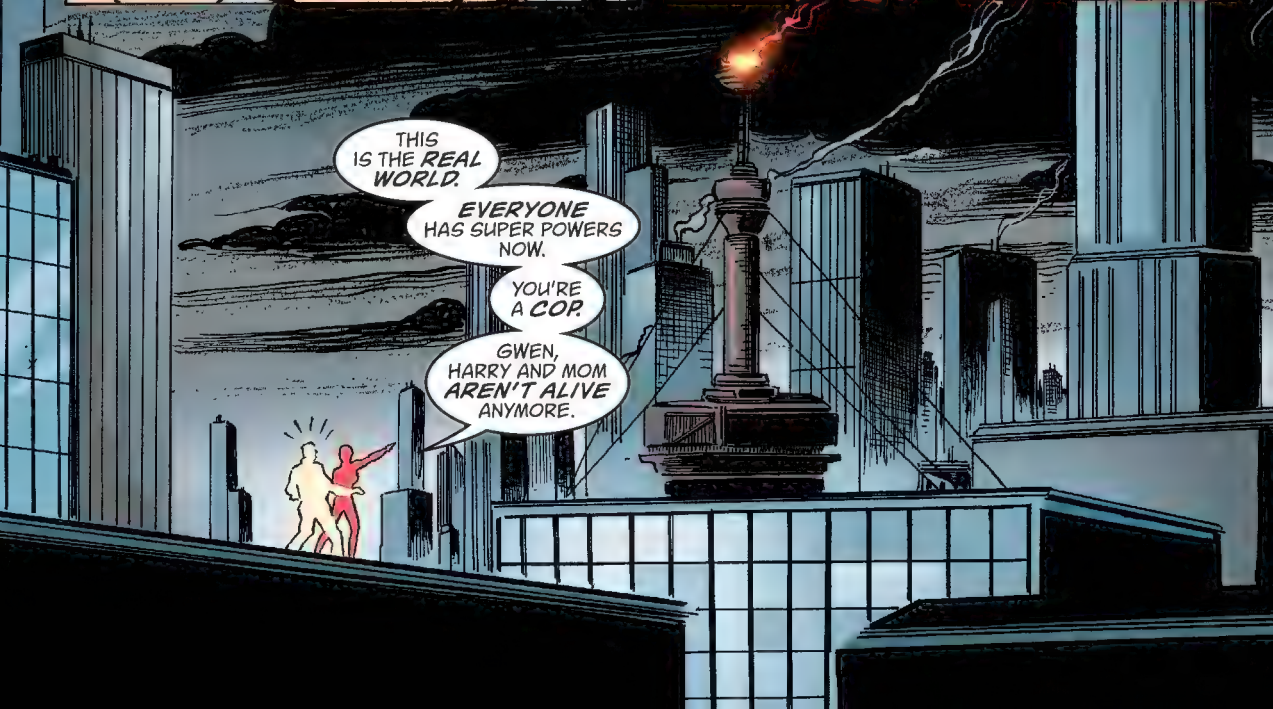
AND HOW COULD YOU LET MOM MARRY THE SON OF THE MAN WHO DESTROYED ALMOST EVERYTHING YOU EVER CARED FOR?



SHUT UP! YOU'RE TRYING TO TRICK ME!



NO.

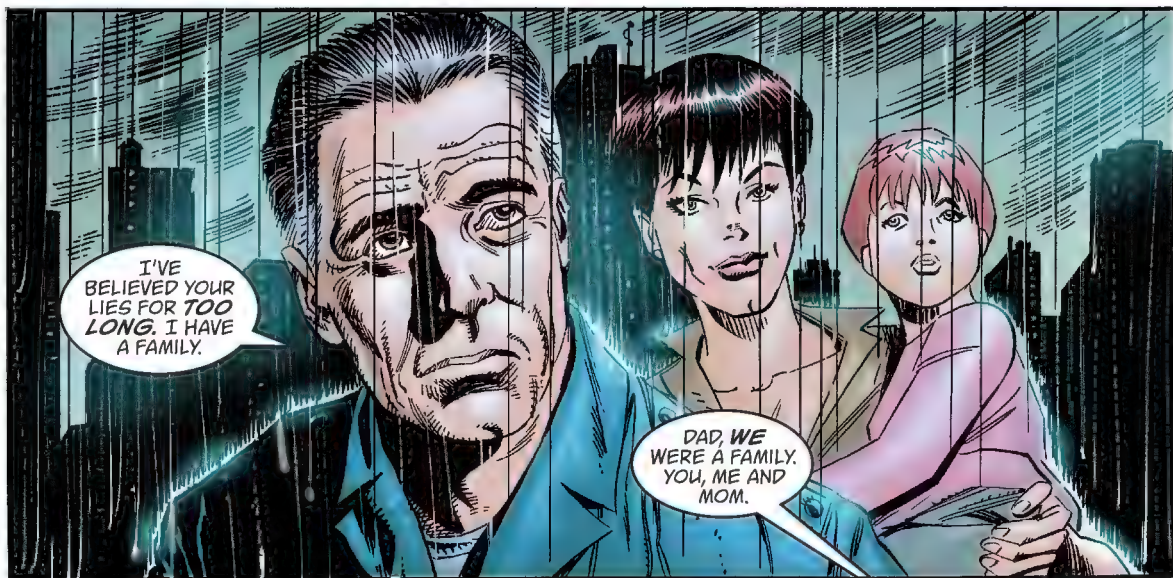


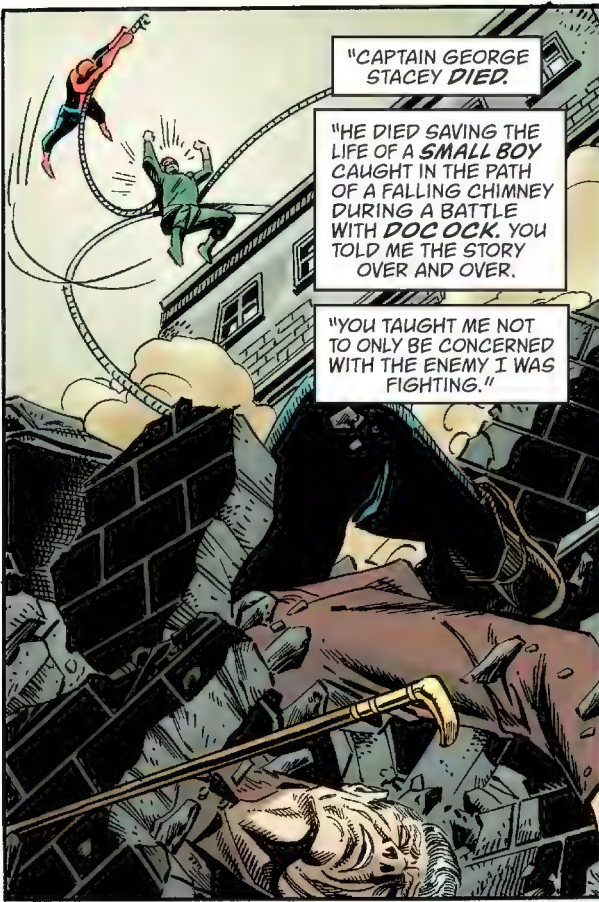
THIS IS THE REAL WORLD.

EVERYONE HAS SUPER POWERS NOW.

YOU'RE A COP.

GWEN, HARRY AND MOM AREN'T ALIVE ANYMORE.

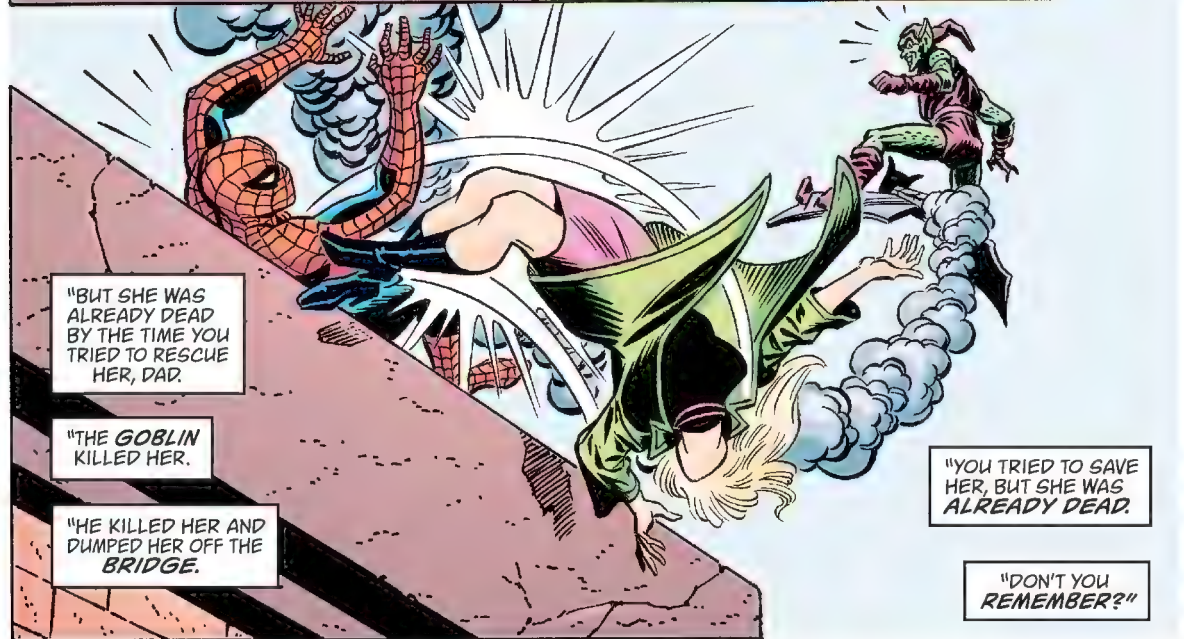






"THE GOBLIN KNEW YOU WERE
PETER PARKER. HE KNEW
HOW TO ATTACK YOU.

"THROUGH
GWEN.



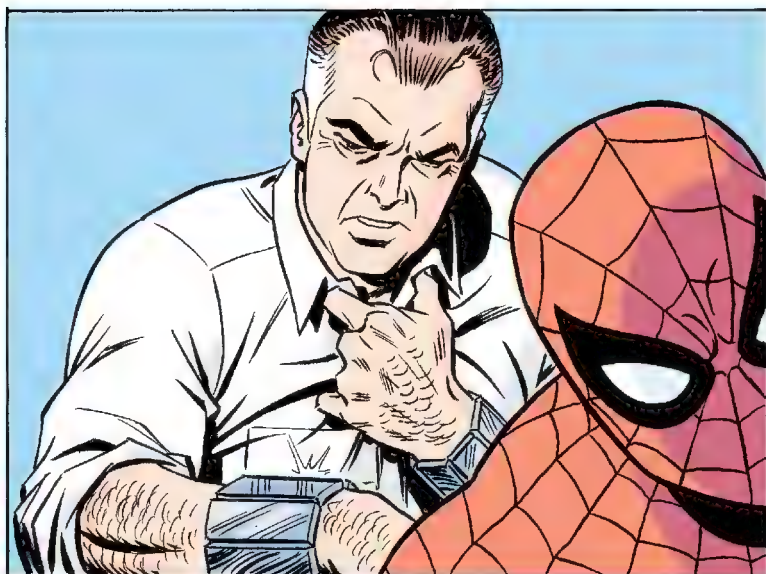
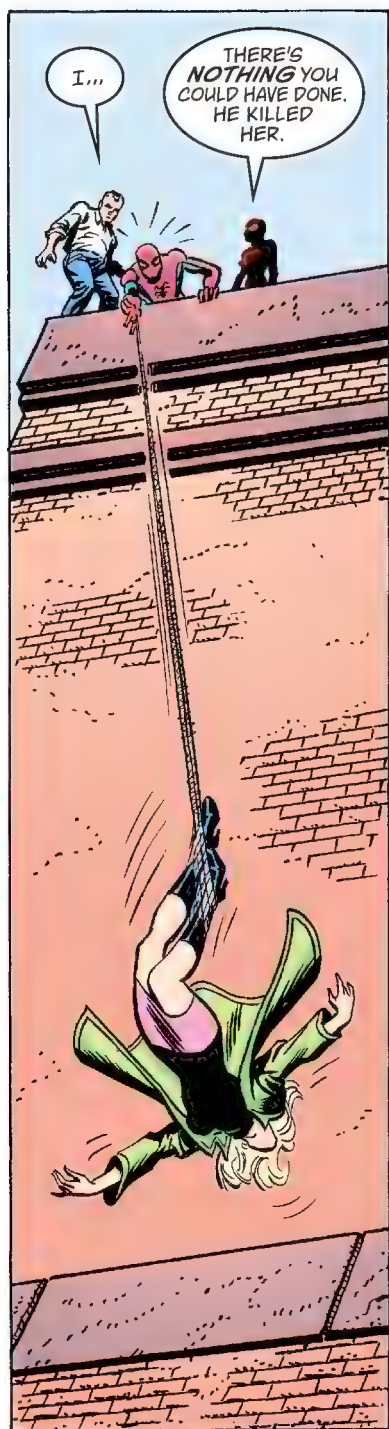
"BUT SHE WAS
ALREADY DEAD
BY THE TIME YOU
TRIED TO RESCUE
HER, DAD.

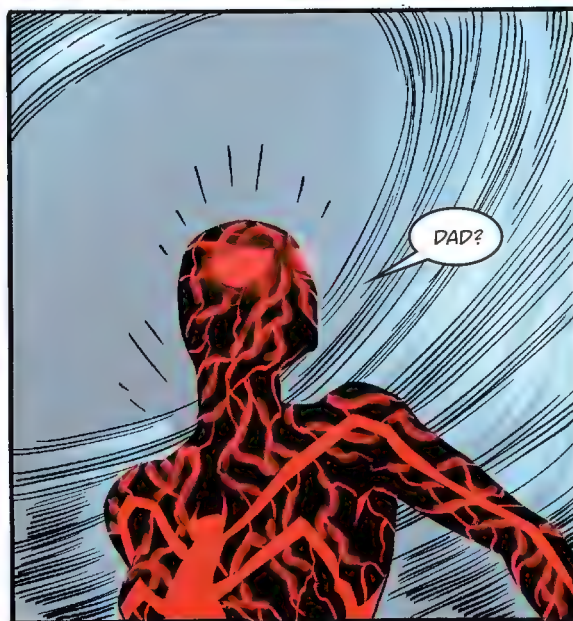
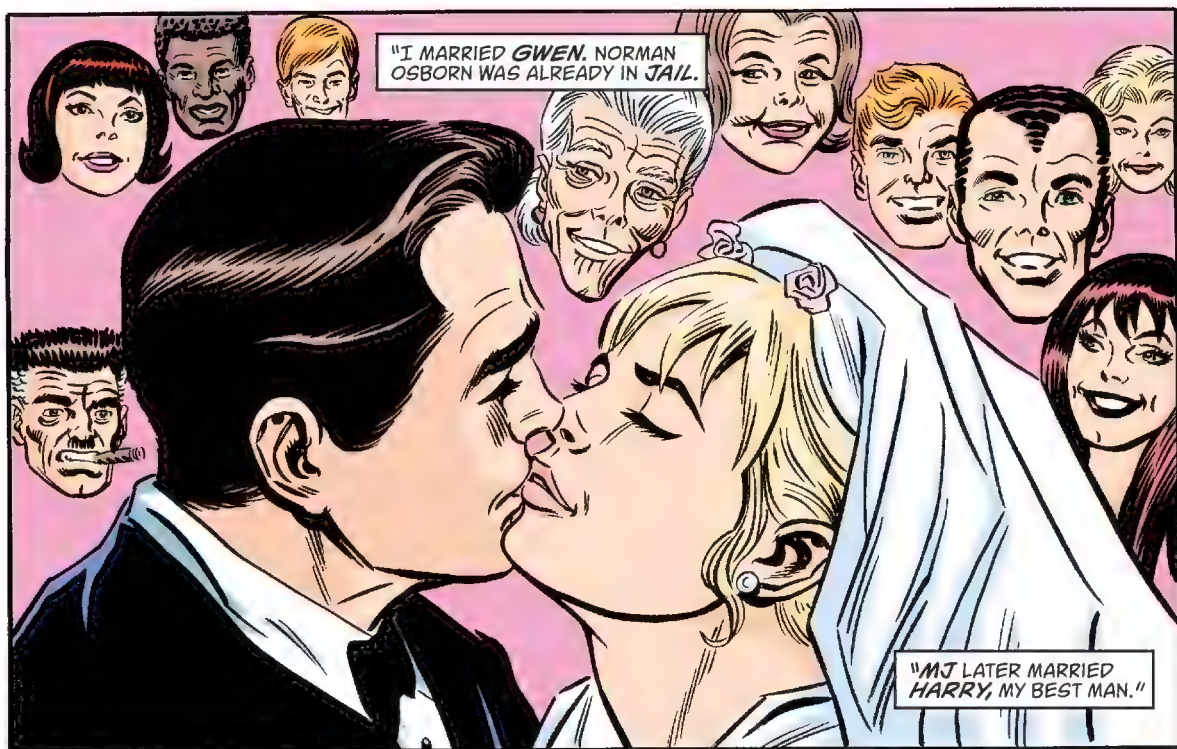
"THE **GOBLIN**
KILLED HER.

"HE KILLED HER AND
DUMPED HER OFF THE
BRIDGE.

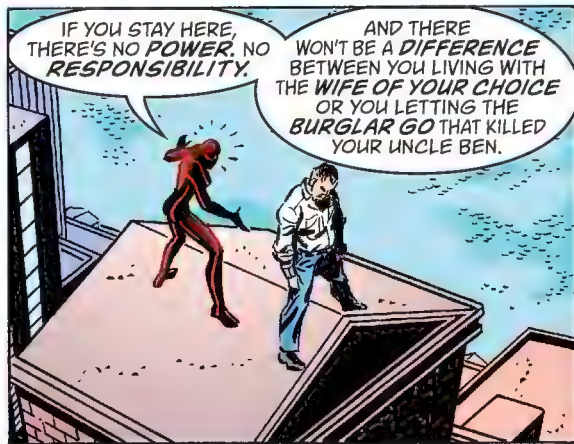
"YOU TRIED TO SAVE
HER, BUT SHE WAS
ALREADY DEAD.

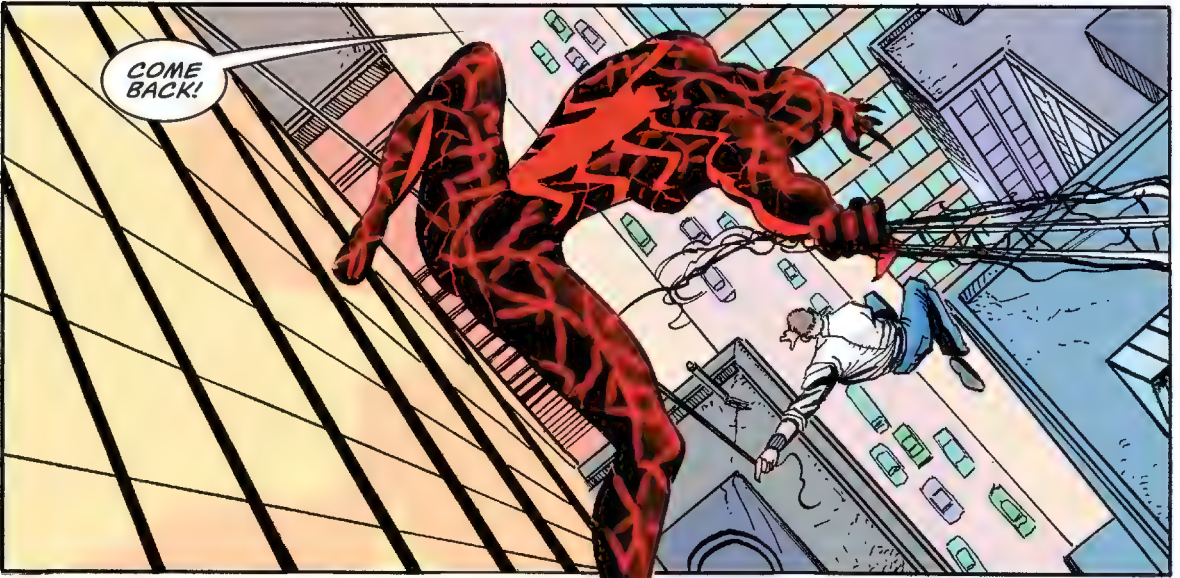
"DON'T YOU
REMEMBER?"













I'M NOT
IN THE HABIT
OF HITTING
GIRLS!

YOU'RE
A GIRL,
RIGHT?

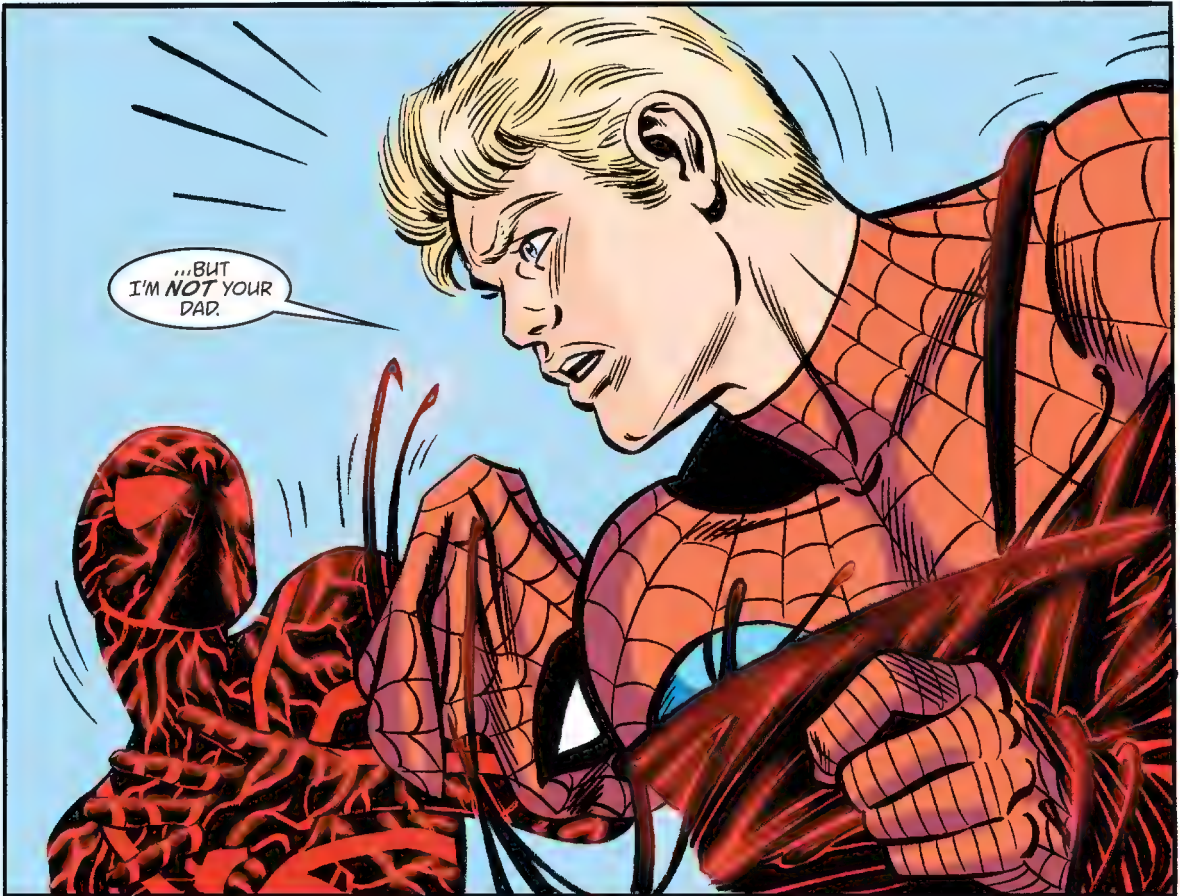
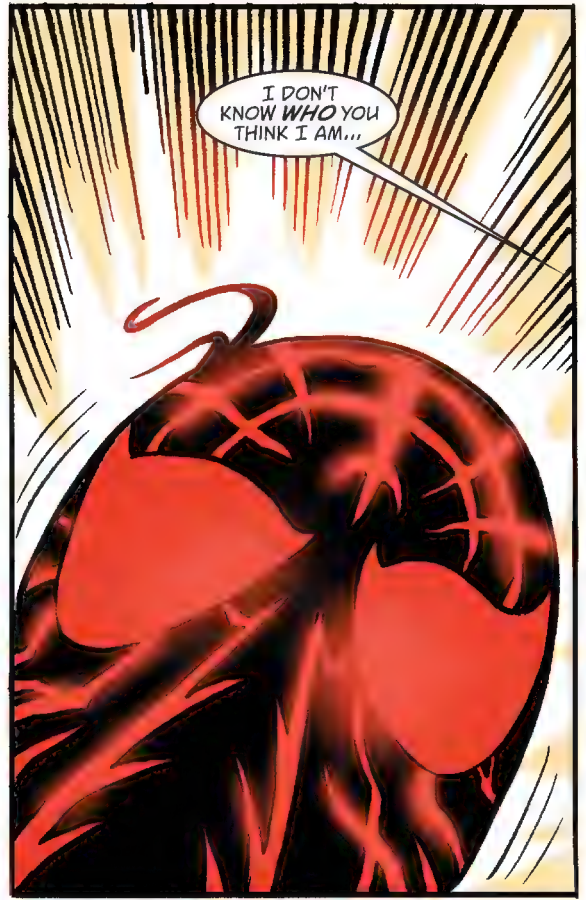
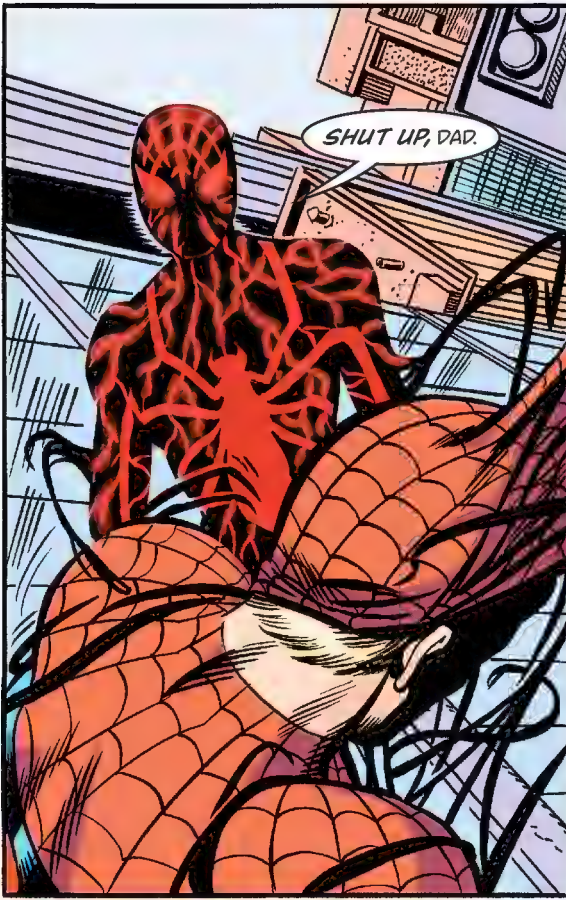
IT'S NOT
LIKE I CAN LOOK UP
YOUR TENTACLES
OR ANYTHING.

STOP
IT, DAD.

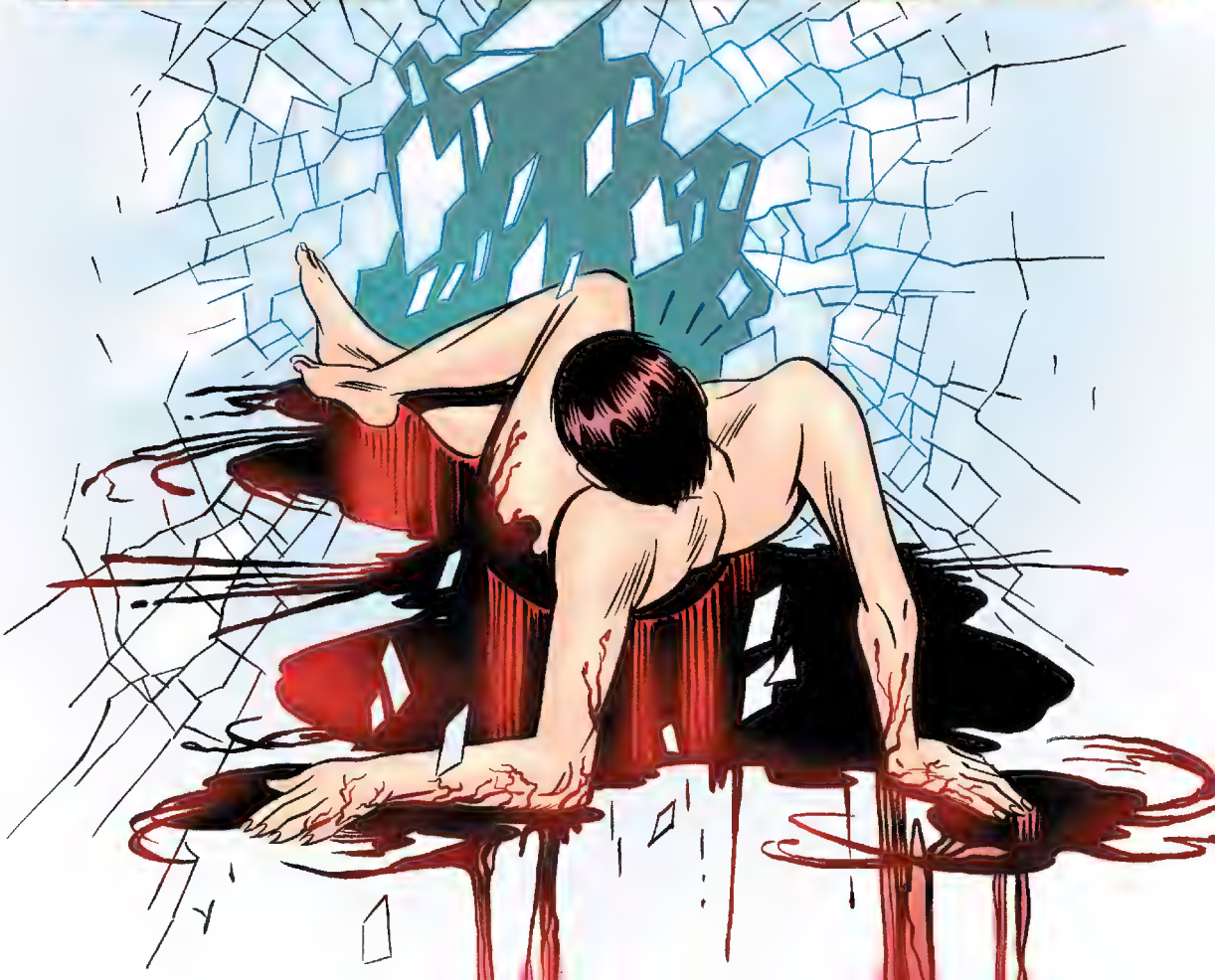
DAD?
I'M NOT
SURE I SEE THE
FAMILY RESEM-
BLANCE.

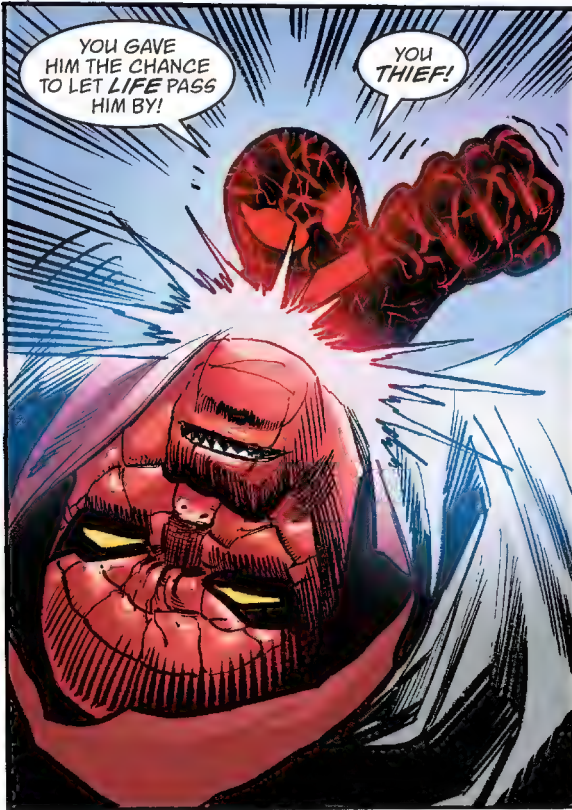
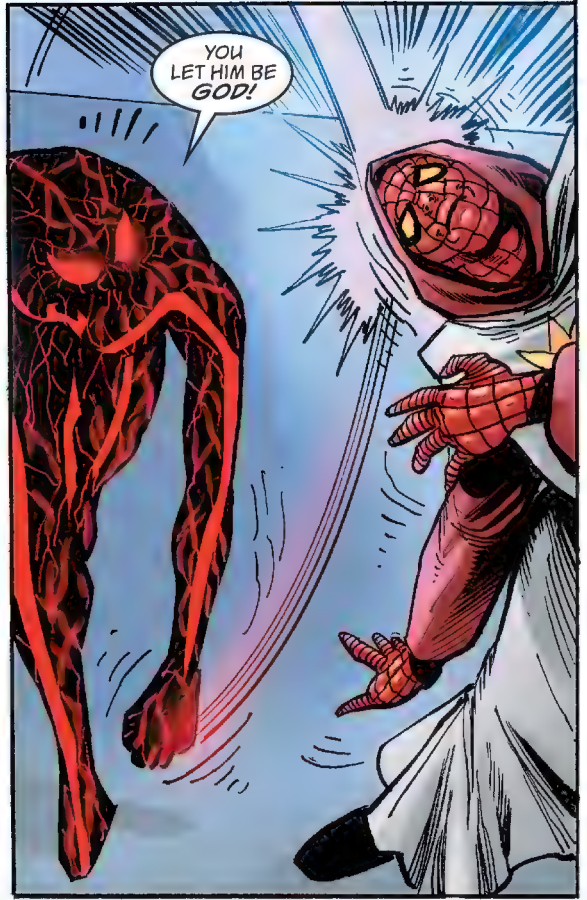
NOW WHY
DON'T YOU BE
A GOOD LITTLE
BAD GIRL, AND
JUST GIVE
UP?













DON'T YOU
DARE TALK TO ME
ABOUT **PAIN!**



DON'T **TOUCH**
ME. PLEASE, I CAN'T
TAKE IT.

YOU DON'T LIKE
TO BE **TOUCHED**?
YOUR SKIN IS **THAT**
SENSITIVE?



DO YOU HAVE
ANY IDEA HOW LOOKING
THE WAY YOU DO MAKES
ME **FEEL**?

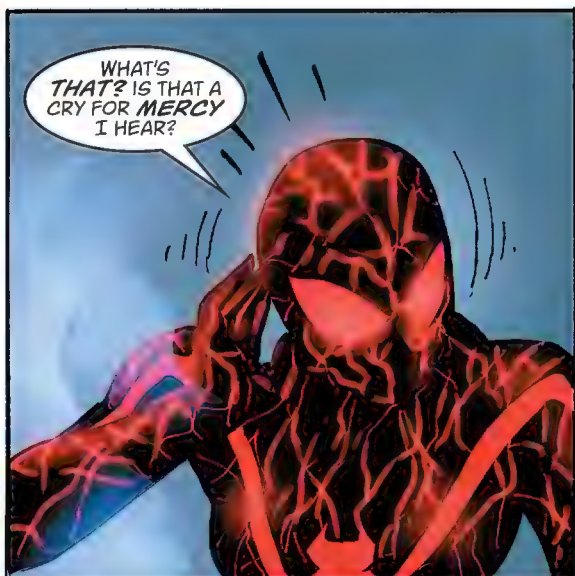
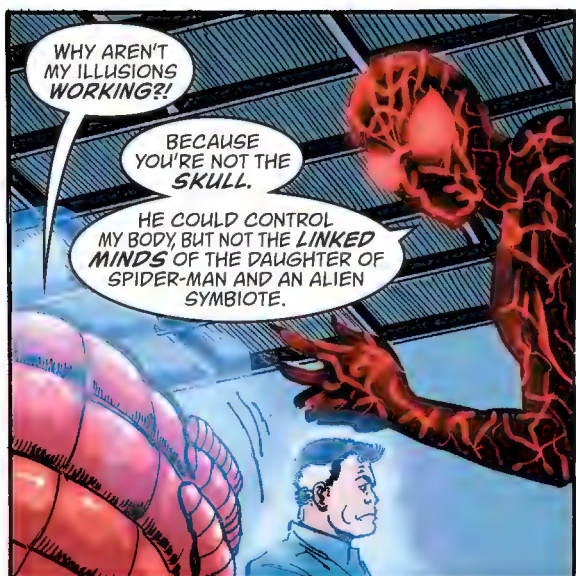
DO YOU,
SPIDERS MAN?

SPIDERS MAN!

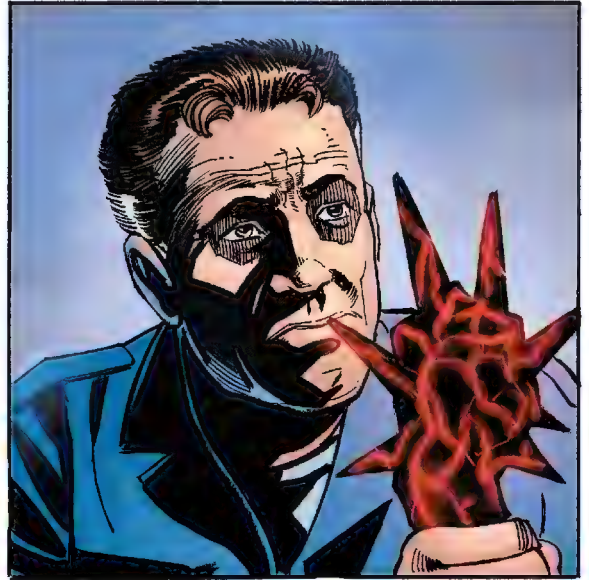


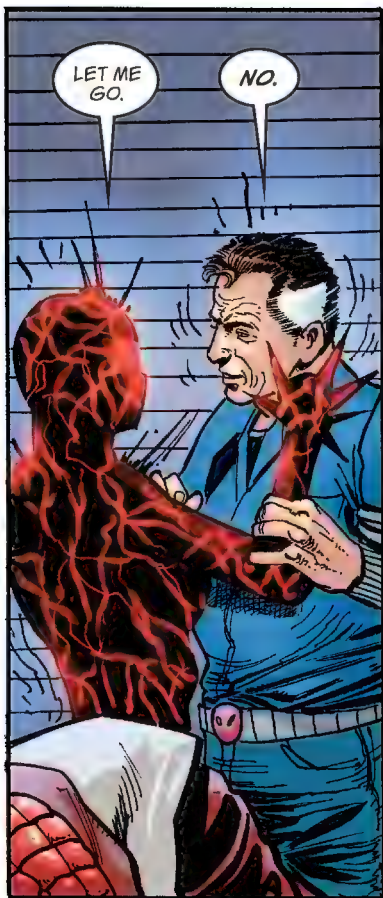
NO!

YOU WOULD
USE MY **MOTHER**
AGAINST ME?











I'M
JUST YOUR
DAUGHTER,
DAD.

WHY'D YOU
COME OUT OF THE
ILLUSION? YOU HAD
EVERYTHING
THERE. A WIFE, A
FAMILY, FRIENDS.

EVERY-
THING.



WHEN I SAW YOU,
EVERYTHING WASN'T
ENOUGH.

I KEPT ASKING
MYSELF **WHY**, IF IT WAS
ALL AN ILLUSION, WHY I
STILL LET THE **BURGLAR**
PASS BY?

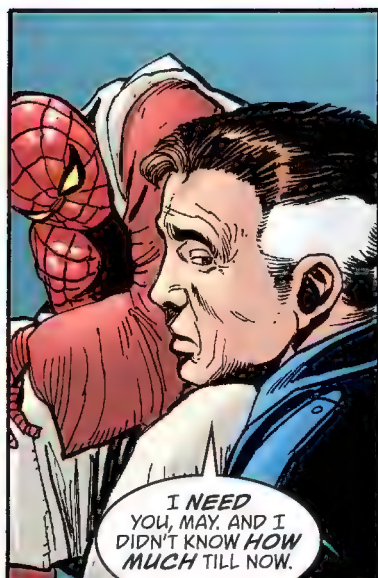


WHY DID I
LET **UNCLE BEN**
DIE?

WHY
DIDN'T I
CHANGE
THAT?



MAYBE BECAUSE
THE WORLD NEEDS
A **SPIDER-MAN**,
DAD?



I **NEED**
YOU, MAY. AND I
DIDN'T KNOW **HOW**
MUCH TILL NOW.



AND I
HAVE **YOU** TO
THANK, **SPIDERS**
MAN.

WILL YOU
COME WITH
US?

UNIVERSE



KRUEGER
BRAITHWAITE
REINHOLD

“I’m hearing the rustling of papers, Isaac. Is something wrong with one of the pages I’ve dictated?”

“Certainly not, Kyle. It is merely a note I wrote to myself. A reminder of an errand I have planned for myself. I am curious as to why you cannot see the words on this page the same way you can predict other pregnant events of our day.”

“I...don’t know why. Sometimes things that are especially close to me are impossible to see. Like a blind spot or something. What did the note say?”

“That if we are now writing mankind’s last days on planet Earth, I am going to need quite a bit more paper. Now continue...”

UNIVERSE X

I S S U E 4

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"I SEE **RAGNAROK**, ISAAC."

"THE FALL OF THE **NORSE GODS** OF MYTH?"

"YES. BUT THIS IS **NOTHING** LIKE MYTH. AS **ODIN** DIES, HIS LIFE PASSES BEFORE HIS EYES. I SEE WHAT HE SEES. HIS **PAST**. I EXPERIENCE WHAT HE EXPERIENCED."

"I'M IN NORTHERN EUROPE A LONG TIME AGO. **ALIENS** HAVE LANDED BEFORE A GROUP OF **VIKINGS**. THE ALIENS ARE FORMLESS. ALMOST WITHOUT DEFINITION. IT'S ACTUALLY VERY DIFFICULT TO FOCUS ON THEM."

"A NORSEMAN, WHO WAS A KEEPER OF THE OLD STORIES OF THEIR RELIGION, APPROACHES THE ALIENS IN **FRIENDSHIP**. HE WALKS WITH A **LIMP**."

"HE CALLS THE ALIENS **BROTHERS**, IN FEAR OF THEIR TERRIBLE POWER. MAGICALLY, THEY **BECOME** HIS BROTHERS. WHATEVER THEY WERE BEFORE THIS POINT IS INCONSEQUENTIAL."

"THE NORSEMAN FEARS A FIRE DEMON KNOWN AS **SURTUR**...AND ONE OF THE ALIEN BEINGS BEGINS TO **CHANGE**... AND SURTUR APPEARS FOR THE FIRST TIME."

"ARE YOU IMPLYING THAT THIS MAN SOMEHOW **SUGGESTED** THE IDENTITIES OF THESE ALIENS ACCORDING TO HIS **FEARS**?"

"YES."

"WHO WAS THIS MAN?"

"HE TOLD THEM TO CALL HIM **ODIN**. AND THE THREE RODE OFF BEFORE THE SURPRISED NORSEMAN TO FACE THE FIRE DEMON."

"I AM FAMILIAR WITH THE **LEGEND OF SURTUR** AND THE **SWORD** SAID TO MARK THE **END OF ASGARD**. THE FABLE GOES ON TO DESCRIBE HOW ODIN RECEIVED THE POWER OF HIS TWO BROTHERS AND WENT ON TO DEFEAT AND BANISH SURTUR. DID THIS LEGEND COME OUT OF THE EVENTS YOU DESCRIBE?"

"IT'S THE EXACT **OPPOSITE**. THE EVENTS I DESCRIBE **BECAME** THE LEGEND AS YOU KNOW IT. THE TWO ALIENS THIS NORSEMAN CALLED BROTHERS **ENTERED** THE NORSEMAN, ADDING THEIR BEING TO HIS."

"AFTER THIS, **ODIN**, AS HE WAS NOW CALLED, RETURNED NOT TO HIS FELLOW NORSEMEN, BUT TO THE **ALIENS**."

"HE GAVE THEM **IDENTITY**. HE FORGED A **NEW WORLD** WHICH EXISTS OUTSIDE OUR OWN."

"ONE BASED ON THE **OLD STORIES** PASSED DOWN TO HIM. AND WHEN STORIES DID NOT EXIST TO ANSWER STRUCTURAL LOGIC, THE STORYTELLER **IMPROVISED**, CREATING A WORLD IN WHICH HE'D RATHER LIVE."

"A REALITY **INVISIBLE** TO HIS FELLOW NORSEMEN."

"NOT MERELY ONE WORLD, BUT **NINE**. NINE WORLDS FROM WHICH HE MIGHT ESCAPE OUR REALITY."

"THIS LOWLY HISTORIAN SET HIMSELF UP AS **KING** AND **FATHER** OF A NATION...OF SIX DIFFERENT RACES, IN FACT."

"AND BECAME, TO A CERTAIN EXTENT, **OMNISCIENT**. ALL-SEEING."

"A **CERTAIN** EXTENT?"

"OF COURSE. HE WAS AWARE OF EVERYTHING, SO LONG AS IT RESULTED FROM HIS STORIES AND **VISION**."

"BUT WHAT ODIN DID **NOT** SEE WAS THE DEATH OF **MYTH** SPAWNED IN THE **20TH CENTURY**."

"HIS WORLD WAS NOT SUSTAINED BY HIS **THOUGHTS** ALONE-- BUT BY THE **PRAYERS** AND **IDEAS** OF HIS FELLOW NORSEMEN."

"AND AS THEY TURNED FROM THEIR GODS TO TRUSTING **THEMSELVES** FOR THEIR DESTINY, THE GOLDEN REALM BEGAN TO **CRUMBLE** AND **BREAK**."

"ODIN WAS FACED WITH THE NEED TO SAVE HIS REALM BY REIGNITING MANKIND'S **FAITH** IN THEIR EXISTENCE."

"HE SENDS ONE OF HIS ALIEN SUBJECTS TO EARTH, ONE WHO HAS ALREADY BEEN KNOWN IN ASGARD AS **THOR**."

"ODIN SENDS THIS THOR BACK AS A **MAN**, AS ODIN ONCE WAS. HE WALKS WITH A LIMP AND IS KNOWN AS **DONALD BLAKE**. THIS BECOMES THOR'S EARTH-BOUND IDENTITY."

"WHY WOULD THOR NEED AN EARTH-BOUND IDENTITY?"

"WHEN BLAKE TRANSFORMS INTO THOR, HE DOES **NOT** RESEMBLE THE THOR HE DID IN ASGARD. THIS IS A TIME WHERE **HEROES** WALK THE EARTH, WHERE A **NEW MYTHOLOGY** HAS OVERTAKEN THE OLD."

"THIS MODERN MYTH WAS MIXED WITH MULTI-COLORED COSTUMES AND SUPER-HEROIC IDEOLOGIES. EVEN **ASGARD** WAS CHANGED INTO A WORLD GOVERNED BY SCIENCE-FICTIONAL DYNAMICS."

"EVEN THE **GODS** WORE MASKS NOW."

"DID ODIN'S PLAN CEMENT THE FUTURE AND STRENGTH OF ASGARD?"

"NO. IT WASN'T ENOUGH."

"A **WAR** WAS NEEDED TO APPEAL TO MANKIND'S BELIEF IN GOOD AND EVIL."

"A **VILLAIN** WAS REQUIRED TO SUPPORT THE IDEA OF A GOLDEN REALM."

"AND SO, ONE OF THE ALIEN FORMS BECAME **EVIL**. A **TRICKSTER**."

"THIS, OF COURSE, WAS **LOKI**. THOR'S BROTHER."

"A BEING WHOSE VERY ACTIONS UPON EARTH WOULD NEED TO BE **AVENGED** BY BOTH THOR AND THOSE ALLIES HE'D CALL UNTO HIMSELF."

"ARE YOU SAYING THE **AVENGERS** EXIST FOR THE SAKE OF ASGARD'S EXISTENCE?"

"OF COURSE. IT'S SO CLEAR. IN THEIR ENTIRE EXISTENCE, ISAAC, WHO HAVE THEY EVER **TRULY** AVENGED? **NO ONE**."

"THEY'VE DEFENDED THE EARTH **COUNTLESS** TIMES. THEY'VE CERTAINLY BEEN **HEROES**. BUT NOT **AVENGERS**. NEVER AVENGERS."

"LOKI CREATED **NEW VILLAINS** TO FACE THESE HEROES."

"AS LONG AS THE AVENGERS FOUGHT ENEMIES SPAWNED FROM THE **NORSE MYTHOS**, ASGARD STOOD STRONG. AS LONG AS PEOPLE BELIEVED IN A **SPIRITUAL THREAT**, THE PILLARS OF HEAVEN STOOD FAST."

"LOKI SENT AN HERB GROWN IN ASGARD TO A PETTY THUG IN PRISON, A MAN CALLED CARL 'CRUSHER' CREEL. UPON INGESTING THIS HERB, CREEL BECAME THE **ABSORBING MAN**."

"A BEING WHO COULD **ELEMENTALLY** BECOME WHATEVER HE **TOUCHED**."

"BUT IF THIS HERB WAS GROWN ON ASGARD, HOW COULD IT HAVE ANY **REAL POWER**?"

"DON'T YOU REALIZE WHAT ODIN **DID**?"

"IT WASN'T JUST THE **ASGARDIANS** ODIN GAVE FORM AND IDENTITY TO."

"ASGARD HAS BEEN KNOWN AS THE **LIVING REALM**... BECAUSE THE GROUND ITSELF IS THOUGHT TO BE **ALIVE**."

"AND IT **IS**."

"IT, TOO, WAS CREATED ACCORDING TO ODIN'S **WISHES**."

"THAT'S WHY ASGARD ITSELF COULD BE STRUCTURALLY **CHANGED** ACCORDING TO ODIN'S WHIM."

"IT WAS BUILT OUT OF THE **ALIEN RACE**, AS WELL."

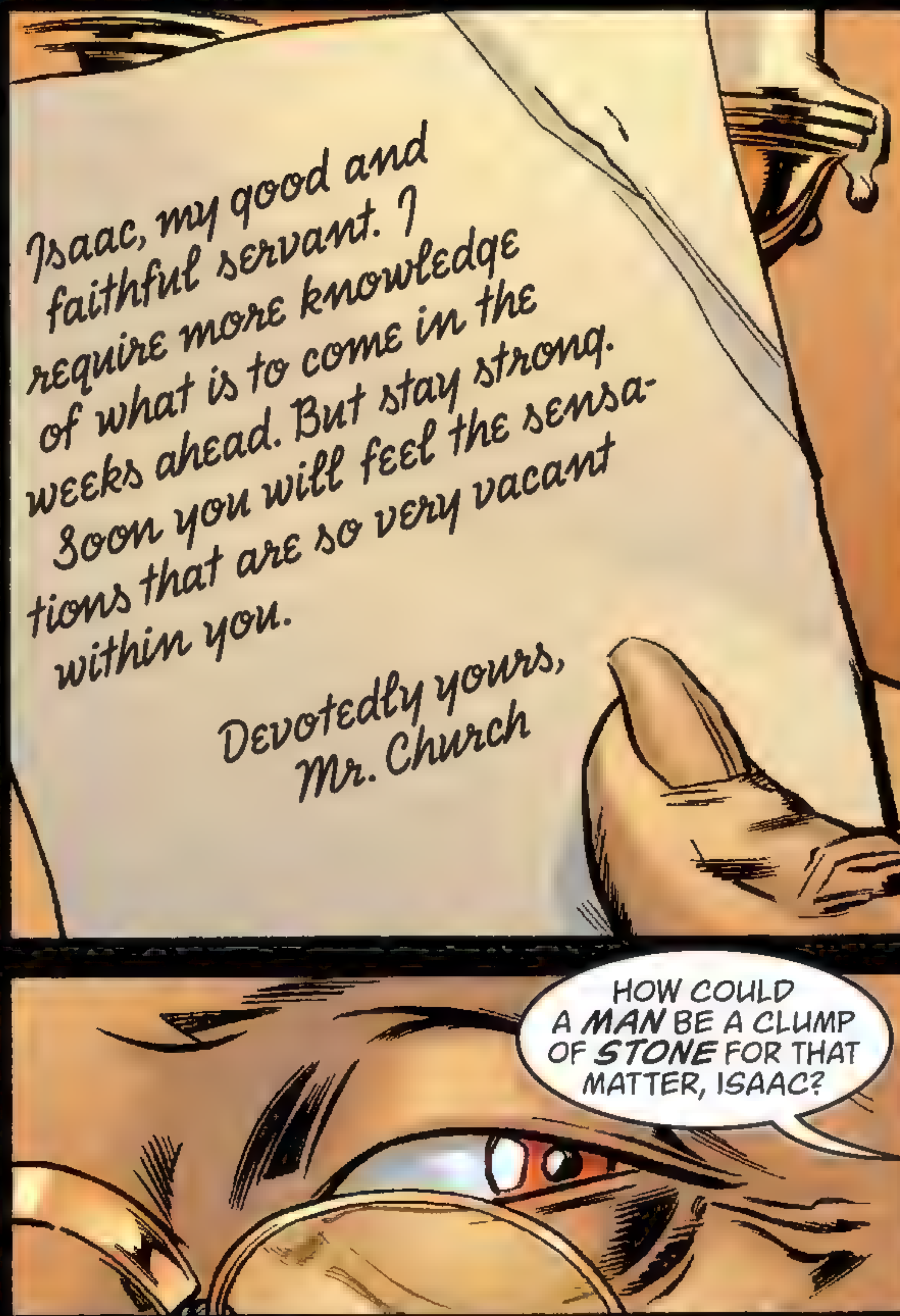
"AND THE HERB THAT **CREEL** INGESTED WAS ONE OF THE SAME **SHAPE-ALIENS**."

"ODIN DIDN'T JUST CREATE A RACE... HE CREATED A **WORLD**."



THIS NOTION REGARDING THE ASSGARDIANS IS **HIGHLY** UNLIKELY, KYLE. THE MANIPULATIONS OF ONE MAN COULD **NEVER** SO DEFINE A REALITY. PERHAPS THE **INTERPRETATION** OF WHAT YOU SEE SHOULD BE BROUGHT INTO QUESTION.

HOW COULD A BEING BE A PLANT?



Isaac, my good and faithful servant. I require more knowledge of what is to come in the weeks ahead. But stay strong. Soon you will feel the sensations that are so very vacant within you.

Devotedly yours,
Mr. Church

HOW COULD A **MAN** BE A CLUMP OF **STONE** FOR THAT MATTER, ISAAC?



YOUR POINT IS WELL MADE, KYLE.

HOW LONG WILL YOU BE GONE ON YOUR ERRAND?



NOT LONG, KYLE.

BUT WE DO HAVE TIME FOR A FEW MORE **PAGES**. PLEASE BEGIN.



"CAPTAIN AMERICA AND THE MAR-VELL CHILD HAVE TELEPORTED TO JAPAN IN SEARCH OF DR. STRANGE'S ORB OF AGAMOTTO.

"THEY ARRIVE IN THE MIDST OF WAR BETWEEN LORD SUNFIRE'S XEN AND THE TONG OF CREEL--"

"THOSE WHO ARE TRYING TO REBUILD THE SHATTERED PIECES OF CREEL? WHY ARE THEY IN JAPAN?"



WATCH OUT, MARVELL!



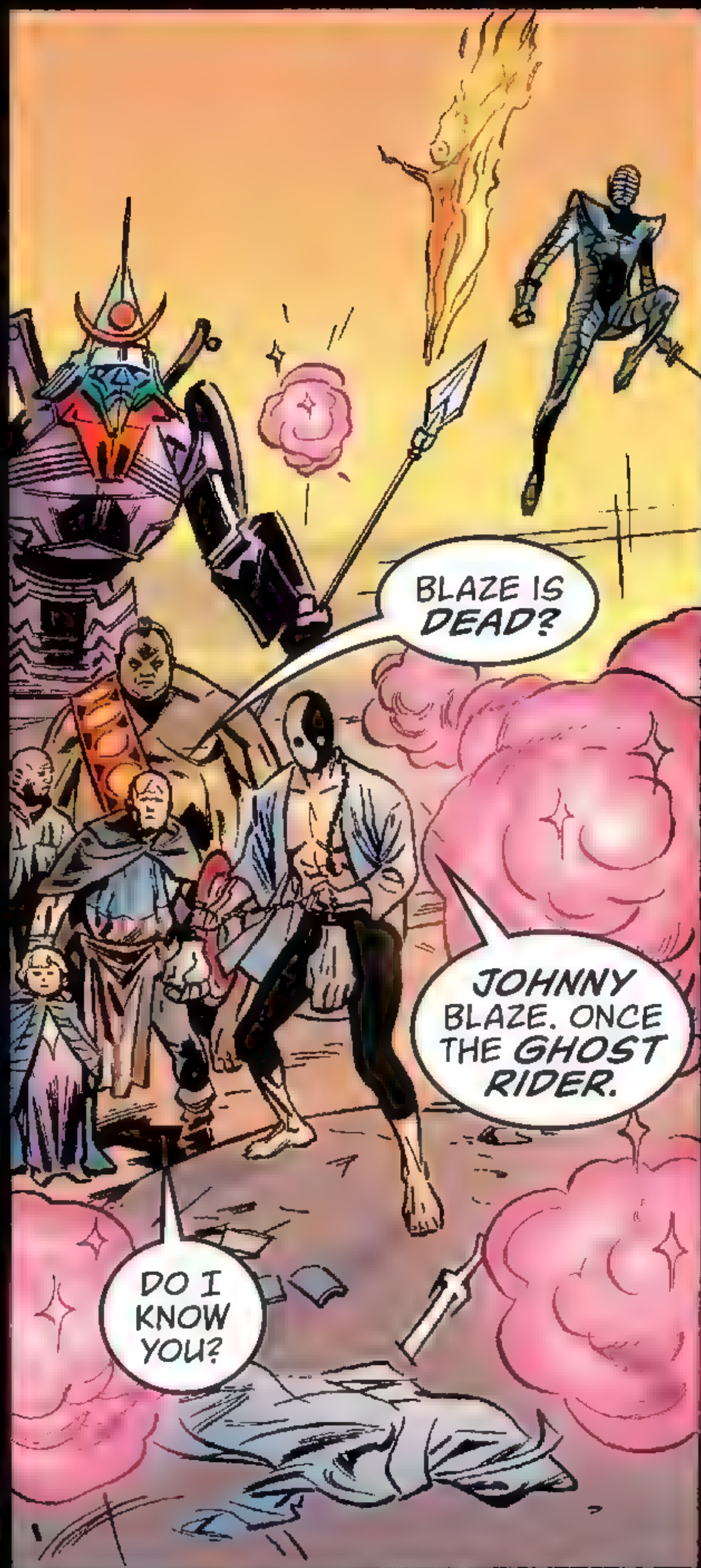
YOU'VE RETURNED, CAPTAIN.

ARE YOU HERE TO AID ME IN MY STRUGGLES THIS TIME?



I HAVE THE MASTER! BLAZE IS DEAD AS WELL.

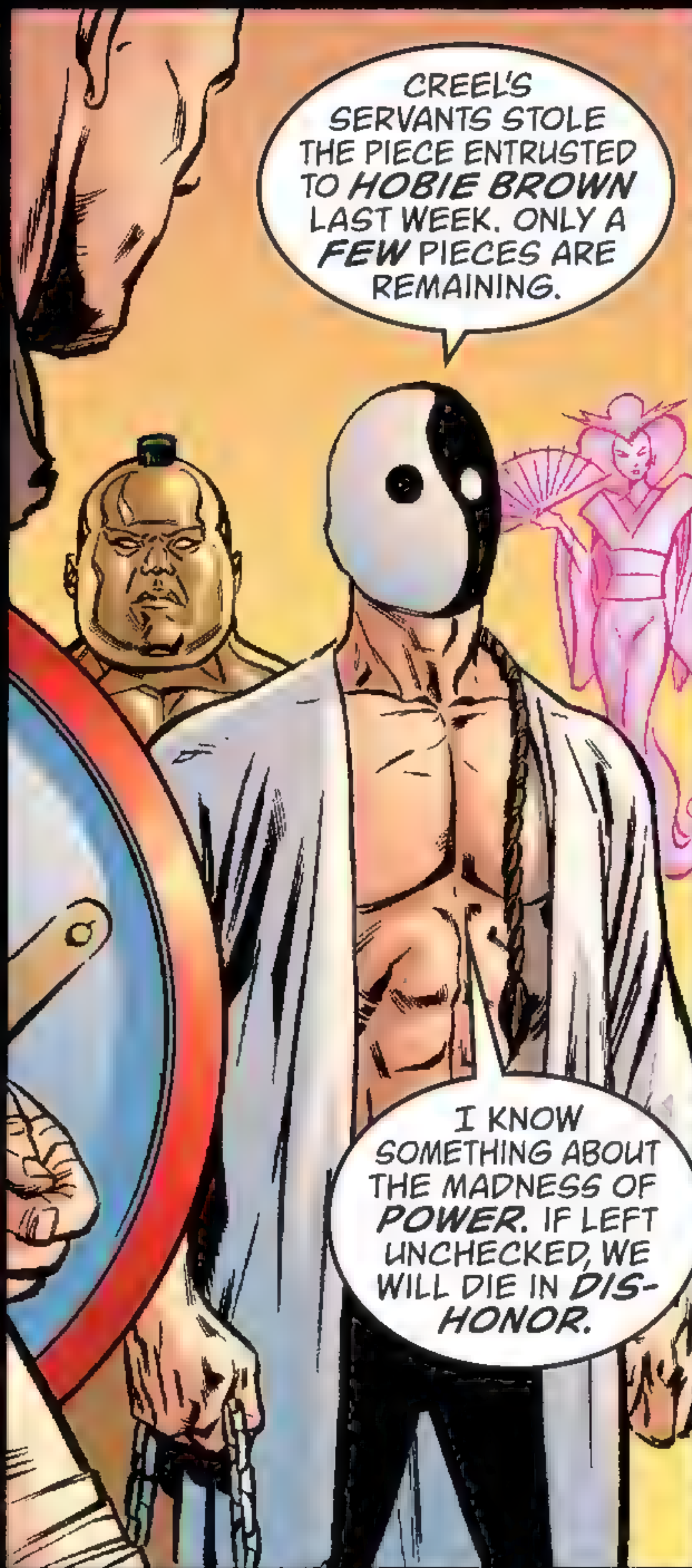
IT IS FINISHED.



BLAZE IS DEAD?

JOHNNY BLAZE. ONCE THE GHOST RIDER.

DO I KNOW YOU?

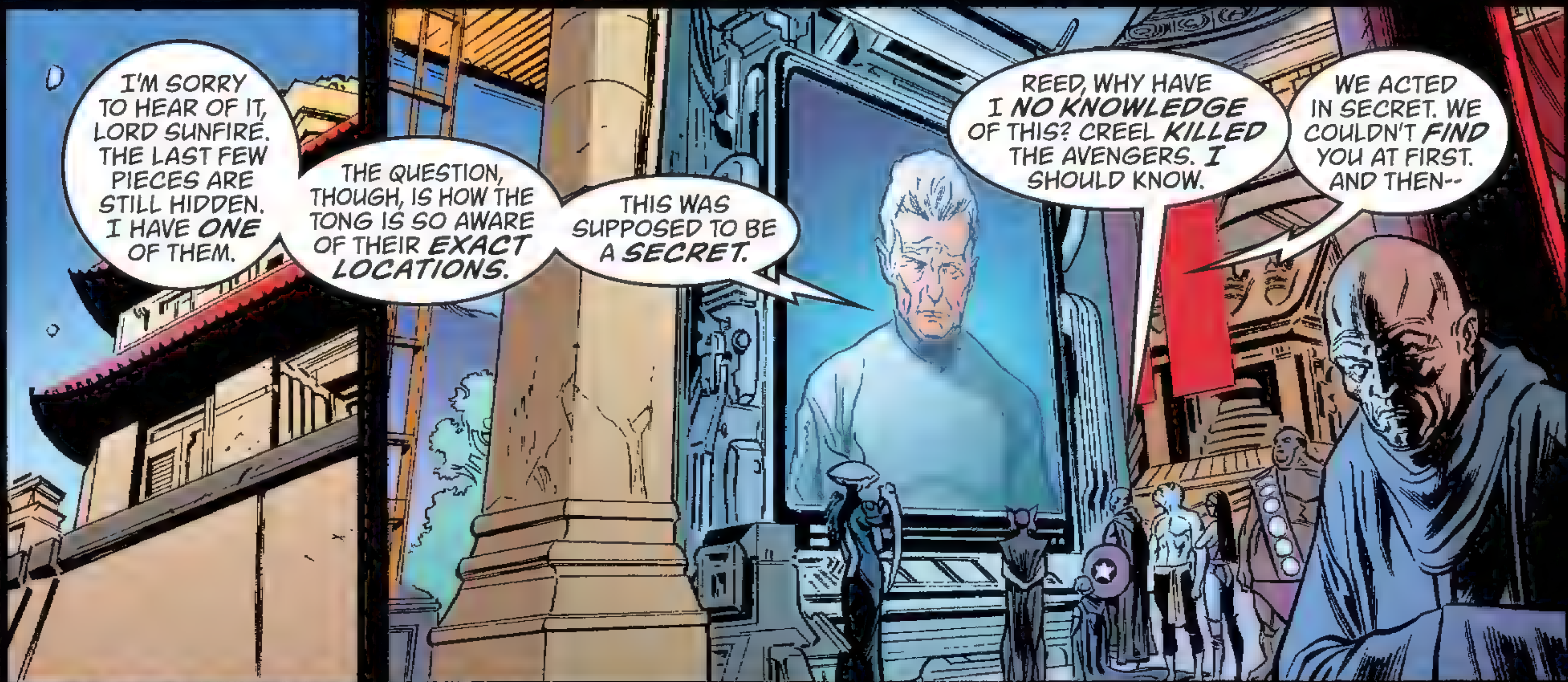


CREELE'S SERVANTS STOLE THE PIECE ENTRUSTED TO HOBIE BROWN LAST WEEK. ONLY A FEW PIECES ARE REMAINING.

I KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT THE MADNESS OF POWER. IF LEFT UNCHECKED, WE WILL DIE IN DISHONOR.



SOON, THERE WILL BE NO BALANCE AT ALL.



I'M SORRY TO HEAR OF IT, LORD SUNFIRE. THE LAST FEW PIECES ARE STILL HIDDEN. I HAVE **ONE** OF THEM.

THE QUESTION, THOUGH, IS HOW THE TONG IS SO AWARE OF THEIR **EXACT LOCATIONS**.

THIS WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A **SECRET**.

REED, WHY HAVE I **NO KNOWLEDGE** OF THIS? CREEL **KILLED** THE AVENGERS. I SHOULD KNOW.

WE ACTED IN SECRET. WE COULDN'T **FIND** YOU AT FIRST. AND THEN--



THEN?

SOME OF THE PEOPLE I ENTRUSTED PIECES OF CREEL TO FELT YOU WERE...WELL, WE FELT THAT THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE **AVENGERS' DEATHS** WAS ALREADY **MORE** THAN YOU COULD BEAR.

I SEE.



NO, YOU DON'T, STEVE. **SUE** AND **JOHNNY** HAD JUST DIED...I DIDN'T WANT ANYBODY **ELSE** TO GO THROUGH WHAT **I** JUST EXPERIENCED.

YOU DIDN'T SEE WHAT **WE** DID. YOU WEREN'T IN **WASHINGTON**.

CREEL ABSORBED THE IDENTITY AND NATURE OF HANK PYM'S SUPER COMPUTER, **ULTRON**.



"HE USED **KNOWLEDGE**, SOMETHING HE HAD NEVER ATTEMPTED TO ABSORB BEFORE, TO DEFEAT THE AVENGERS."



REED, I **STILL** HAVE TO KNOW. HOW DID THEY DIE?

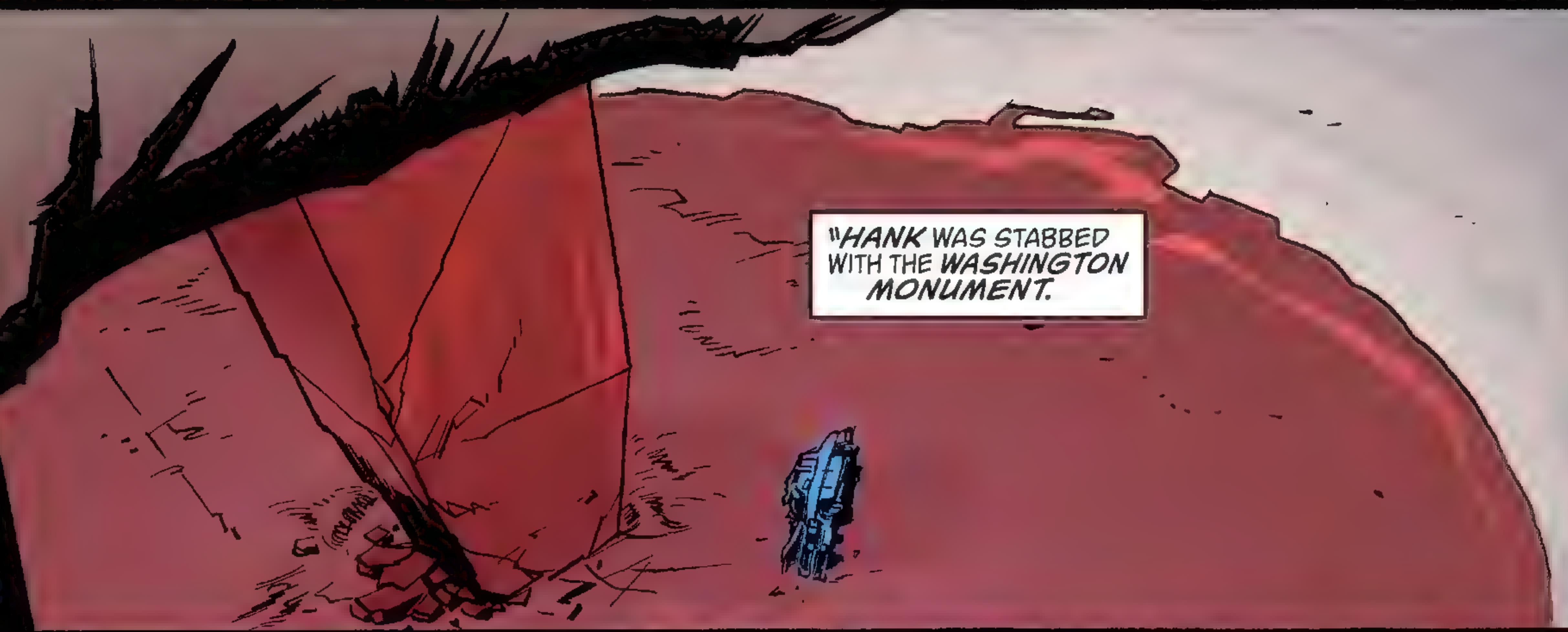


IT WAS CREEK'S LOW INTELLECT THAT ALWAYS UNDOED HIM IN THE PAST.

BUT NOW, AFTER ABSORBING A DIGITIZED INTELLECT, HE WAS NO LONGER LIMITED TO BECOMING WHAT-EVER HE COULD TOUCH.

HE COULD STORE HIS FORMS AND CHEMICAL MAKEUP AND RECALL THEM AT WILL. HE COULD REACT TO EVERYTHING THE AVENGERS THREW AT HIM WITH THE PERFECT RESPONSE.

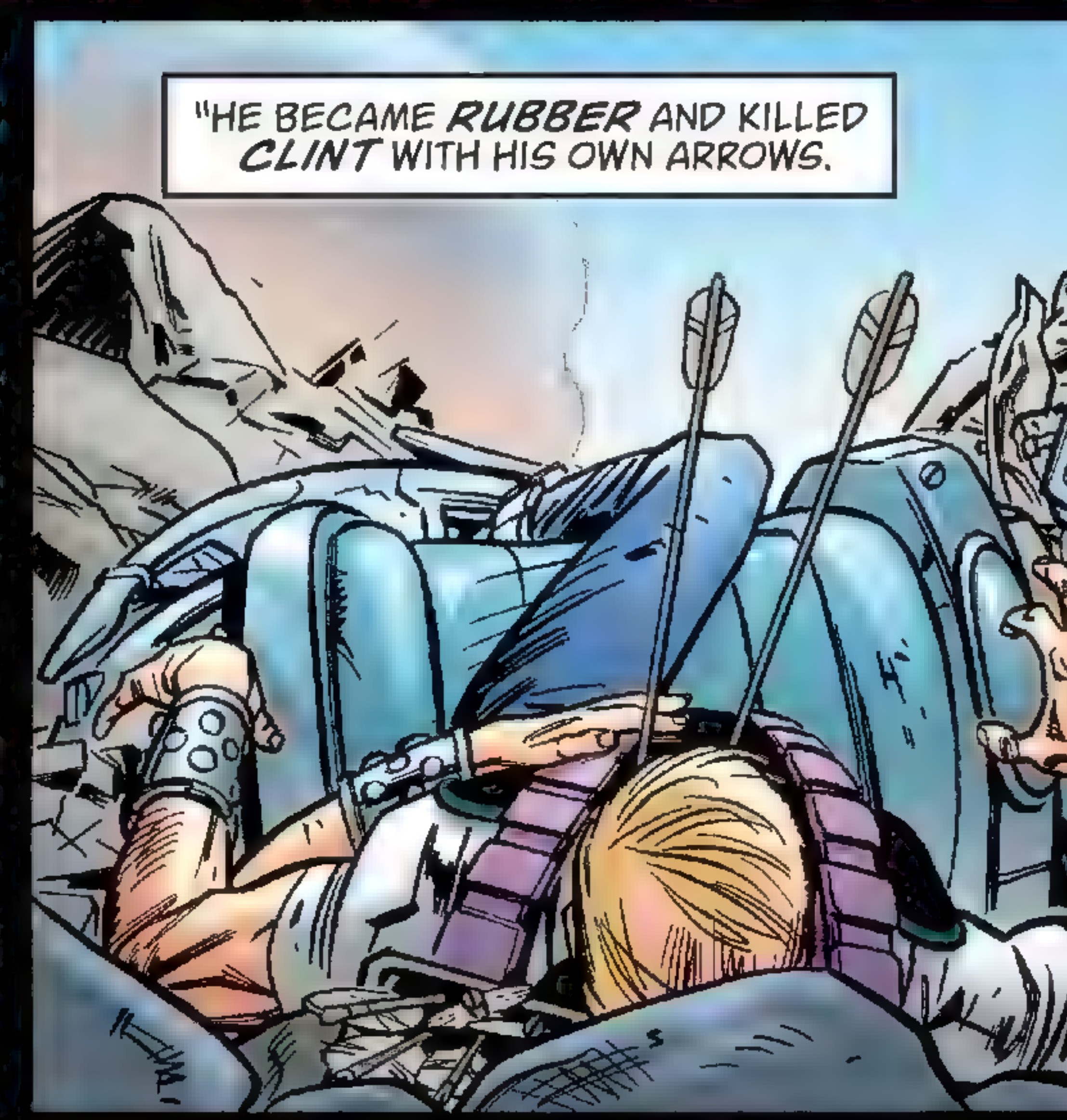
HE COULD BECOME ANYTHING.



"HANK WAS STABBED WITH THE WASHINGTON MONUMENT."



"CREEK BECAME TAR AND SMOOTHERED PIETRO."



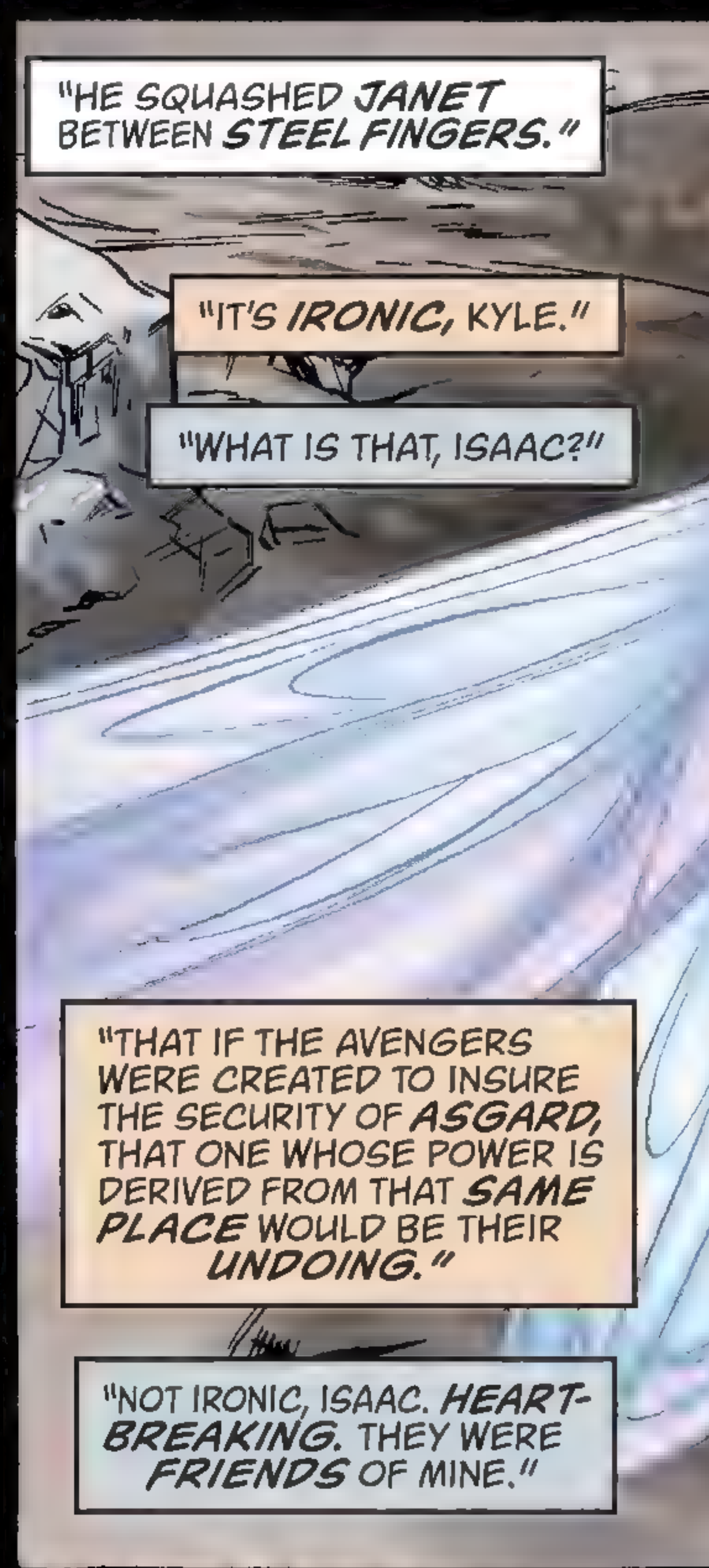
"HE BECAME RUBBER AND KILLED CLINT WITH HIS OWN ARROWS."



"HE KNEW BETTER THAN TO ATTACK WANDA OUT-RIGHT. HER POWER WAS BASED ON PROBABILITY."

"BUT PROBABILITIES ARE FRACTIONS. DECIMALS. HE WAS THEREFORE ABLE TO NEGATE HER ABILITIES WITH A NEGATIVE FORMULA AND RENDER HER POWER-LESS."

"HE SNAPPED HER NECK."



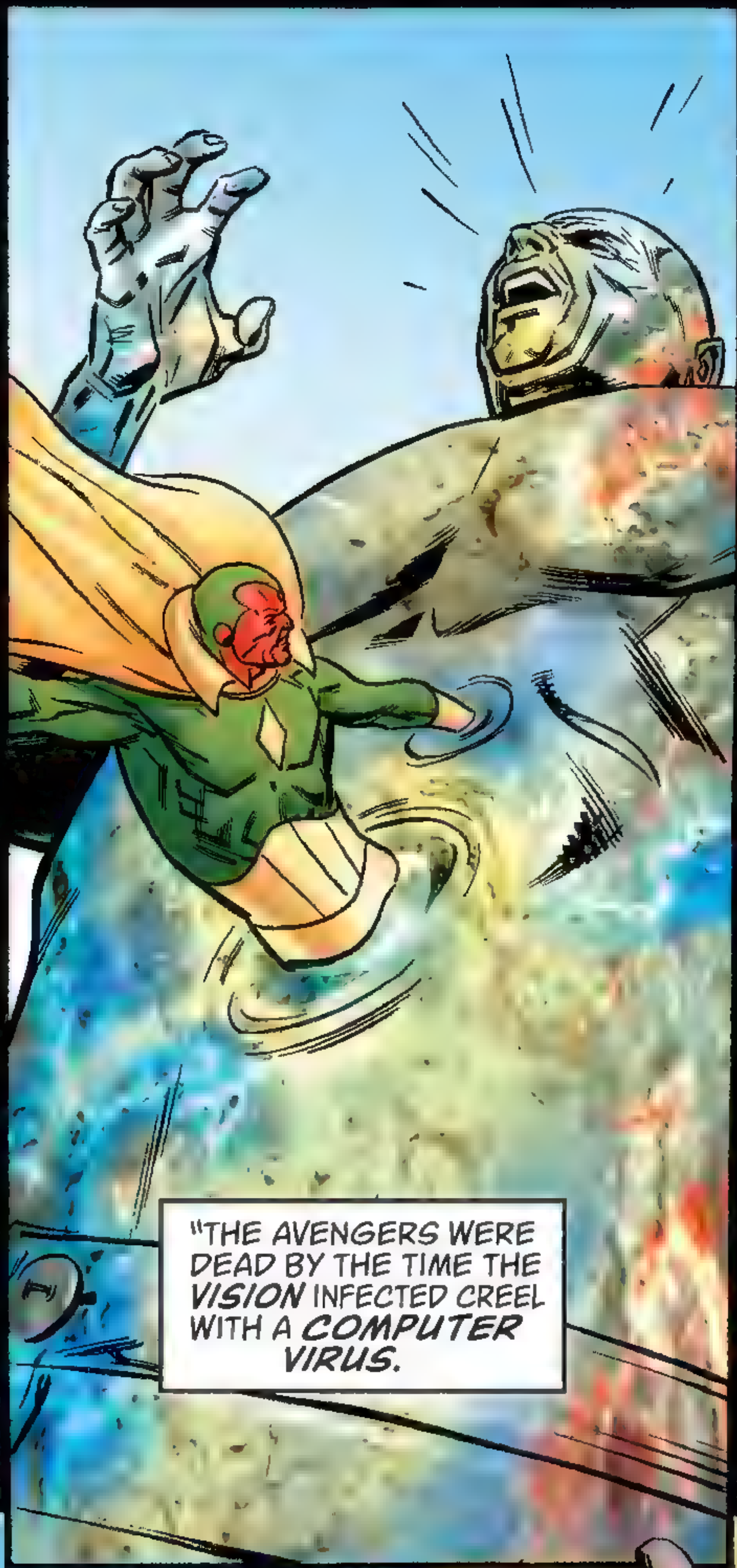
"HE SQUASHED JANET BETWEEN STEEL FINGERS."

"IT'S IRONIC, KYLE."

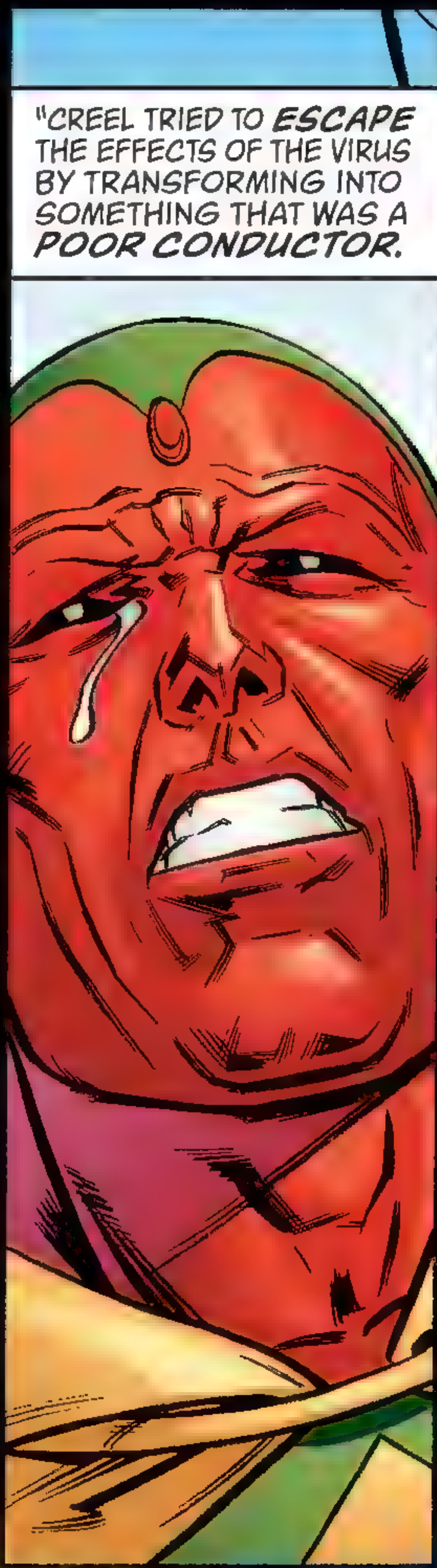
"WHAT IS THAT, ISAAC?"

"THAT IF THE AVENGERS WERE CREATED TO INSURE THE SECURITY OF ASGARD, THAT ONE WHOSE POWER IS DERIVED FROM THAT SAME PLACE WOULD BE THEIR UNDOING."

"NOT IRONIC, ISAAC. HEART-BREAKING. THEY WERE FRIENDS OF MINE."



"THE AVENGERS WERE DEAD BY THE TIME THE VISION INFECTED CREEL WITH A **COMPUTER VIRUS**.



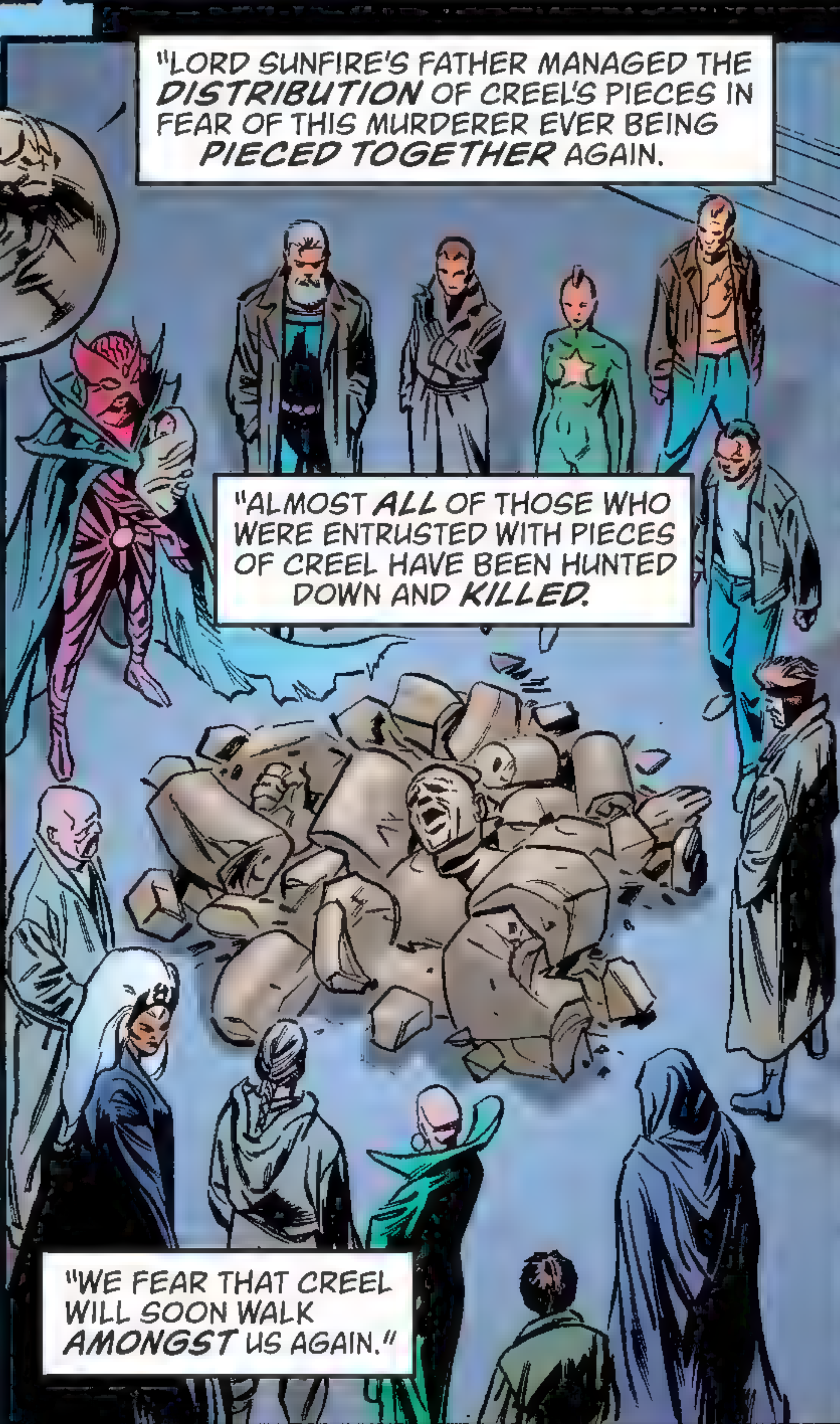
"CREEL TRIED TO **ESCAPE** THE EFFECTS OF THE VIRUS BY TRANSFORMING INTO SOMETHING THAT WAS A **POOR CONDUCTOR**.



"HE BEGAN TURNING TO **STONE**, WHILE ATTEMPTING TO **ISOLATE** THE VIRUS IN DELETED MASS.



"THAT WAS WHEN THE VISION **SHATTERED** HIM INTO THE PIECES THAT WERE DISTRIBUTED AMONGST THE WORLD'S SUPER POWERS.



"LORD SUNFIRE'S FATHER MANAGED THE **DISTRIBUTION** OF CREEL'S PIECES IN FEAR OF THIS MURDERER EVER BEING **PIECED TOGETHER** AGAIN.

"ALMOST **ALL** OF THOSE WHO WERE ENTRUSTED WITH PIECES OF CREEL HAVE BEEN HUNTED DOWN AND **KILLED**.

"WE FEAR THAT CREEL WILL SOON WALK **AMONGST** US AGAIN."



WHERE ARE THE **REST** OF THE PIECES?

I HESITATE TO SAY, STEVE. SOMEHOW, THE TONG KNOWS WHERE THEY ALL ARE.

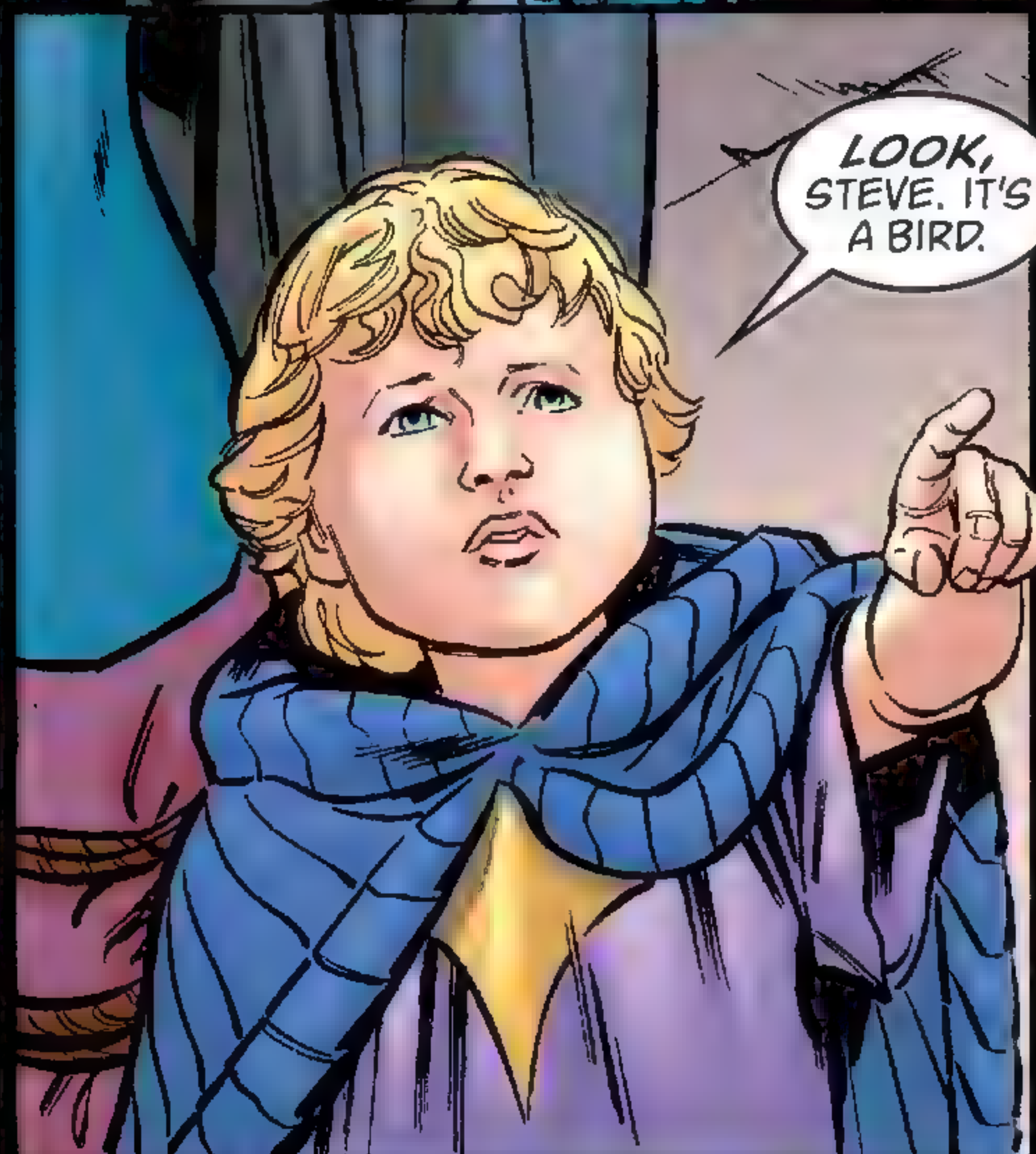
IF IT WEREN'T FOR THE **DOOM-BOTS**, THEY WOULD HAVE ALREADY GOTTEN CREELE'S HEAD. AND THEY'RE STILL SEARCHING FOR HIS **HANDS**.



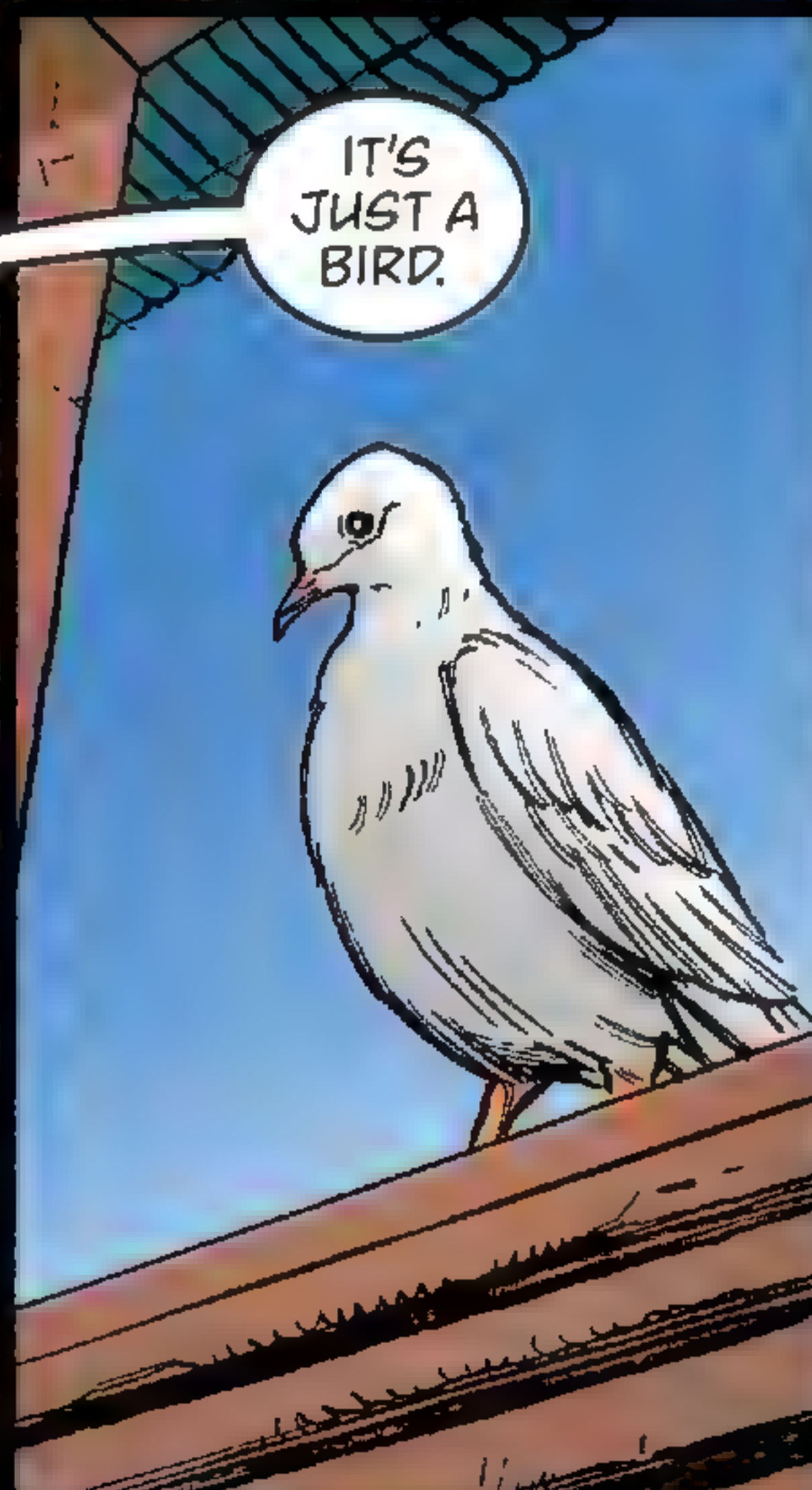
I HAVE BROUGHT THE **ORB** AS YOU REQUESTED.



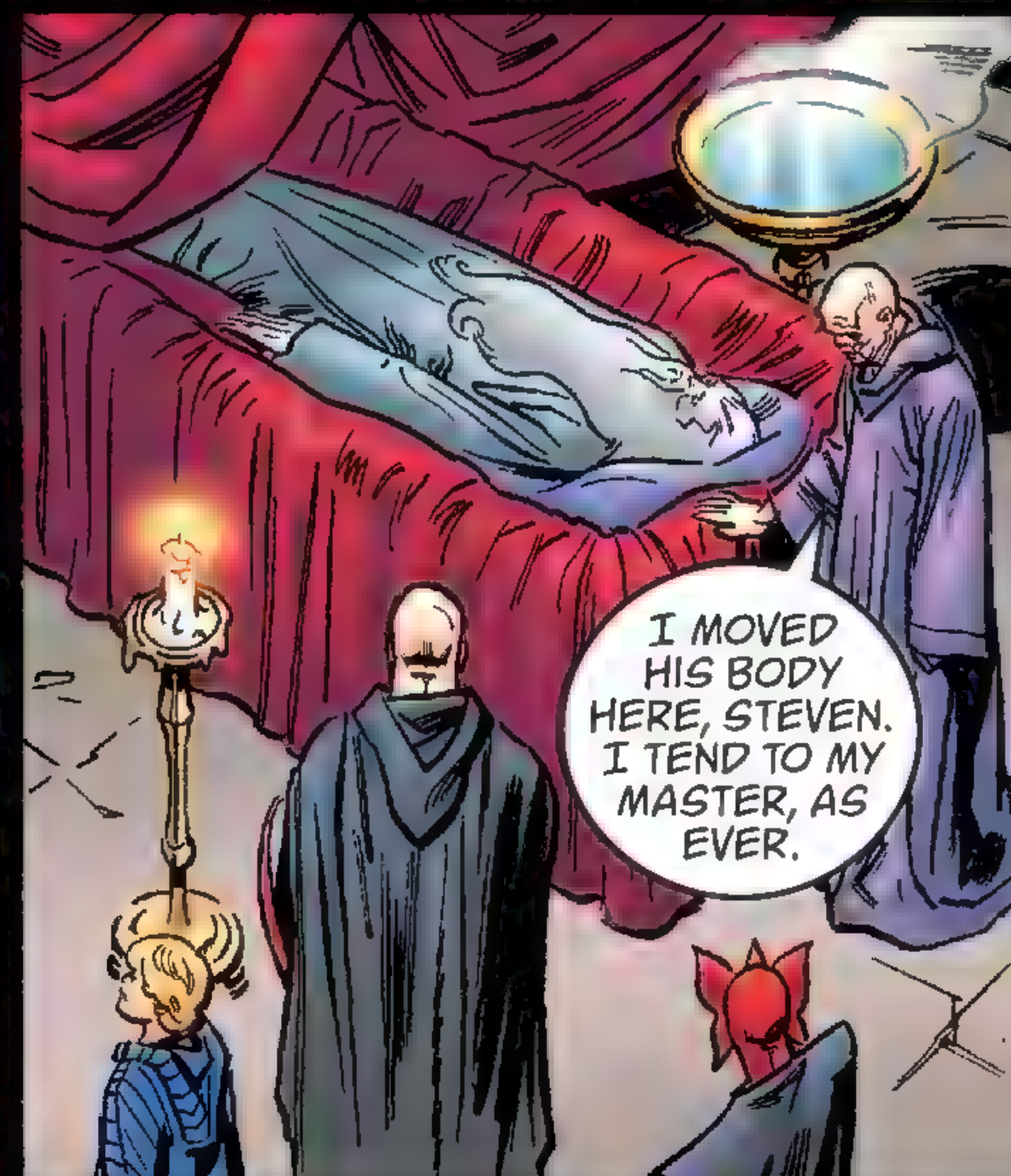
WE WERE IN **SOHO, WONG**. STEPHEN'S BODY HAS BEEN **STOLEN**.



LOOK, STEVE. IT'S A BIRD.



IT'S JUST A BIRD.



I MOVED HIS BODY HERE, STEVEN. I TEND TO MY MASTER, AS EVER.



STEPHEN'S BODY IS SAFE, BUT WHAT OF **YOU**? HOW CAN WE HELP YOU IN YOUR **QUEST**?



YOU **CAN'T**, LORD SUNFIRE. YOU HAVE YOUR OWN **CONCERNS**.

"THE ORB OF AGAMOTTO. THE BOOKS OF VISHANTI AND THE DARKHOLD. ANTI-METAL. WHAT IS THIS TREASURE HUNT OF POWER THAT MAR-VELL IS LEADING CAPTAIN AMERICA UPON? WHAT IS HE DOING, KYLE?"

"I DON'T KNOW, ISAAC. ALL I SEE IS STEVE AND MAR-VELL TRAVELING TO THE MIDWEST IN SEARCH OF THE NEGA-BANDS ENTRUSTED TO RICK JONES."

RICK'S ONE OF THE HYDRA, TOO?

IT NEVER GETS BETTER, DOES IT? NOT EVEN FOR A MOMENT.

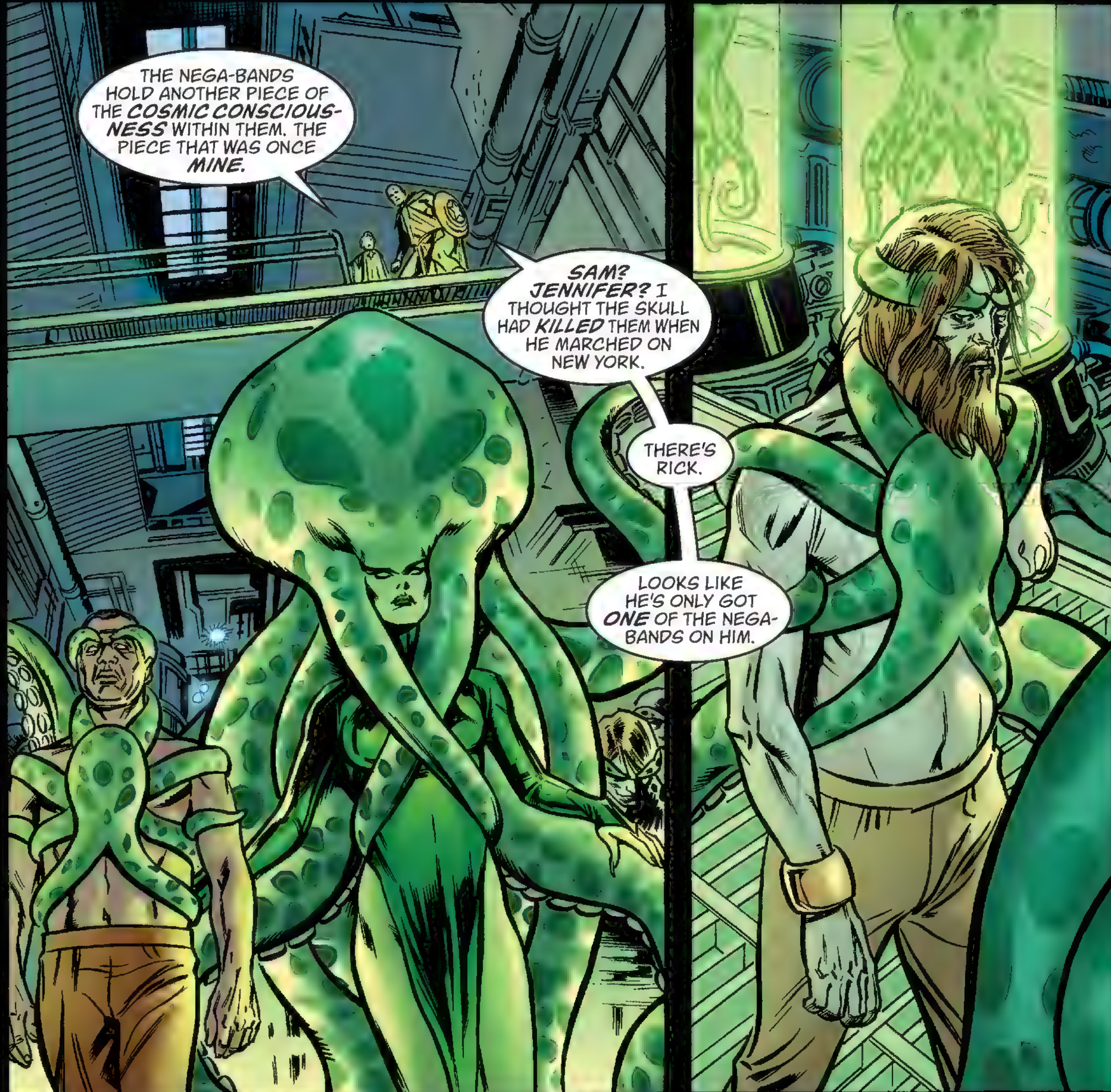


THE NEGA-BANDS HOLD ANOTHER PIECE OF THE COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS WITHIN THEM. THE PIECE THAT WAS ONCE MINE.

SAM? JENNIFER? I THOUGHT THE SKULL HAD KILLED THEM WHEN HE MARCHED ON NEW YORK.

THERE'S RICK.

LOOKS LIKE HE'S ONLY GOT ONE OF THE NEGA-BANDS ON HIM.



SAM AND JENNIFER DIED WHEN THE HYDRA TOOK THEM. THE HYDRA INHABIT DEAD BODIES NOW. THEY CAN'T BE KILLED AGAIN.

THIS DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE, STEVE. THERE'S NOTHING WITHIN THE NEGA-BAND. IT'S DEAD.

MY PIECE OF THE COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS MUST HAVE BEEN HIDDEN SOMEWHERE ELSE.

LET'S GO, STEVE.

STEVE?



"IN NEW YORK, THE *CHURCH OF IMMORTUS* ATTACKS THE *HUMAN TORCH* AGAIN.

"BUT WITHOUT THE AID OF SPIDERS MAN'S *ILLUSIONS*, THIS ATTACK *FAILS*."

LOOK, MA!
I'M ON TOP OF THE
WORLD!

I KNOW YOU
WON'T LISTEN, BUT I
WOULDN'T *DO THAT*
IF I WERE YOU.

DON'T GET
MAD AT ME! I TRIED
TO *WARN YOU!*

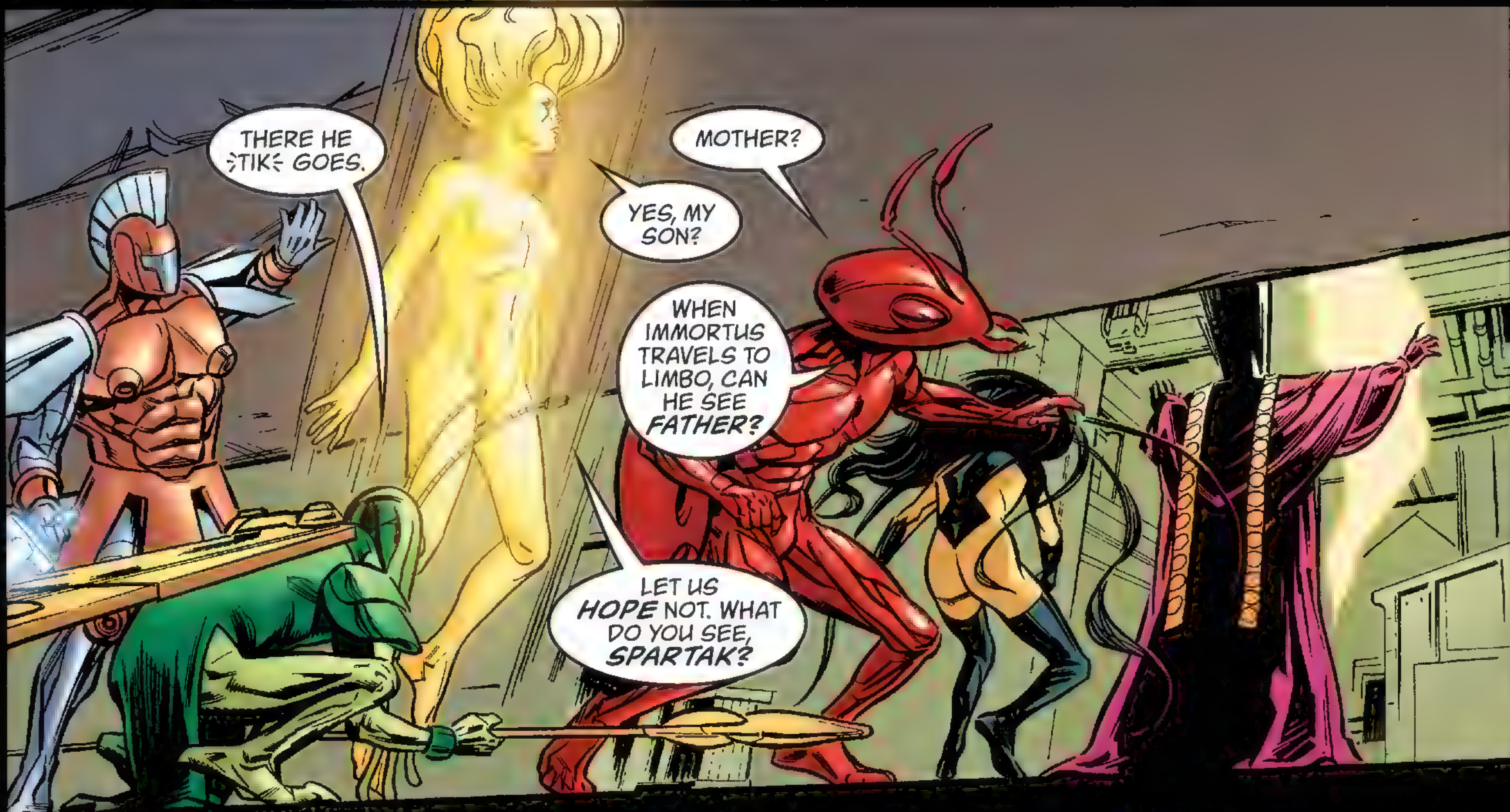
NOW!

WHY DO YOU
HAVE TO *TALK*
TO THEM, DAD?

ALL YOU DO
IS SHOW PEOPLE
HOW MUCH TV YOU
WATCHED AS A KID
'CAUSE YOU NEVER
HAD A *DATE!*

"IMMORTUS'S DEFEAT BEFORE
MARSHALL MULDOON AND THE
N.Y.P.D. *OVERWHELMS* HIM.

"HE ATTEMPTS TO GO BACK TO
LIMBO FOR NEW PERSPECTIVE."





WHY HAVE YOU COME, ODINSON?

THIS IS THE PLACE OF LIVING FLAME. YOU DO NOT BELONG HERE.

I AM NO MORE ODIN'S SON THAN **YOU** ARE, SURTUR. WE ARE VILLAINS ONLY BECAUSE SOMEONE **THINKS** WE ARE. OUR EVERY ACT OF EVIL HAS BEEN...HOW SHOULD I SAY IT? NOT OUR **OWN** IDEA.



I JUST THOUGHT I SHOULD BE THE ONE TO DROP IN AND TELL YOU THAT **RAGNAROK**--YOU KNOW, THE **DEATH** OF THE **GODS**, ONLY EVERYTHING YOU'VE EVER **WISHED** FOR? WELL...

...IT'S **BUNK**. A SVARTALFHEIM ELF-LOAF, IF YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN.

YOU SHOULD **THANK** ME. YOU DON'T HAVE TO DESTROY THE WORLD, AFTER ALL.



I **DON'T** HAVE TO BRING ON **RAGNAROK**?

MY **IMPRISONMENT** HAS BEEN FOR **NOTHING**?

WHO HAS **DONE** SUCH A THING?



ODIN. OR AT THE VERY LEAST, THE GUY WHO **WANTED** TO BE ODIN.

JUST REMEMBER, I SAID YOU DIDN'T **HAVE** TO CAUSE RAGNAROK. I DIDN'T SAY YOU **SHOULDN'T**.



CAP!
COME
BACK!

NO.



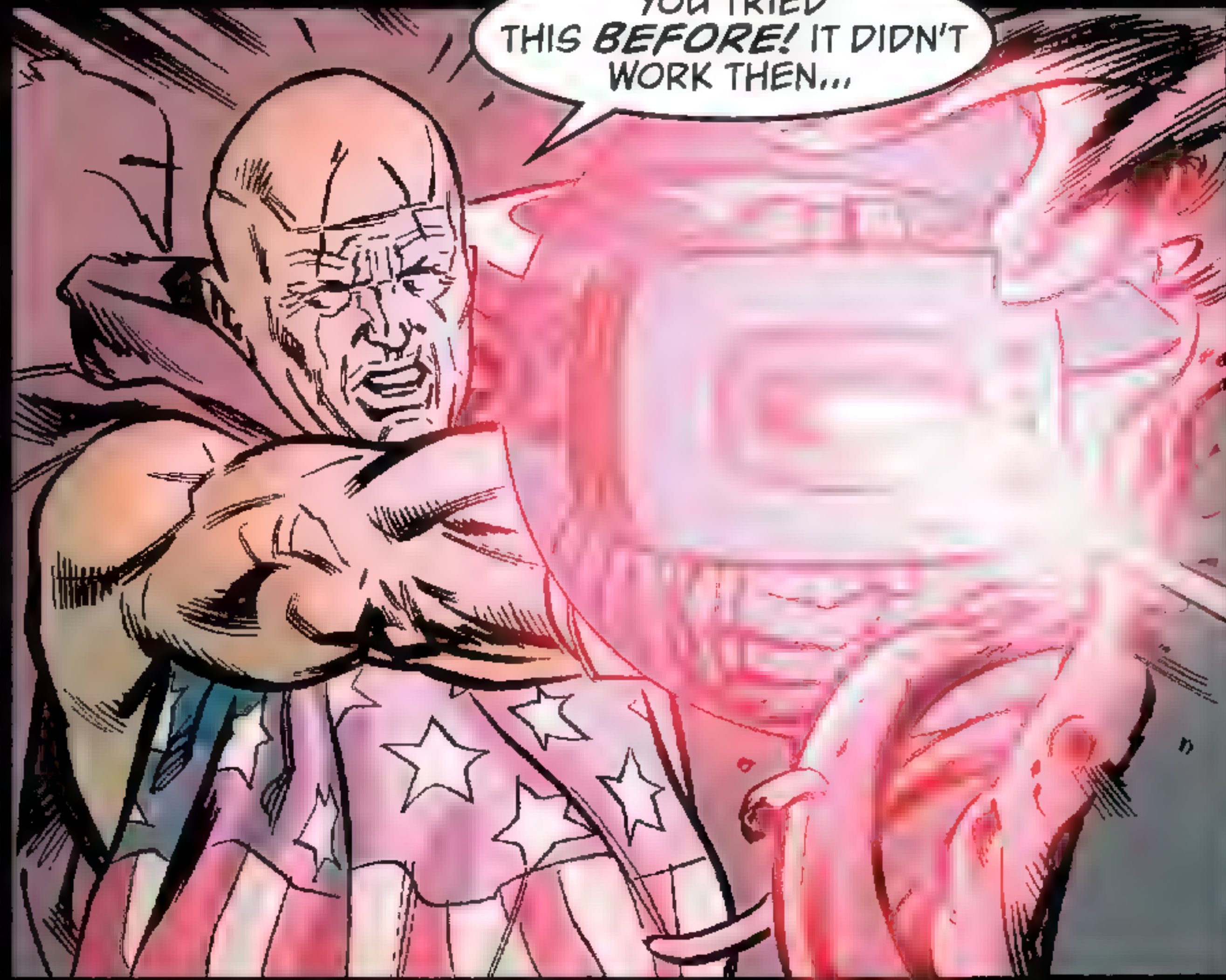
WHAT ARE
YOU DOING, STEVE?
JOIN US.

EMBRACE
PEACE.

LET
THE WAR
END.



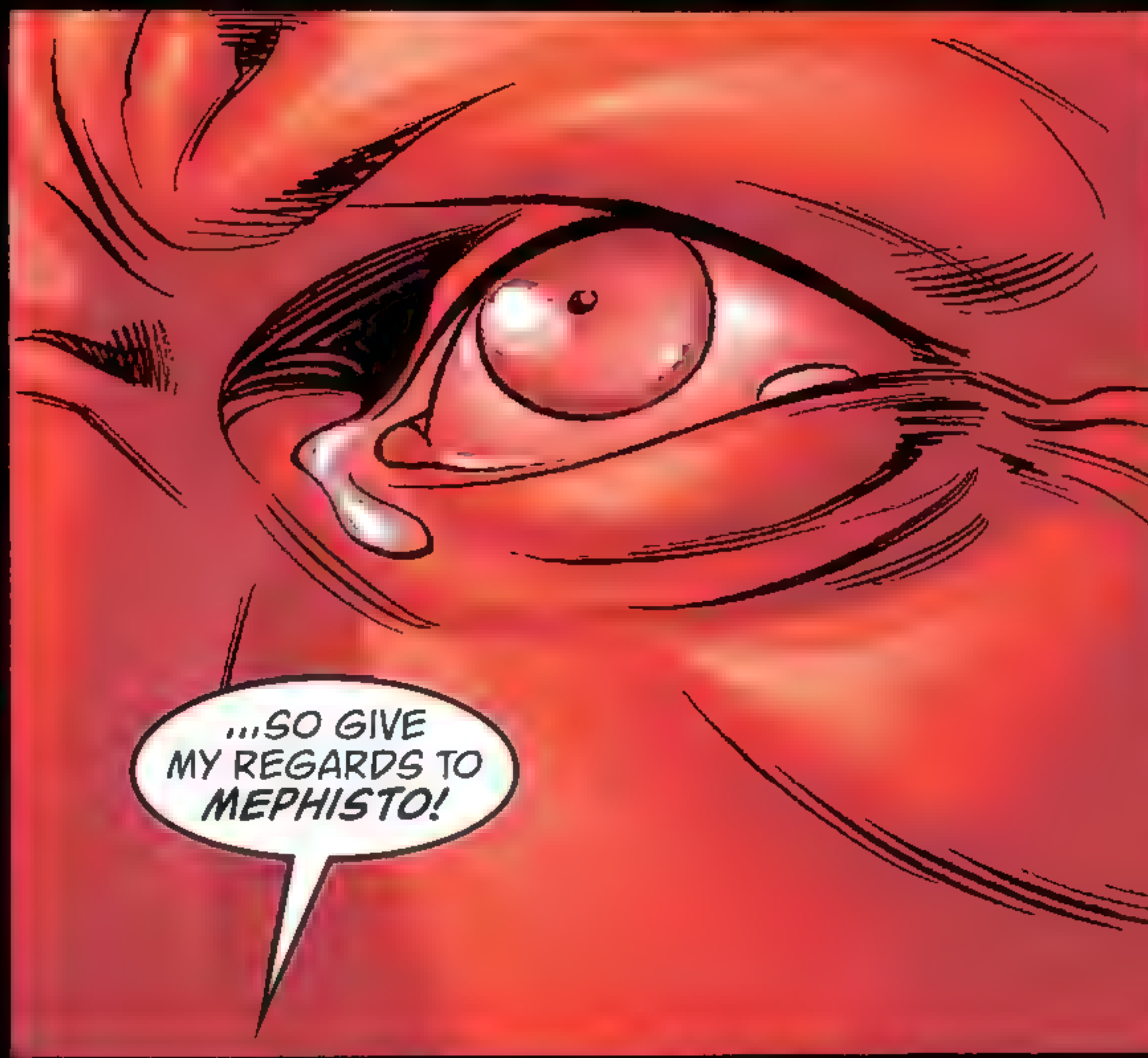
YOU TRIED
THIS *BEFORE!* IT DIDN'T
WORK THEN...



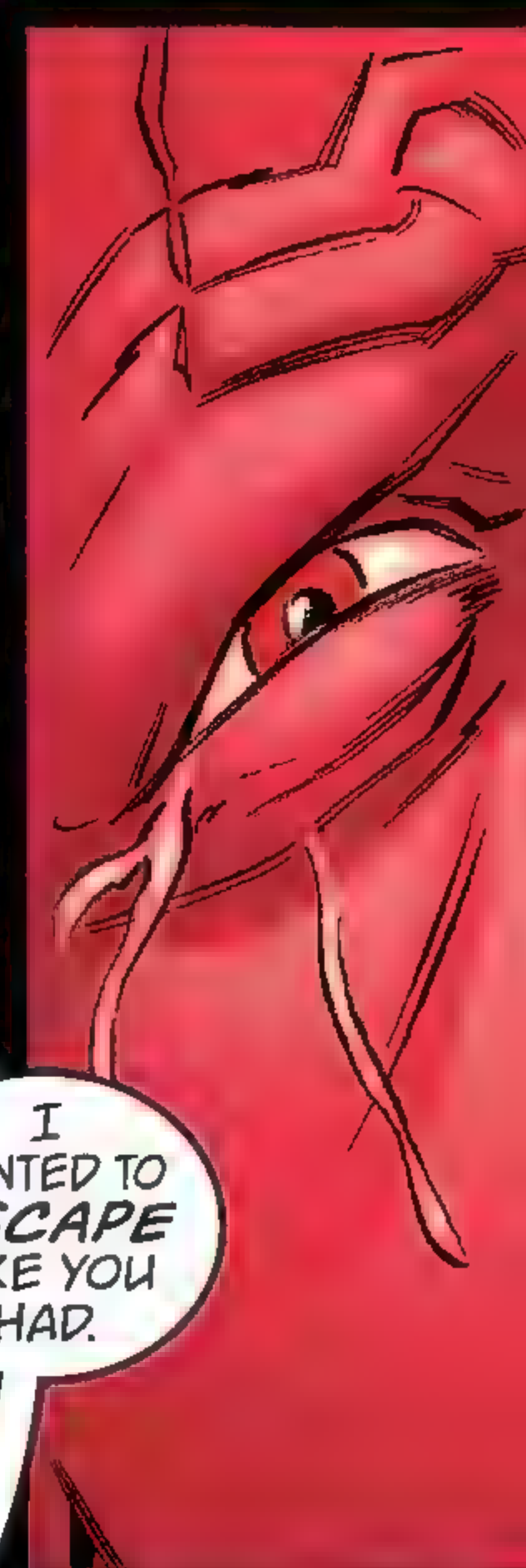
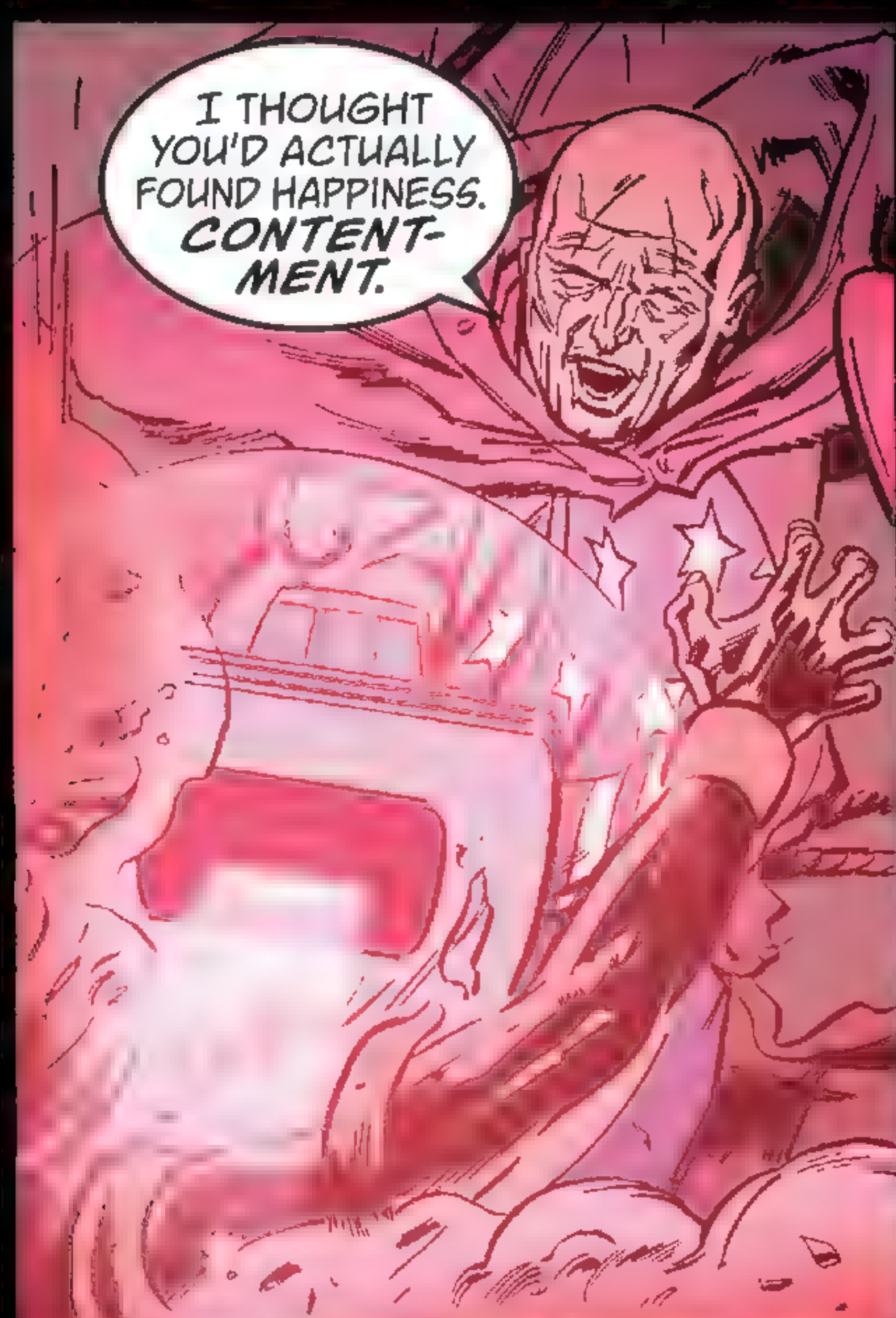
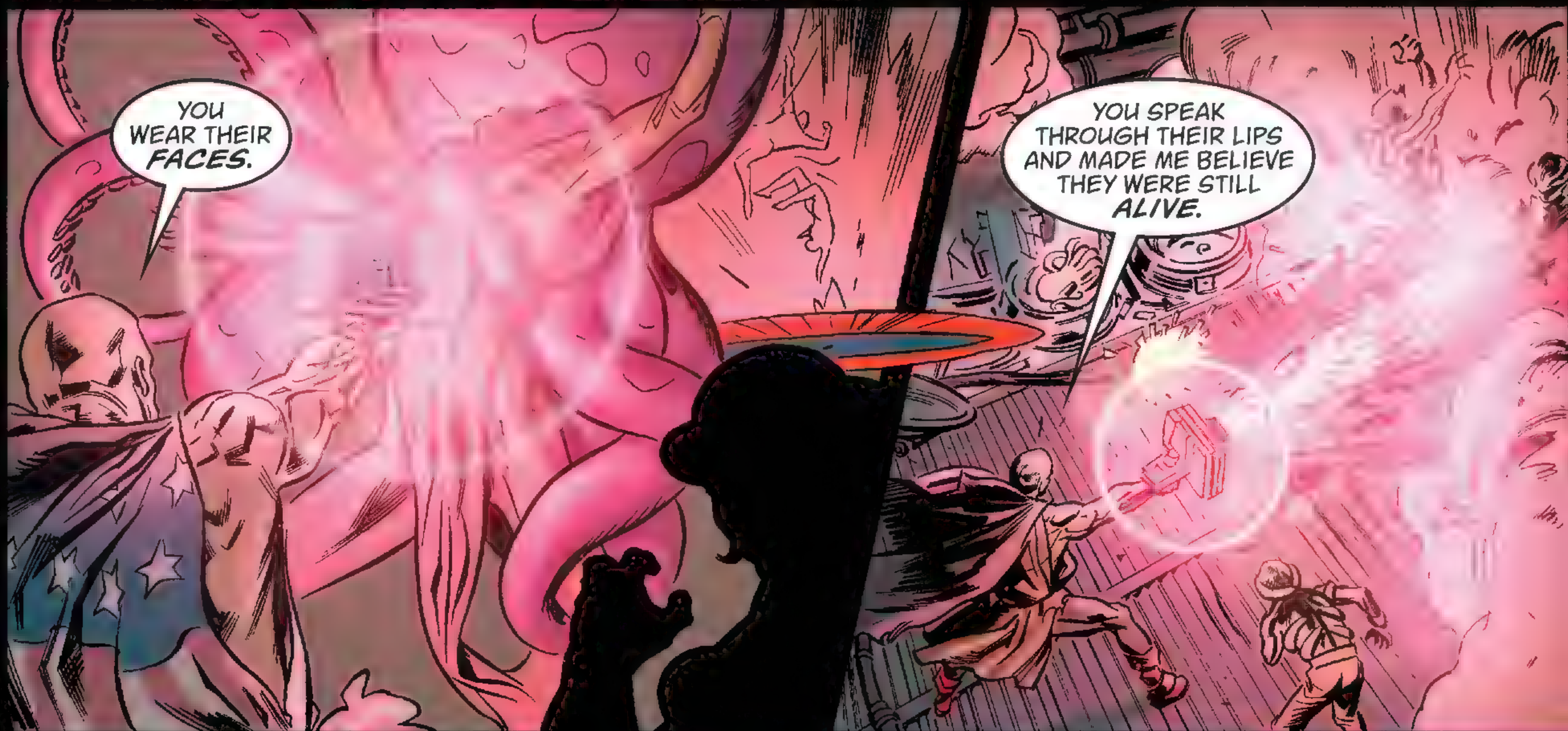
CAP!



YOU SAID I
COULDN'T *KILL* THEM.
BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN
I CAN'T SEND THEM
TO *HELL*...



...SO GIVE
MY REGARDS TO
MEPHISTO!





I BELIEVED.

AND THERE'S
ONLY **ONE WAY** TO
GET THAT KIND OF
CONTENTMENT.

YOU'VE
SHOWN ME
THAT.

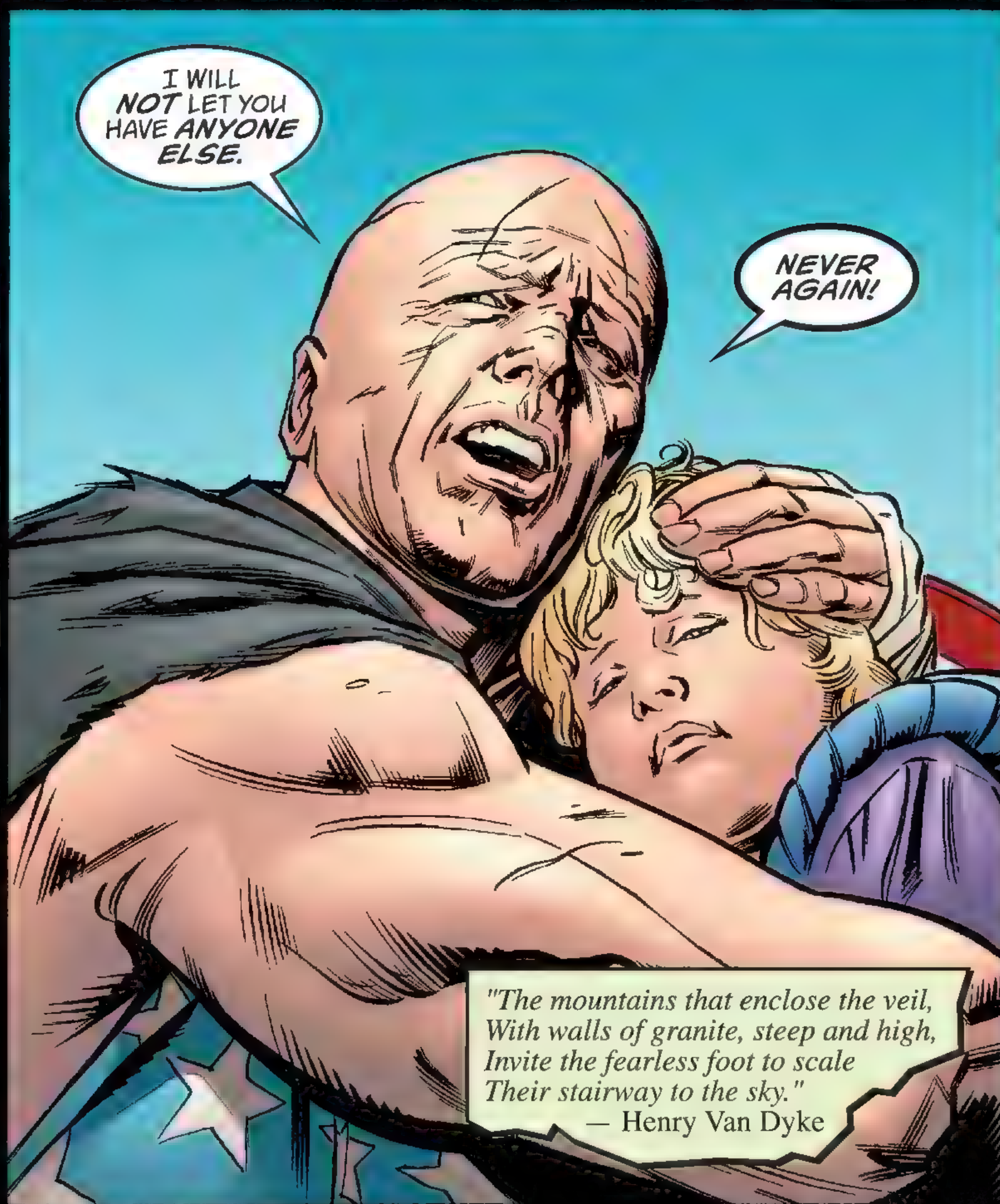


IS THAT
WHAT YOU'RE
HERE FOR,
DEATH?



FOR
MAR-VELL'S
HAPPINESS? FOR
HIS **DEATH?**

NO,
STEVE!



I WILL
NOT LET YOU
HAVE **ANYONE**
ELSE.

NEVER
AGAIN!

"The mountains that enclose the veil,
With walls of granite, steep and high,
Invite the fearless foot to scale
Their stairway to the sky."
— Henry Van Dyke

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER FOUR

W R I T T E N B Y
J I M K R U E G E R

"Why is it, Uatu, that I can't shake the feeling that Death is not following Mar-Vell, but Steve Rogers... Captain America?"

"What leads you to this conclusion, robot?"

"I'm not certain. Call it a hunch."

"You are not capable of hunches, merely calculating probabilities."

"You don't have any idea what it's like to be human, alien. So your definitions of what I am capable or incapable of are little more than uninformed opinion."

"Your attempts at defensiveness need work, robot, if you are going to convince the population of Earth that you are one of them."

"Whatever you say, Uatu. But this is about whether or not Cap is defending Mar-Vel from Death, or if, indeed, he is the prey of Death."

"What concerns you?"

"Two things: the first is Cap himself."

"Yes?"

"I have just watched him swear with all the conviction and definition of the soldier he is, that no one would ever die again. That Death would not be allowed to take anyone."

"Madness."

"Perhaps so, but it must be the insanity that comes with perfect reason. Perhaps there comes a point in which all fighting, all death, seems meaningless"

"Death is natural. It comes to all men."

"Does it?"

"Yes."

"But why?"

"That is the natural order brought out of the chaos of being. Birth and Death. We have spoken of this."

"But why does Birth necessitate death?"

"What are you saying?"

"If the plague that cursed man to be mutated was brought about by the Celestial tampering of mankind, who is to say that death itself is not some sort of a curse as well. There is a being who is Chasing Captain America and Mar-Vell whose touch will spirit one or both of them to a nether world where another war is being fought according to the prophesying eyes of Kyle Richmond."

"And so this Death is a curse?"

"I don't know. You have said that all of life is biological. That it is merely birth and death and birth again."

"It is."

"Then why does Death come on wings? Or in the form of a skeleton? Or in the form of a teenage girl? Why does death seem to have a personification?"

"I myself, have not seen Death, but merely witnessed it from a distance. Perhaps humanity is guilty once again of anthropomorphizing your own



destruction just as your invention of god is a animation of the concept of birth and creation."

"But Uatu. It's not. Not if you would have us think of the Celestials of our gods, then our memories of beings being responsible for who we are, are not the fabrications of a superstitious people, but a belief in personalities very real."

"I will concede this, robot. It seems you have learned something of the nature of existence, after all."

"So what if Death is a personality? Was there an originator of life on Earth prior to the Celestials' coming? Prior to the day, perhaps, that you were set here upon to moon to play midwife for the growing Celestial child within Earth? What if, Watcher? What if there were things done upon Earth you did not see?"

"Make your point, robot."

"What if you only accept Death as natural because you were not witness to a world upon which Death did not reign supreme?"

"Then I would be a fool to have assumed so much."

"Thank you."

"But I am not a fool, X-51, just as it is foolish to suggest as much. Death is not merely a commonality for the humanity you try so hard to mock. It is a common element to all of the planets in the universe. Every world knows it. No land is alien to its entropic nature."

"But what if Earth was the conduit to Death entering the Universe? What if all the universe became prey to entropy as a result of Earth?"

"I would say that you have been watching Sunday School lessons far more than the lives of those heroes you claim to care so much for."

"Did the Celestials create Death's Realm?"

"What?"

"What explanation is there for this place we hear Kyle Richmond speak about?"

"Why must there be an explanation? Perhaps these are only the dreams of the dead? Or perhaps this child who claims to be Mar-Vell has a sort of different effect on the mind than did the child Captain America killed."

"The Skull?"

"Yes. Perhaps the Mar-Vell child merely effects the beliefs of one's mind and convicts all he comes upon with a sort of hallucination or shared perspective upon

a world that does not exist at all? Perhaps this Mar-Vell child has mutant abilities after all."

"How can you say that? Didn't he bring Sue Richards back from the dead?"

"I doubt it."

"What do you mean?"

"The Richards woman was formed out of Reed Richards arm. Richards himself was already a second-tier mutation. Perhaps her existence is like that of the Asgardians and Galactus himself. Maybe Sue Richards now lives only as long as Richards believes that that is her identity."

"No..."

"Why not, X-51? Is it because what I am saying could not possibly be true, or is it because you don't want it to be? It's a matter of perspective, isn't it?"

"So what you're saying is that we have invented these dreams of Death to suggest that there is something after life to look forward to? That Mar-Vell's quest and Captain America's belief that this will somehow end war, is an illusion?"

"Why not?"

"I... I... don't..."

"I thought not. You see, X-51, knowledge is a danger to humanity. It promises hope in its unanswered questions and at the same time damns humanity when the unanswered becomes revealed."

"What about Mephisto?"

"What?"

"What about the Devil?"

"There is no devil, except, of course, for your referral of myself for not lifting a finger to help your miserable species."

"No. I'm talking about Mephisto."

"There is no Mephisto."

"You're certain of that?"

"Yes."

"That almost confirms, though, that there are being and places that you cannot see. It almost proves that your explanations are only limited to your experiences and those of the rest of your species."

"It does indeed. But we have seen so much more than you."

"Still..."

"Have you ever thought, robot, why my equipment is capable of witnessing 'Death' yet requires a Recorder to witness the realms of Asgard? Have you ever thought of what that says about Death?"



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UNIVERSE X: CAPTAIN AMERICA



"THE FIRST THING
I EVER LEARNED
ABOUT MY COUNTRY
WAS THAT IT DIDN'T
WANT ME AS I WAS.

"TO FIGHT FOR DEMOCRACY,
THE FIRST ENEMY I FACED
WAS MY *OWN BODY*."

"AT LEAST THAT'S WHAT I TOLD
MYSELF THE DAY I VOLUNTEERED
FOR *OPERATION REBIRTH*."

"THE SUPER-SOLDIER
FORMULA AND THE MAN
WHO CREATED IT WERE
LOST THAT DAY. SO I
WOULD BE THE *ONLY*
ONE."

"THE ONLY
SUPER
SOLDIER."

"I WAS MADE A
WEAPON TO
FIGHT THE NAZI
MENACE."

"I WAS MADE
CAPTAIN
AMERICA."

"THAT'S WHAT I WAS
TOLD. THAT'S WHAT I
TOLD *MYSELF*."



"AN AMERICAN
DREAM CREATED
TO FIGHT A FASCIST
NIGHTMARE."

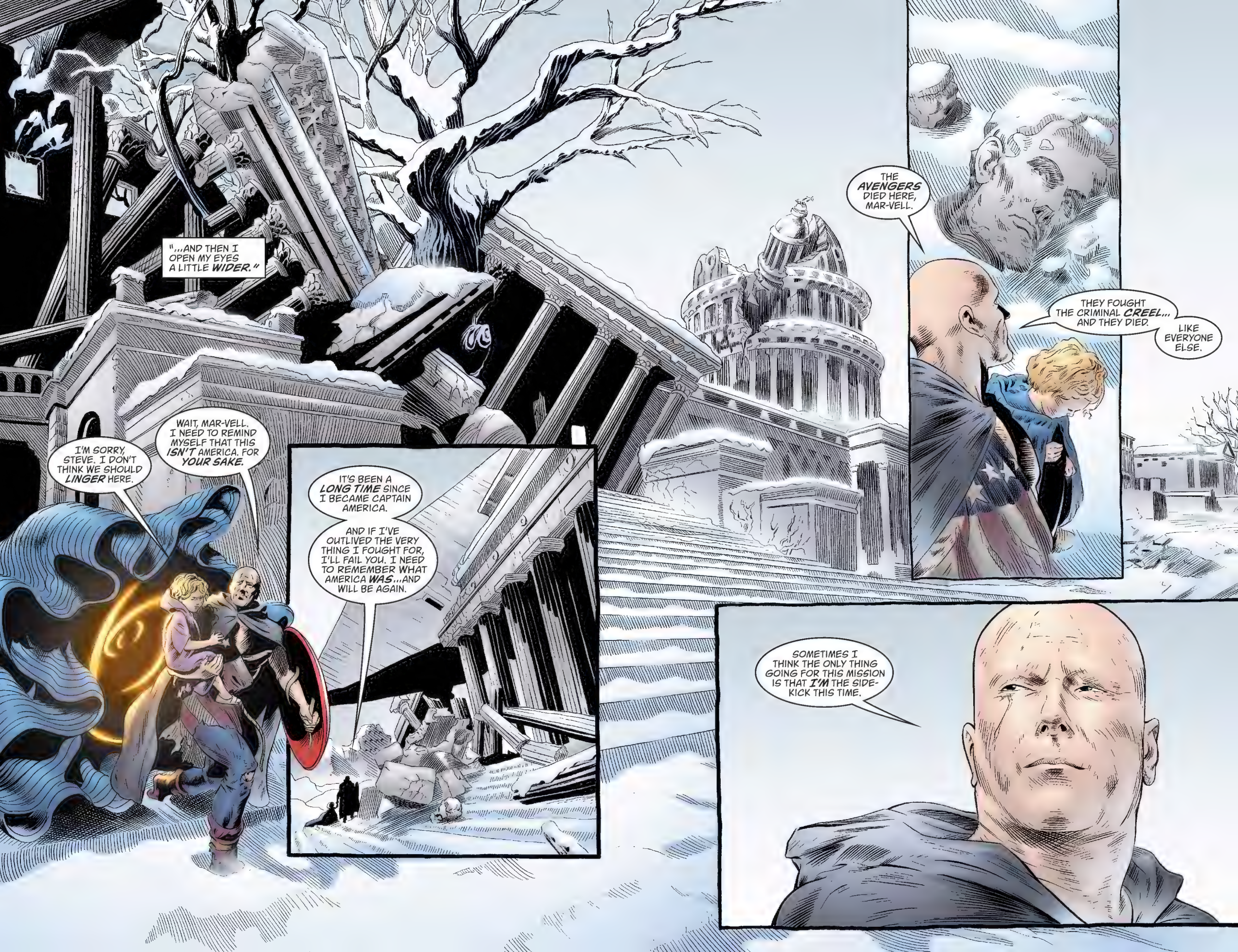
"IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE I COULD
EVER HAVE BELIEVED THERE WAS
SUCH A THING AS A *GOOD WAR*."

WE WERE
TOO LATE,
STEVE.

ARE WE
MAKING ANY
DIFFERENCE
AT ALL?

I
DON'T
KNOW. I
NEVER
DO.

WE
SEEM
TO
WIN...



"...AND THEN I
OPEN MY EYES
A LITTLE WIDER."

I'M SORRY,
STEVE. I DON'T
THINK WE SHOULD
LINGER HERE.

WAIT, MAR-VELL.
I NEED TO REMIND
MYSELF THAT THIS
ISN'T AMERICA. FOR
YOUR SAKE.

IT'S BEEN A
LONG TIME SINCE
I BECAME CAPTAIN
AMERICA.

AND IF I'VE
OUTLIVED THE VERY
THING I FOUGHT FOR,
I'LL FAIL YOU. I NEED
TO REMEMBER WHAT
AMERICA WAS...AND
WILL BE AGAIN.

THE
AVENGERS
DIED HERE,
MAR-VELL.

THEY FOUGHT
THE CRIMINAL CREEL...
AND THEY DIED.

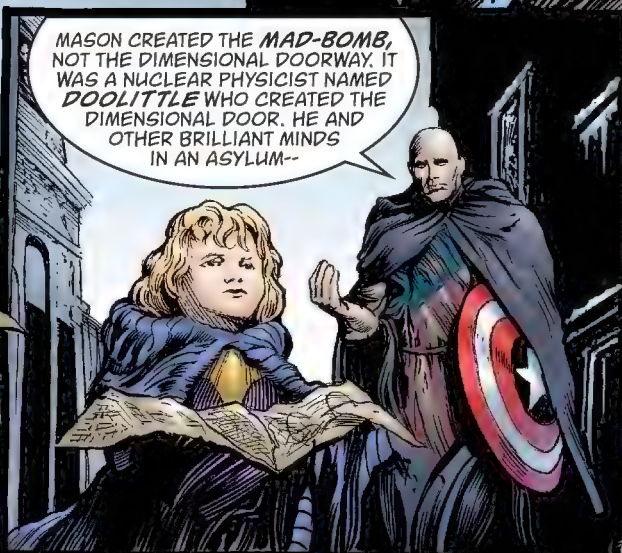
LIKE
EVERYONE
ELSE.

SOMETIMES I
THINK THE ONLY THING
GOING FOR THIS MISSION
IS THAT I'M THE SIDE-
KICK THIS TIME.



WHERE'S
MASON?

IT'S NOT
MASON WE NEED,
STEVE. IT'S THE
**DIMENSIONAL
DOORWAY** HE
INVENTED.



MASON CREATED THE **MAD-BOMB**,
NOT THE **DIMENSIONAL DOORWAY**. IT
WAS A NUCLEAR PHYSICIST NAMED
DOOLITTLE WHO CREATED THE
DIMENSIONAL DOOR. HE AND
OTHER BRILLIANT MINDS
IN AN ASYLUM--



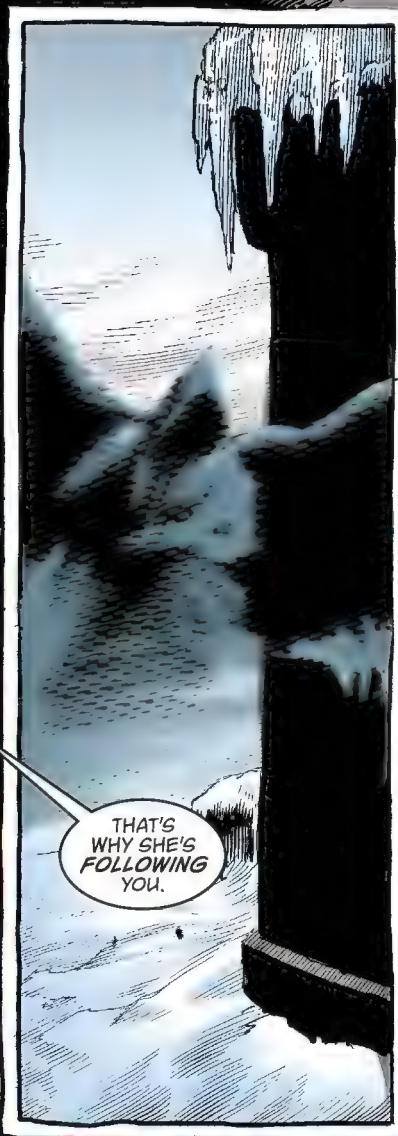
MASON HARDING
INVENTED **BOTH**,
STEVE.

DOOLITTLE AND
ALL THE OTHERS IN THE
ASYLUM WERE HIT WITH A
WAVE FROM THE **MAD-BOMB**
AFTER THEY **ASSISTED**
HARDING IN CREATING
IT.

HARDING'S WAY
OF PROTECTING HIS
SECRETS. WHO WOULD
EVER BELIEVE A
MADMAN?



BUT OUR
MISSION IS GREATER
THAN **DISARMAMENT**,
ISN'T IT, MAR-VELL?



THAT'S
WHY SHE'S
FOLLOWING
YOU.



YOU?! AFTER ALL THESE YEARS? HAVE YOU COME TO **KILL ME** FOR WHAT I'VE DONE TO THE WORLD?

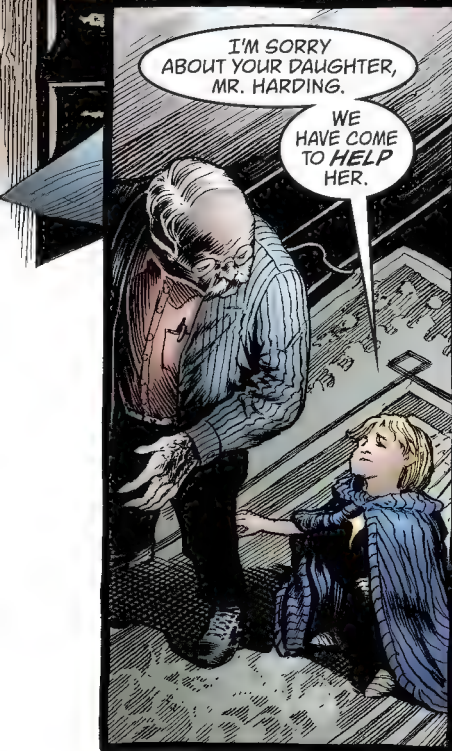


YOU DID THIS TO THE WORLD?



LOOK AT THE **DEAD**, YOUNG MAN. THEN LOOK AT THE **LIVING** AND TELL ME THAT MY MAD-BOMB WAS NOT DETONATED. THERE IS **NO MUTATION**.

INSANITY RULES HERE. THIS IS MY **LEGACY**.



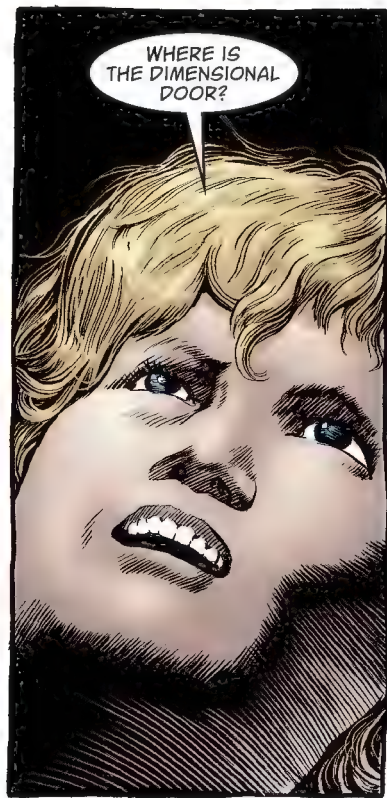
I'M SORRY ABOUT YOUR DAUGHTER, MR. HARDING.

WE HAVE COME TO **HELP** HER.



HOW? SHE WAS **MURDERED** WHEN THE KILLING BEGAN...AND THE AVENGERS **FAILED** TO STOP IT.

HOW WILL YOU **HELP** SOMEONE WHO IS **DEAD**?



WHERE IS THE **DIMENSIONAL** DOOR?

"IN THE DARKEST HOURS OF WORLD WAR II, WE WERE INVADERS."

"THIS WAS NOT MY LAND. IT WASN'T JIM HAMMOND'S, EITHER."

"AND WHAT NEED HAD THE PRINCE OF ATLANTIS FOR THE CONTINENT OF EUROPE?"

"YET THERE WE WERE."

"FIGHTING MADMEN."

"MADMEN WHO BELIEVED THEY WERE DEFENDING WHAT WAS RIGHT—FULLY THEIRS."

"WE BEAT OUR CHESTS AND CLOSED OUR FISTS OVER OUR HEARTS AND *SWORE* WE'D FIGHT TO THE DEATH FOR THE SAKE OF *FREEDOM*."





"CAPTAIN AMERICA.
THE SUB-MARINER.
THE HUMAN TORCH.
UNION JACK. SPITFIRE.
THE DESTROYER.

"TO THE *DEATH*."

"BUT IT WAS
BUCKY
WHO DIED."

"AND I WOULDN'T KNOW IT FOR *MANY YEARS*.
I WOULDN'T GRIEVE THIS LOSS TILL HE WAS
GONE FOR MORE YEARS THAN HE'D *LIVED*."



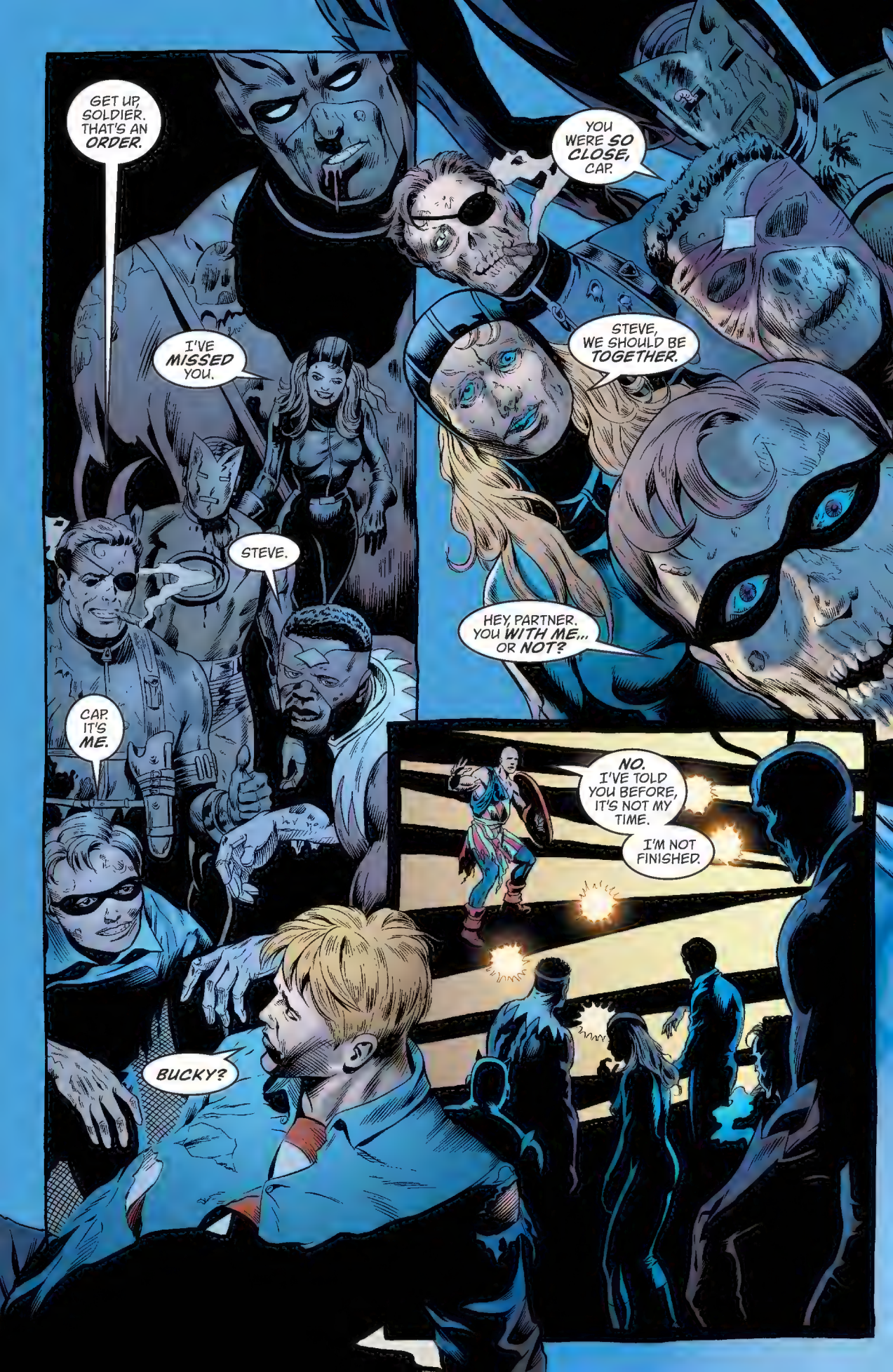
"IN A DAY WHEN EVEN THOSE I ONCE
CALLED *ALLIES* HAD BECOME MADMEN.



"A WORLD
ALIVE WITH
HEROES."



"A WORLD *INVADED*."



GET UP,
SOLDIER.
THAT'S AN
ORDER.

YOU
WERE *SO*
CLOSE,
CAP.

I'VE
MISSED
YOU.

STEVE,
WE SHOULD BE
TOGETHER.

STEVE.

HEY, PARTNER.
YOU *WITH ME*...
OR NOT?

CAP.
IT'S
ME.

BUCKY?

NO.
I'VE TOLD
YOU BEFORE,
IT'S NOT MY
TIME.

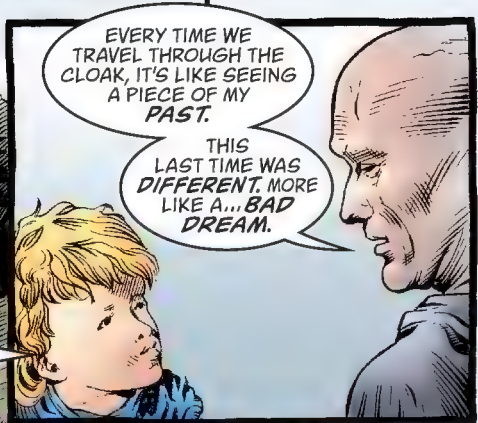
I'M NOT
FINISHED.



THE
DIMENSIONAL
DOORWAY IS
UP THERE,
STEVE.

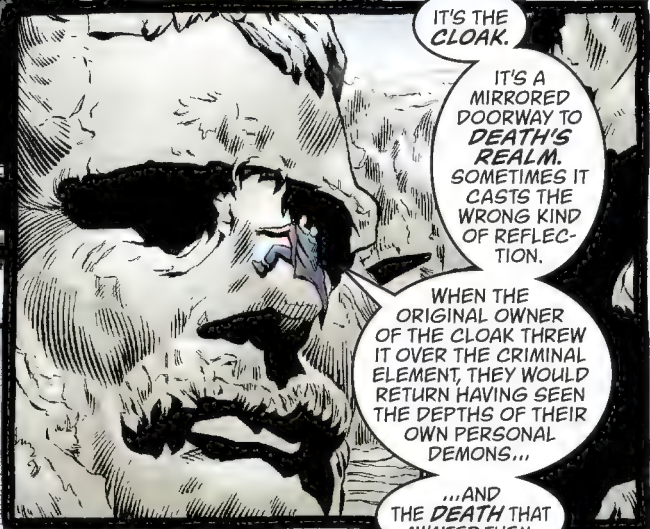
STEVE?

WHAT'S THE
PROBLEM?



EVERY TIME WE
TRAVEL THROUGH THE
CLOAK, IT'S LIKE SEEING
A PIECE OF MY
PAST.

THIS
LAST TIME WAS
DIFFERENT. MORE
LIKE A...**BAD**
DREAM.

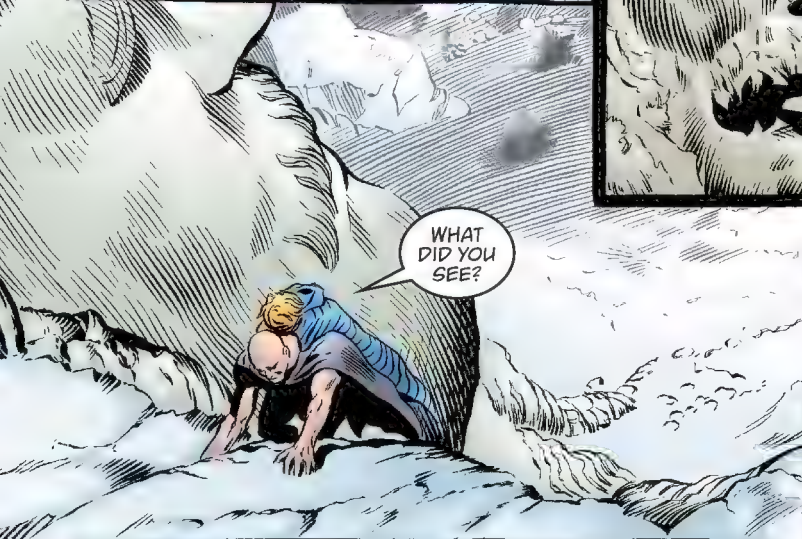


IT'S THE
CLOAK.

IT'S A
MIRRORED
DOORWAY TO
DEATH'S
REALM.
SOMETIMES IT
CASTS THE
WRONG KIND
OF REFLEC-
TION.

WHEN THE
ORIGINAL OWNER
OF THE CLOAK THREW
IT OVER THE CRIMINAL
ELEMENT, THEY WOULD
RETURN HAVING SEEN
THE DEPTHS OF THEIR
OWN PERSONAL
DEMONS...

...AND
THE **DEATH** THAT
AWAITED THEM.



WHAT
DID YOU
SEE?



SOMETIMES I
SEE THE WAR. THIS
TIME I SAW MY
FRIENDS.



THEY TOLD
ME TO **HELP**
YOU.



THERE.

KEEP A GOOD GRIP ON THE CLOAK. WE MAY HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE FAST.

WE'RE BEING WATCHED.

WHY DOES THIS CITY LOOK THE WAY IT DOES?

IT WAS A TOURIST SPOT.

WHEN THE **MUTATIONS** BEGAN, THE INMATES AND VICTIMS OF THE MAD-BOMB SETTLED HERE.

THIS IS JUST LIKE THE WAR...

...WE'D STEP INTO A STREET AND **NO ONE** WOULD BE IN SIGHT. IT WOULD LOOK LIKE WAR HADN'T EVEN **TOUCHED** THE PLACE. AND THEN THE BUILDINGS WOULD **EXPLODE** IN OUR **FACES**.



IS
THIS LIKE THE
WAR?



MORE
MUTANTS?

NO. FALCON
AND I FOUGHT
THESE THINGS
YEARS AGO.

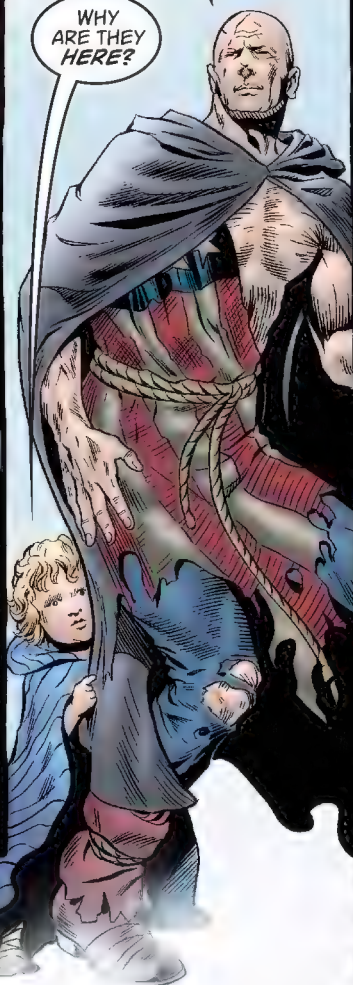
WHEN
WE FIRST
FACED THE
INMATES OF
THE ASYLUM,
THEY WERE
KNOWN AS
THE NIGHT
PEOPLE.

THEY WERE
LIVING IN AN
ALTERNATE
REALITY.



THESE
WERE THE
INDIGENOUS
LIFE-FORMS
OF THAT DIMEN-
SION.

WHY
ARE THEY
HERE?



THE
DIMENSIONAL
DOORWAY?

IT'S A
TRAP.



NIGHT PEOPLE!

THEY SHOULD REMEMBER ME...



...BUT OPEN THE CLOAK JUST IN CASE!



BE READY!



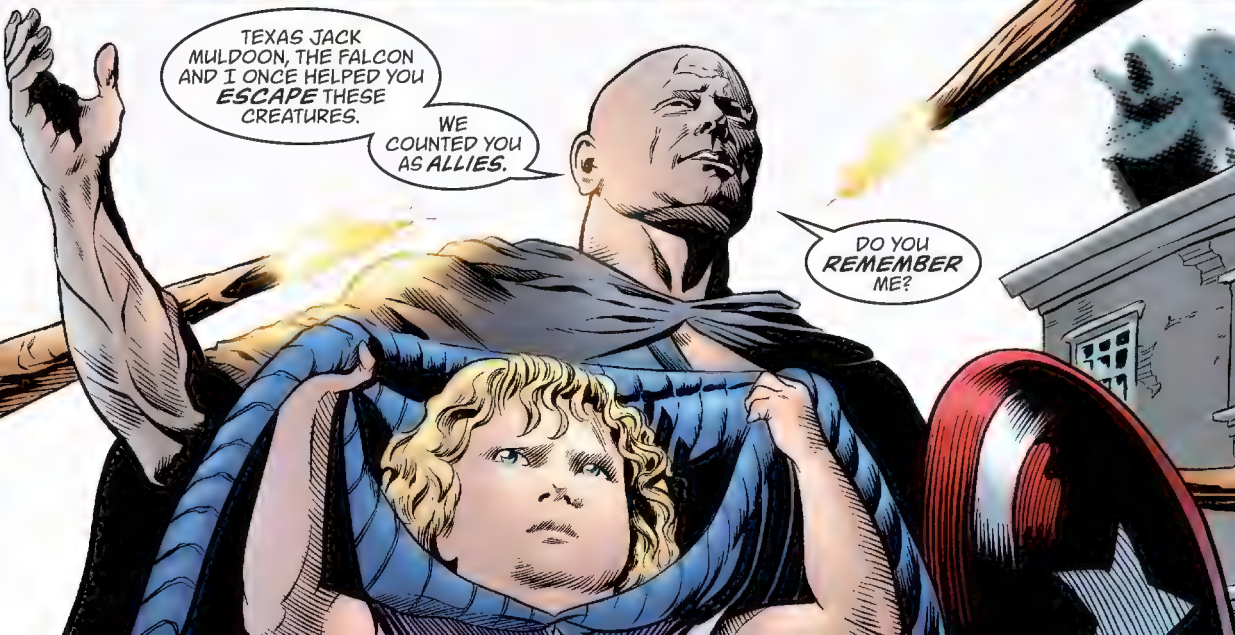
BEHIND ME.

NOW?



NOT YET.

WE'RE ONLY TRESPASSERS RIGHT NOW...NOT NECESSARILY ENEMIES.



TEXAS JACK MULDOON, THE FALCON AND I ONCE HELPED YOU ESCAPE THESE CREATURES.

WE COUNTED YOU AS ALLIES.

DO YOU REMEMBER ME?



I
REMEMBER YOU,
AMERICAN.

I AM
KNOWN AS JOHN
SMITH.



YOU
HELPED
US.

YOU
PROMISED TO
PROTECT
US.



YOU SAID
THEY WOULD NOT
FOLLOW.

THEY
DID.



YOU
PROMISED TO
BE THERE.

YOU
WEREN'T.



YOU WERE
RESPONSIBLE FOR
OUR WELL-BEING. WE
NEEDED FOOD. WE
NEEDED A PLACE TO
STAY. WE NEEDED
PROTECTION.

IS THAT
NOT WHAT
AMERICA
STANDS
FOR?

DO WE
NOT HAVE
RIGHTS?

YES...
NO.

I PROMISED
TO *HELP* I NEVER
PROMISED TO SEE TO
YOUR *EVERY* NEED. NO
ONE CAN *GUARANTEE*
ANOTHER PERSON'S
FUTURE.

AH... *NOW* I UNDER-
STAND. IN *THIS* LAND OF
OPPORTUNITY, THERE IS NO
MORAL RESPONSIBILITY
FOR ONE'S NEIGHBOR. IS
THAT IT, AMERICAN?

TO OUR KNOWLEDGE,
NEITHER YOU NOR THE FALCON
NOR MULDOON EVER *BOTHERED*
TO CHECK UP ON US.

NEVER
BOTHERED TO
ENFORCE OUR
OPPORTUNITY!

NEVER *TRIED*
TO SEE IF YOU WERE
TRULY RIGHT! NEVER
BOTHERED TO MAKE
CERTAIN WE WEREN'T
FOLLOWED!

THEY *STILL* COME
IN THE NIGHT. THEY COME
THROUGH THE DIMENSIONAL
DOOR THAT *YOUR*
PEOPLE...

WHAT?
OH. I
SEE.

THE *CHILD*
IS THE ONE SAID
TO TAKE ALL
POWER AWAY.

I'M *SORRY*
FOR PROMISES I
MADE THAT I COULD
NOT KEEP.

BUT WE CAN
MAKE *CERTAIN* YOU
ARE *NEVER* ATTACKED
AGAIN.

WE WILL *NOT*
LOSE A HOME BE-
CAUSE OF YOUR
PROMISES
AGAIN!

KILL THEM!

MAR-VELL?

NOW!



"NO, I *CAN'T* WATCH THIS AGAIN. HOW MANY *TIMES* MUST I RE-MEMBER?"



GUTEN TAG, HERR ROGERS!

I WOULD LIKE TO TELL YOU ABOUT SOME *RECENT FINDINGS* IN REGARDS TO YOUR... *CONDITION.*



LET ME TELL YOU OF THE *ORIGIN* OF CAPTAIN AMERICA. LET US SPEAK AS *ALLIES* NOW, INSTEAD OF ENEMIES.

WE ARE *NOT* ALLIES, NAZI. I COULD NEVER--



NO? NEVER?

ZEN WHAT I AM ABOUT TO *READ* TO YOU COULD NEVER BE *TRUE.*

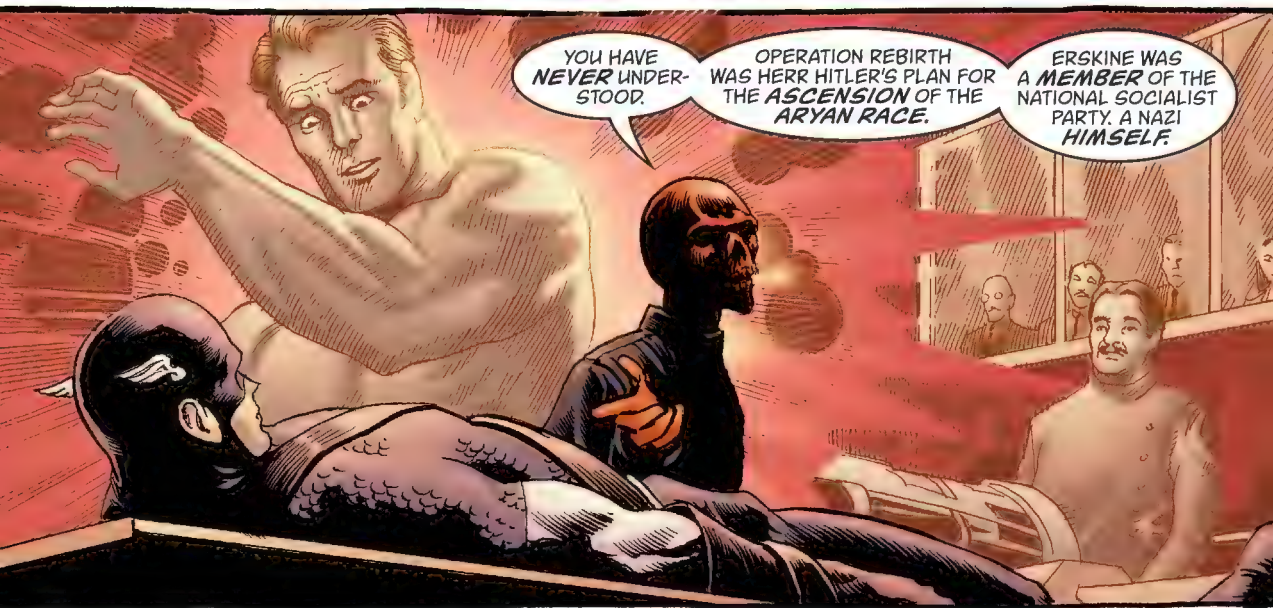


HAVE YOU EVER **WONDERED**, CAPTAIN...HOW THE THIRD REICH WAS CAPABLE OF STEALING SO **MANY** ALLIED SECRETS DURING THE WAR?

DER FUHRER BELIEVED THAT OUR OPERATIONS WOULD BE **BEST GUARDED** IF THEY WERE DISGUISED...

...AS OPERATIONS ORIGINATING FROM **OTHER NATIONS**. IF CERTAIN OPERATIONS AND DISCOVERIES WERE ACTUALLY FUNDED AND RESEARCHED FROM **WITHIN** ENEMY LANDS.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND.



YOU HAVE **NEVER UNDERSTOOD**.

OPERATION REBIRTH WAS HERR HITLER'S PLAN FOR THE **ASCENSION** OF THE **ARYAN RACE**.

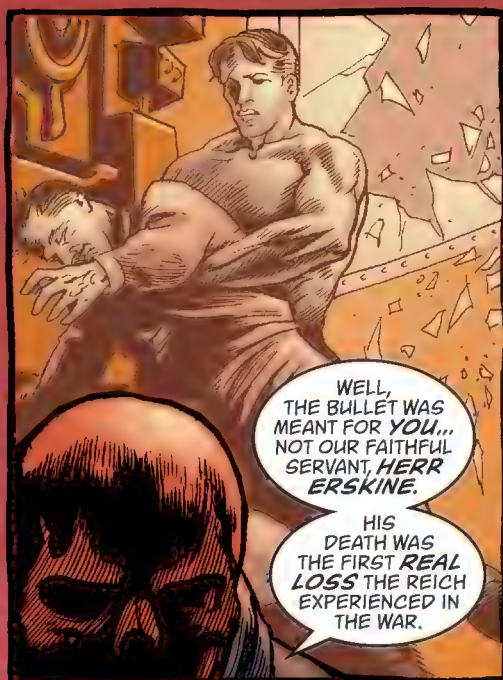
ERSKINE WAS A **MEMBER** OF THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST PARTY. A NAZI **HIMSELF**.



YOU'RE **CRAZY**, SCHMIDT! YOU CAN'T **REWRITE** HISTORY!

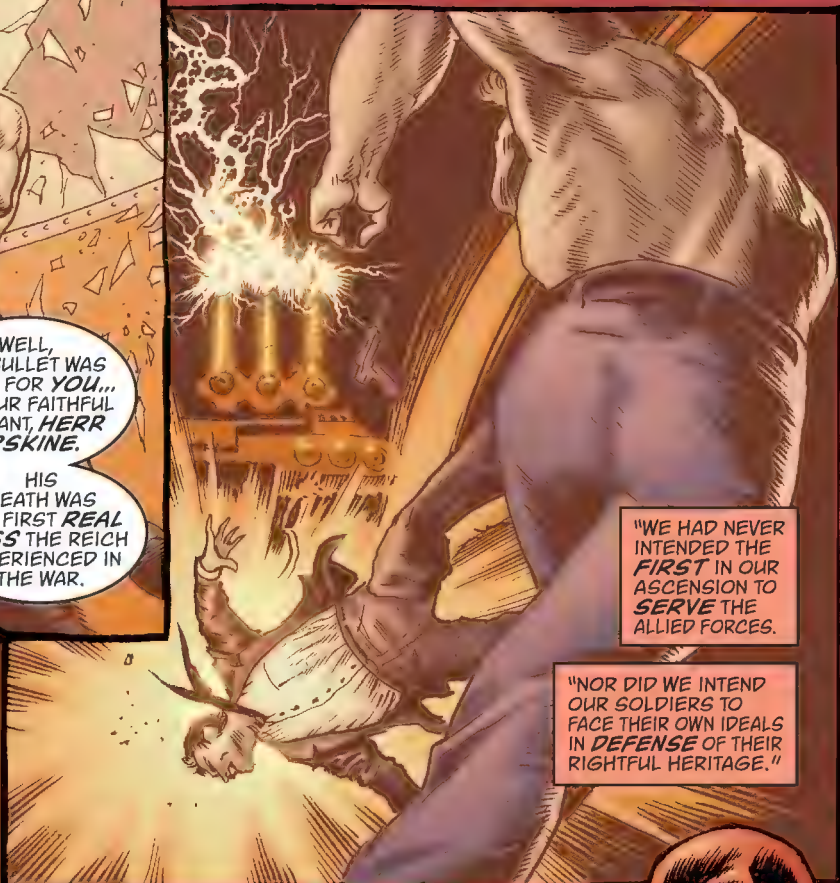
FOOLISH BOY. IT WAS **REWRITTEN** IN THE **FIRST** PLACE.

YOU REMEMBER, OF COURSE, THE NAZI AGENT WHO TRIED TO **KILL YOU** ONCE YOU WERE **REBORN**?



WELL,
THE BULLET WAS
MEANT FOR *YOU*...
NOT OUR FAITHFUL
SERVANT, *HERR*
ERSKINE.

HIS
DEATH WAS
THE FIRST *REAL*
LOSS THE REICH
EXPERIENCED IN
THE WAR.



"WE HAD NEVER
INTENDED THE
FIRST IN OUR
ASCENSION TO
SERVE THE
ALLIED FORCES.

"NOR DID WE INTEND
OUR SOLDIERS TO
FACE THEIR OWN IDEALS
IN *DEFENSE* OF THEIR
RIGHTFUL HERITAGE."



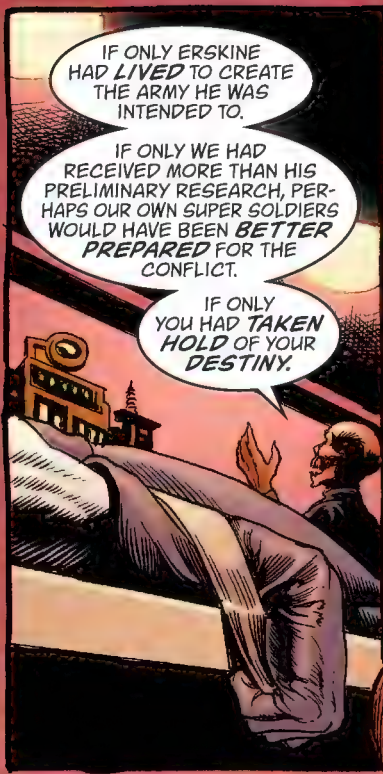
YOU LOST A
FATHER OF SORTS THAT
DAY, *HERR* ROGERS...BUT
THE *FATHERLAND* LOST
ITS *FIRST BORN*.



"IF"

THE MOST
IMPORTANT
WORD IN YOUR
ENGLISH
LANGUAGE,
JA?

JOIN NOW
HITLER
YOUTH



IF ONLY ERSKINE HAD **LIVED** TO CREATE THE ARMY HE WAS INTENDED TO.

IF ONLY WE HAD RECEIVED MORE THAN HIS PRELIMINARY RESEARCH, PERHAPS OUR OWN SUPER SOLDIERS WOULD HAVE BEEN **BETTER PREPARED** FOR THE CONFLICT.

IF ONLY YOU HAD **TAKEN HOLD** OF YOUR DESTINY.



IT'S A **LIE**.

YOU ARE THE **EMBODIMENT** OF THE ARYAN AGENDA.



YOU ARE HITLER'S **TRUE SON**, ROGERS. YOU ARE--

SHUT UP.



DAS TUT MIR LEID, JUNGE.

IT WAS A **TOP-SECRET EXPERIMENT** THAT WE KNEW ALL ABOUT.

INVOLVING A BLOND-HAIRED AND BLUE-EYED **WEAKLING** DISCOVERING HIS **TRUE POTENTIAL**.

IN A TIME WHEN ONLY **ONE NATION** CLAIMED TO HAVE THE BLOOD OF A **MASTER RACE** COURSEING WITHIN IT.



IT... **CAN'T BE TRUE**.
NO.





IT'S NOT TRUE!

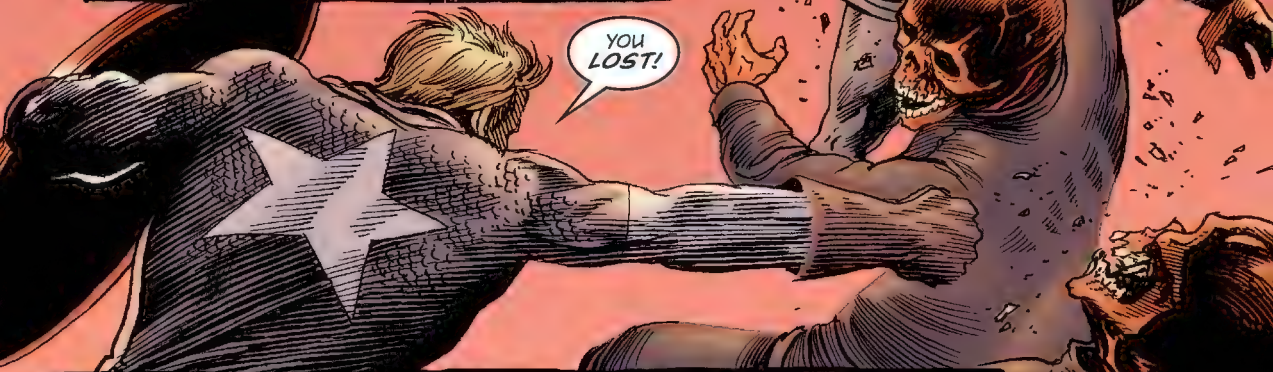
YOU TWIST EVERYTHING!

EVERYTHING!

I WON'T LET YOU TWIST ME!

NEIN. LET HIM COME.

WHEN WILL YOU STOP?





WHY
WON'T YOU *GIVE UP?*



WHY
AREN'T YOU
FIGHTING BACK?



BECAUSE, ROGERS...
YOU ARE EVERYTHING MY
FUHRER EVER *DREAMED*
OF.

IF I AM TO
DIE, LET IT BE AT
THE HANDS OF
MY *FUHRER'S*
DREAM.



YOU
POINT THE
WAY.



AS LONG
AS YOU LIVE, THE
WAR WILL *NEVER*
BE OVER.



**SEIG
HEIL!**

"I THOUGHT I WAS
THE AMERICAN
DREAM."

"AND THEN I
WOKE UP."





IT'S
NOT THEIR
FAULT.

NOT
ALL OF
IT.



HERE I AM
FIGHTING **MADMEN**
AGAIN.



WHILE THEY'RE
DISTRACTED, GET THE
DIMENSIONAL DOORWAY.
I'LL HELP YOU
DOWN.



BROTHER
JOHN?!



STAY HERE
UNTIL YOU HAVE A
CLEAR SHOT.

WHAT ARE
YOU GOING TO
DO?



WHAT
I ALWAYS
DO.

CAP?
SHE'S
HERE.



YOU
CAN'T HAVE
ME.



HE
WON'T LET
YOU.



I TOLD YOU
ONCE BEFORE THAT
I WOULD **HELP YOU**
AGAINST THEM. I
MEANT IT.



LISTEN TO ME. ALL OF YOU. THE MONSTERS WILL NEVER BOTHER YOU AGAIN.



THAT'S
WHAT YOU PROMISED
BEFORE! WHERE'S
THE **BOY?**

BACK IN
THAT **CLOAK** YOU
TWO ARE ALWAYS
ESCAPING
INTO?



LOOK! THE CHILD!
HE'S TAKEN
THE **DIMENSIONAL**
DOORWAY!

SHE'S
HERE, STEVE!
SHE'S **HERE!**



BROTHERS!
THE **CLOAK!**



NO!



STUN HIM.

THANK YOU
FOR SAVING ME,
AMERICAN.

"I HAD COME UNDER THE SKULL'S JUDGMENT. NO LONGER DID HE WISH TO KILL ME. NOW, HE ONLY WISHED TO MAKE CERTAIN I LIVED UP TO THE **MASTER'S DREAM**.

"THE SKULL KILLED **BERNIE ROSENTHAL**, A GIRL I DATED YEARS AGO. HE KILLED HER BECAUSE OF OUR BRIEF ASSOCIATION.

"HE SAID HE DID IT FOR ME."



I AM NOT YOUR DREAM.

SHE WAS A FOOLISH WOMAN. NOT WORTHY OF THE FUHRER'S GIFT.

SHE WASN'T EVEN HUMAN.

WE ARE BROTHERS, YOU AND I! YOU CANNOT DENY WHO YOU ARE!

YOU ARE THE DREAM!

"THE **TRUTH**--DESPITE ALL HE REPRESENTED AND EVERYTHING HE'D DONE, DESPITE EVERYTHING THAT MADE HIS DEATH A **RECKONING** AND AN EFFORT FOR JUSTICE AND NECESSITY-- WAS THAT I KILLED THE SKULL BECAUSE I WANTED TO.

"I WANTED TO.

"I SWORE THAT DAY I WOULD **NEVER** KILL AGAIN. THAT TO KILL AGAIN WOULD BE TO SHAME EVERYTHING I'D **EVER** FOUGHT FOR. TO KILL AGAIN WOULD BE MY **FAILURE**.

"BUT WHO HAD EVER HEARD OF A SOLDIER WHO **WOULDN'T** TAKE A LIFE?"



STOP IT!



"I COULD NO LONGER BE AN AVENGER.

"THE AVENGERS WERE MORE THAN JUST HEROES...THEY WERE **EXAMPLES**... AND THEIR RANKS HAD TO BE **PURE**."

STEVE.
COME
BACK.

WE
NEED
YOU.

WE NEED
YOU.

WE NEED
YOU.

WE NEED
YOU.

WE NEED
YOU.

WE NEED
YOU.

"I SOMETIMES WONDER IF THINGS WOULD HAVE BEEN DIFFERENT IF I'D **STAYED** ON THE TEAM.

"WF"



"I JOINED **NICK FURY** AND **S.H.I.E.L.D.** SHORTLY AFTER THE MEAT SHORTAGES BEGAN.

"THE BALANCE OF POWER HAD **SHIFTED** IN THE WORLD. THERE WAS NO SUCH THING AS THE **COMMON MAN** ANYMORE.

"THE ALIEN LIFE-FORM THAT CAME TO BE KNOWN AS **HYDRA** ATTACKED **S.H.I.E.L.D.** FIRST, REDUCING MANY OF THE MOST LOYAL SOLDIERS I'VE EVER KNOWN INTO SENSELESS **ZOMBIES**.

"I SHOULD HAVE REALIZED THEN THERE WAS A **REASON** THEY WERE ATTACKED FIRST.

"I SHOULD HAVE REALIZED THE REASON THEY WERE TURNED HAD **NOTHING** TO DO WITH AN **ALIEN** THREAT...

"...BUT ONE **DOMESTIC** IN NATURE.

"ONE EAGER TO FILL THE **VOID** LEFT BY THE DESTRUCTION OF WASHINGTON DC AND THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT."

I WOULD LIKE **YOU** TO LEAD MY ARMIES AGAINST THE **HYDRA**, GENERAL.

IT'S **CAPTAIN AMERICA**, OSBORN. AND THEY'RE NOT **YOUR** ARMIES, NO MATTER WHAT YOU HAVE THE PRESS SAY.

YOU ARE **NOT** THE PRESIDENT.

YOUR CURRENT POSITION IS NOT ONE SELECTED BY THE **PEOPLE** OF THIS COUNTRY.

"BUT OSBORN FOUND ALLIES **ELSEWHERE**, INDUSTRIALIST **TONY STARK** AND THE **IRON AVENGERS**--

"--**ROBOT** VERSIONS BUILT BY STARK WHOSE VERY PRESENCE **MOCKED** THE LOSS OF EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES."

"THE IRON AVENGERS COULDN'T
BE **EVERYWHERE** AT ONCE.

"AND SOON, THE LAST VESTIGE
OF THE **AMERICAN GOVERNMENT**
FELL FROM THE **SKY**."

"WITH THE DEATH OF NICK
FURY AND THE CRASHING
OF THE HELI-CARRIER, **NO
ONE** COULD STOP OSBORN.

"LIKE GHOSTS, THE
LIFE-MODEL
DECOYS OF FURY
ESCAPED THIS
COFFIN.

"WHILE I
MADE MY
HOME
THERE..."



"...AND FOUND WHAT *ELSE* HAD BEEN BURIED THERE."

LISTEN, CAP,
THIS NEW HYDRA
WAS *CREATED*
BY OSBORN.

HE
SYNTHESIZED
IT FROM SOMETHING
HE FOUND...SOMETHING
HIDDEN CALLED THE
BLOODSTONE
FILES.

I WANTED
TA TELL YOU THIS
IN PERSON, BUT I
GET THE FEELIN' I'M
NOT GONNA GET
THE *CHANCE*.

BECAUSE YOU
DENIED OSBORN, YER
FRIENDS WERE TARGETED
TO BECOME HYDRA
THEMSELVES.

HE WENT
AFTER *SHARON*.
AND *FALCON*. AND
HE'LL BE COMIN'
AFTER *YOU*,
TOO.

ONE
WAY OR
ANOTHER,
HE'LL
BE--

--WHAT
IN *SAM*
HILL...?

"I'D DOOMED MY FRIENDS.
THEY WERE *DEAD* BECAUSE
OF ME.

"BECAUSE I WOULDN'T
BE ANYONE'S *SOLDIER*."

"I WENT
TO **NEW
YORK.**

"READY TO TAKE
OSBORN **DOWN.**
TO THROW AWAY
EVEN THE **PROMISE**
I'D SWORN TO
MYSELF.

"BEING ON THE SIDE
OF **RIGHTEOUSNESS**
WAS NO LONGER EVEN
A **CONCERN** OF MINE.

"I HAD **NO REPUTA-
TION** LEFT TO DEFEND.

"I FACED MORE
HYDRA THERE.
AND FOUND THE
RED SKULL HAD
RETURNED.

"I'D FACED THE SKULL
IN **MANY FORMS**
OVER THE YEARS.

"BUT HE HAD NEVER
ATTACKED ME AS A
CHILD.

"HE HAD NEVER
TAKEN THE FORM
AND AGE OF
BUCKY BEFORE.

"THIS SKULL **MENTALLY**
CONTROLLED THOSE
FEW FRIENDS I STILL HAD.

"REDWING. NAMOR.
JACK MULDOON.

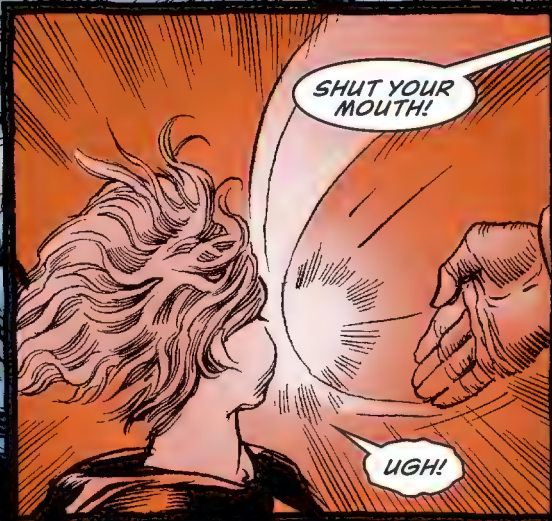
"TO SAVE THEM, I
FAILED ALL THAT I
HAD **ONCE BEEN.**

"HOW **SMALL** I
HAD BECOME."



DON'T
MOVE,
STEVE!

YOU'LL
SLIT YOUR
WRISTS!

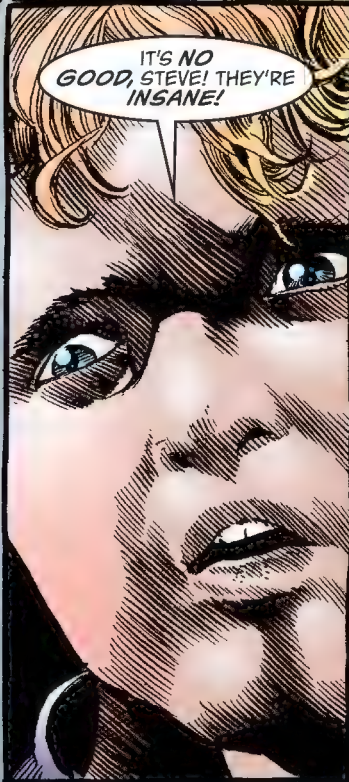


SHUT YOUR
MOUTH!

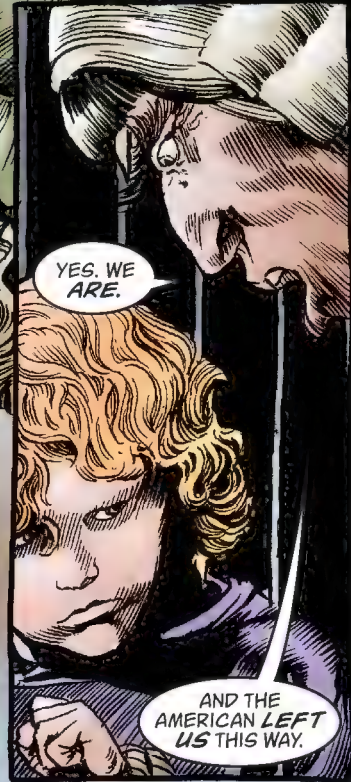
UGH!



WE TOOK THE
DIMENSIONAL DOORWAY!
YOU'LL NEVER HAVE REASON
TO **FEAR** THE OTHER DIMEN-
SION AGAIN! YOU'RE
FREE!

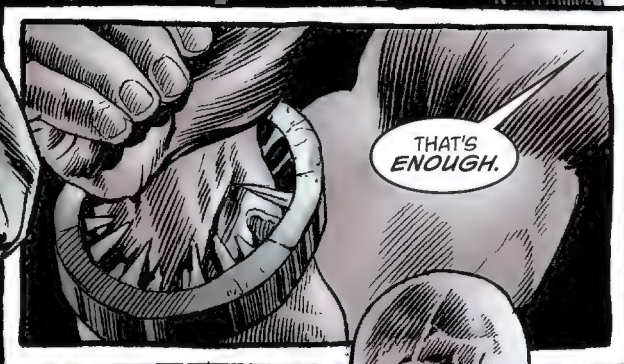


IT'S **NO**
GOOD, STEVE! THEY'RE
INSANE!



YES, WE
ARE.

AND THE
AMERICAN **LEFT**
US THIS WAY.



THAT'S
ENOUGH.

PUT IT
ON *ME*, JOHN
SMITH.

HEAP
IT UP.

LAY IT AND
EVERY *OTHER* EXCUSE
FOR YOUR OWN MORAL FAILURES
UPON ME AND CLAIM THAT IT IS
DEMOCRACY'S FAULT THAT
YOU DIDN'T BECOME ALL
YOU *COULD* HAVE.

BLAME
YOUR LOT ON
AMERICA.

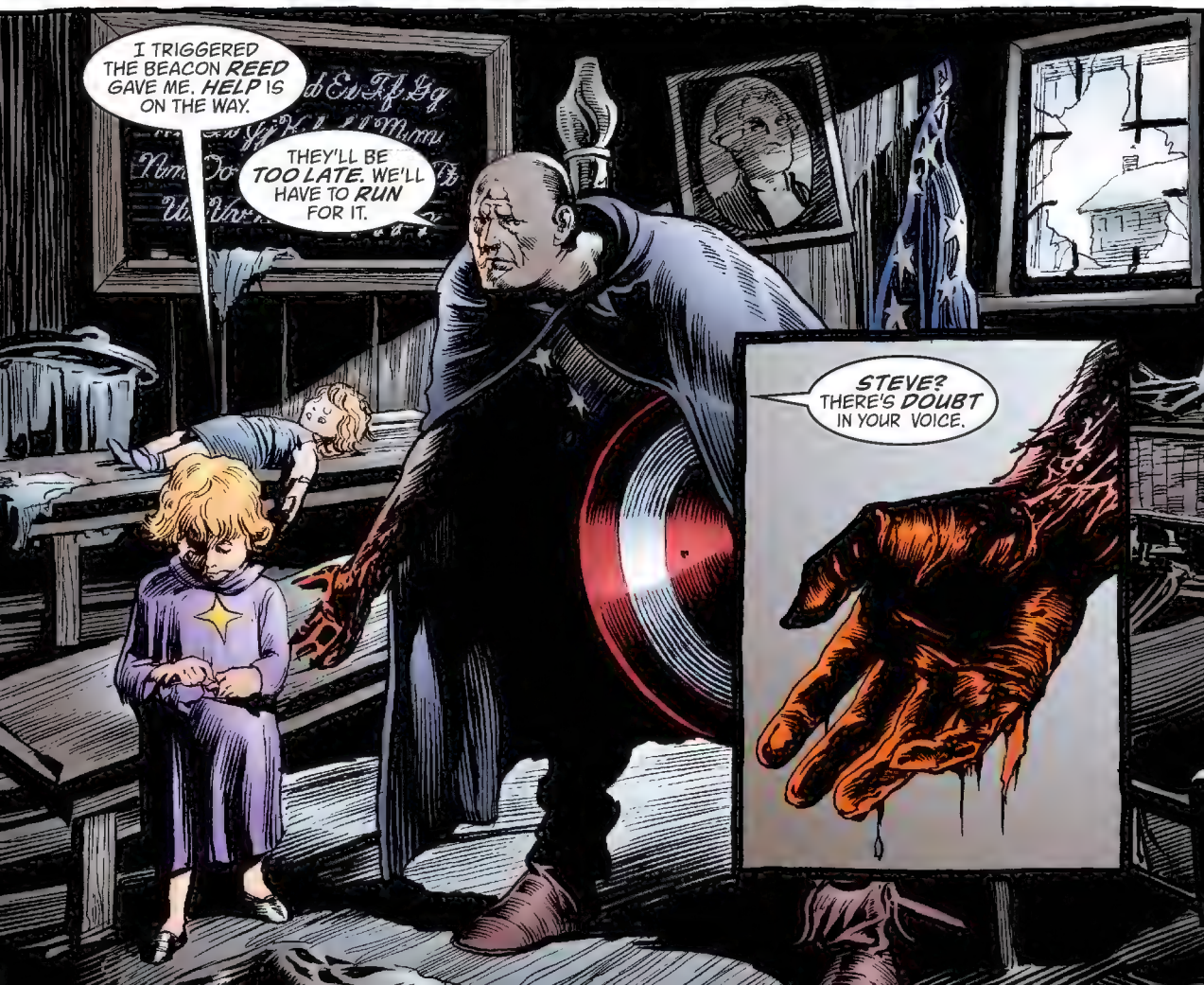
BLAME IT ON
FREEDOM.

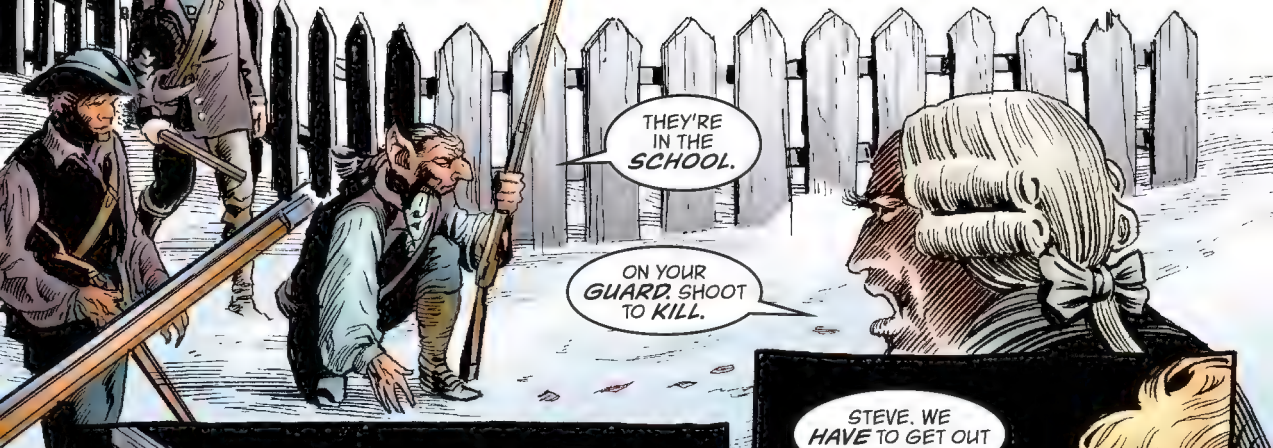
BUT THE
BLOOD ON MY
HANDS IS MY
OWN.



YOU
CAN'T STOP
ME.
NOT
UNLESS
I LET
YOU.







THEY'RE
IN THE
SCHOOL.

ON YOUR
GUARD. SHOOT
TO KILL.



YOUR
SHIELD WILL
PROTECT
US.

NOT
BOTH OF
US.



STEVE, WE
HAVE TO GET OUT
OF HERE.

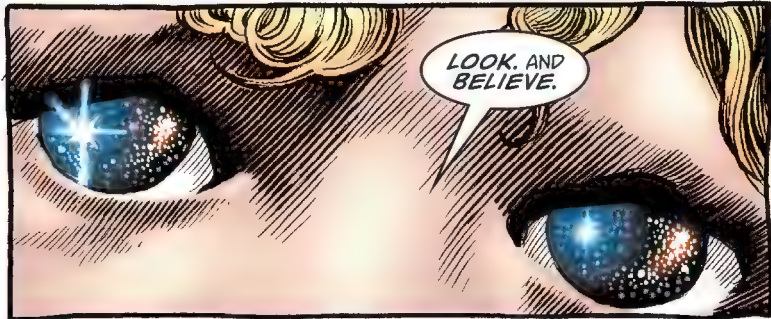
YOU DON'T
UNDERSTAND
WHAT'S AT
STAKE.



THIS ISN'T
EVEN ABOUT *THIS*
WORLD, STEVE.

IT'S
ABOUT THE
NEXT.

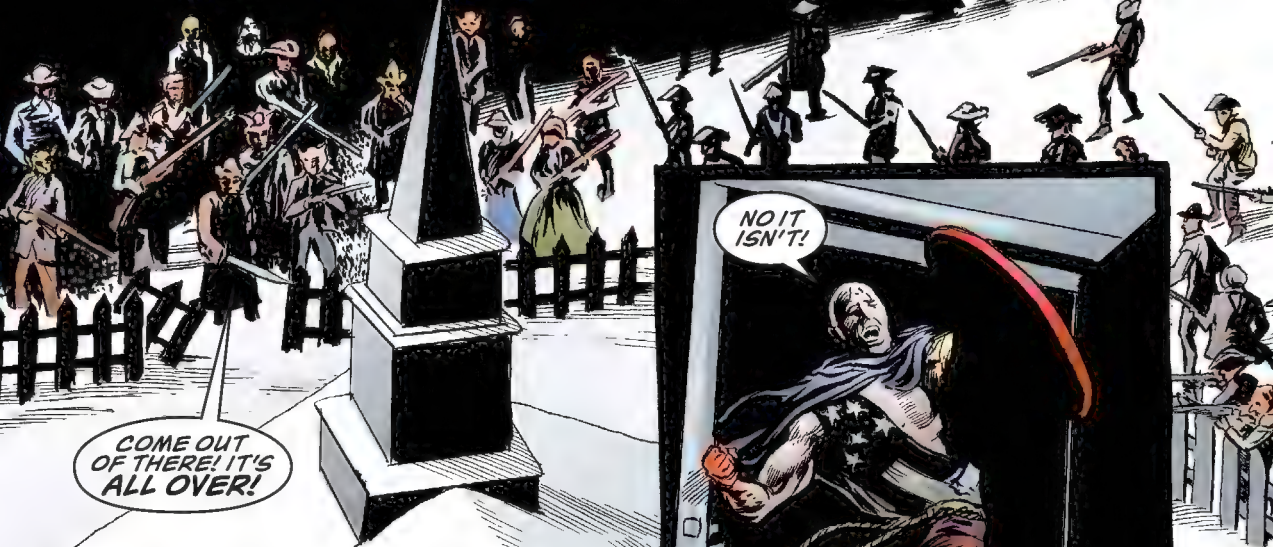
THIS
IS FOR ITS
FREEDOM.



LOOK, AND
BELIEVE.



I...I NEVER
DREAMED...



COME OUT
OF THERE! IT'S
ALL OVER!



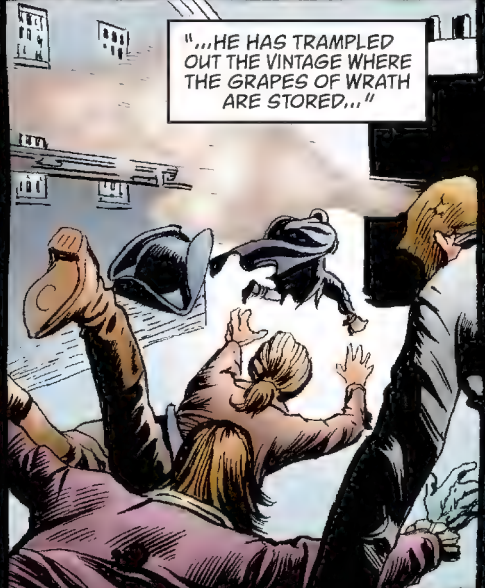
NO IT
ISN'T!



HOLD ON!



"MINE EYES HAVE
SEEN THE GLORY
OF THE COMING
OF THE LORD..."



"...HE HAS TRAMPLED
OUT THE VINTAGE WHERE
THE GRAPES OF WRATH
ARE STORED..."



"...HE HATH LOOSED THE
FATEFUL LIGHTNING OF
HIS TERRIBLE SWIFT
SWORD..."

"...HIS TRUTH IS
MARCHING ON."

"WITH THE FIRST HIT,
I'M A **BOY** AGAIN."

"PLAYING
TAG WITH MY
FATHER."

"I'M HIT AGAIN. MY MOTHER'S
DEAD NOW. DAD DIED LONG
AGO. I'M **ALL ALONE**."

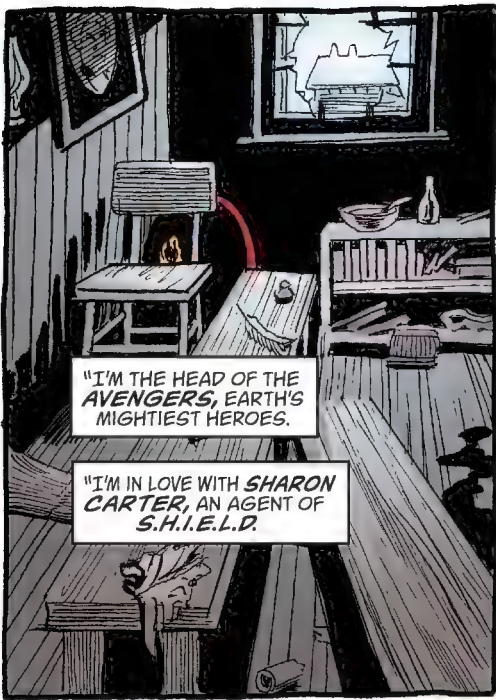
"HITLER'S INVADDED FRANCE.
I WANT TO FIGHT HIM, BUT I'M
NOT **STRONG ENOUGH**."

"I'VE BECOME **CAPTAIN
AMERICA**. I'M A **LIVING
LEGEND**."

DON'T WORRY,
MAR-VELL, WE'LL MAKE IT.
I **PROMISE**."

"BUCKY'S **DEAD**. HE'S BEEN
DEAD FOR SO **MANY YEARS**."

"HOW AM I GOING
TO LIVE IN THE PAST?
I DON'T EVEN KNOW
THE **WORLD ANY-
MORE**."

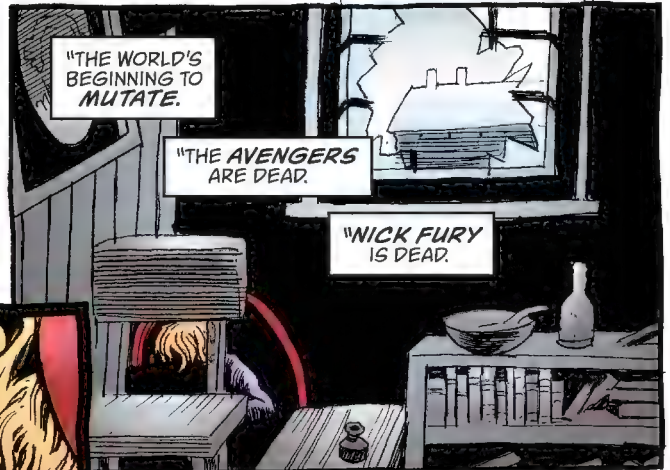


"I'M THE HEAD OF THE AVENGERS, EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES.

"I'M IN LOVE WITH SHARON CARTER, AN AGENT OF S.H.I.E.L.D.



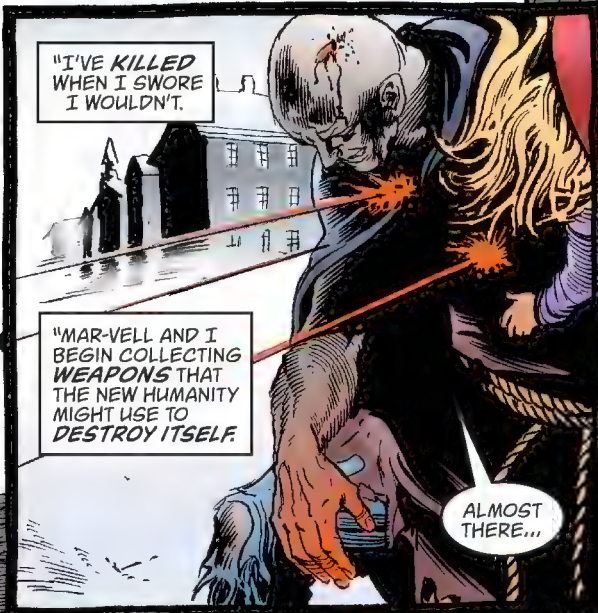
"SOMEONE WANTS ME TO RUN FOR PRESIDENT. I CAN'T.



"THE WORLD'S BEGINNING TO MUTATE.

"THE AVENGERS ARE DEAD.

"NICK FURY IS DEAD.



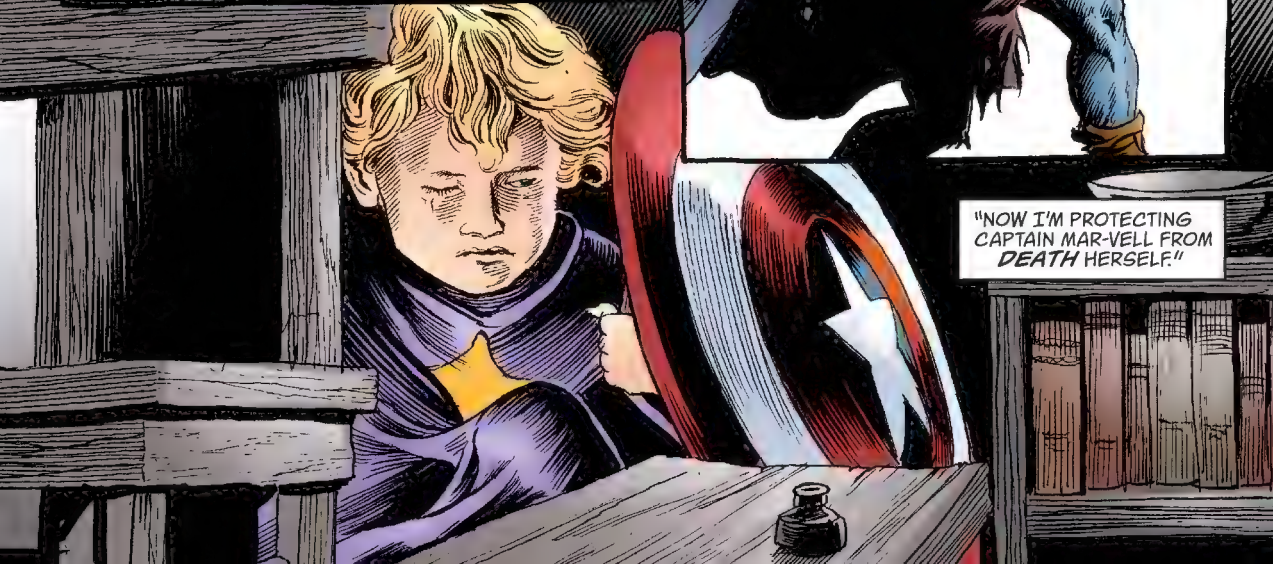
"I'VE KILLED WHEN I SWORE I WOULDN'T.

"MAR-VELL AND I BEGIN COLLECTING WEAPONS THAT THE NEW HUMANITY MIGHT USE TO DESTROY ITSELF.

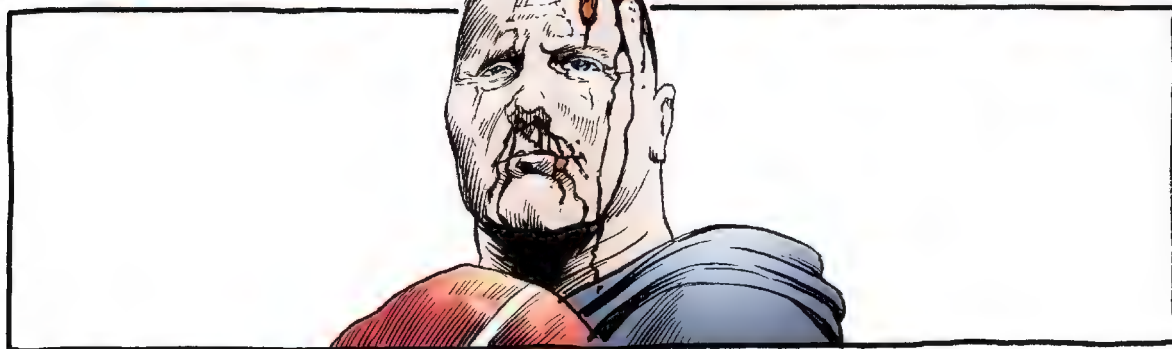
"ALMOST THERE..."



"HOLD... ON.



"NOW I'M PROTECTING CAPTAIN MAR-VELL FROM DEATH HERSELF."

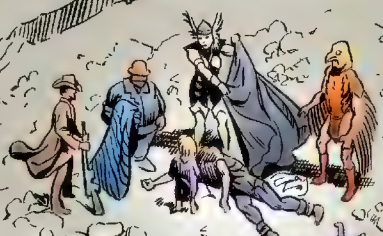
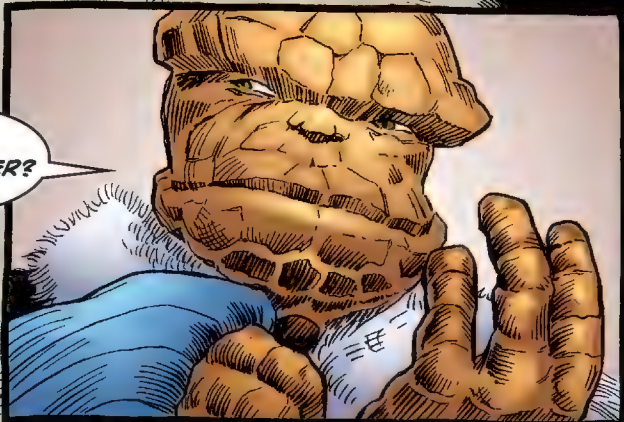




DERN IT, STEVE.

I CAME AS SOON AS I GOT YER MESSAGE...

...WHY DIDN'T YA CALL **SOONER?** WHY?



GO AND FLY AND NEVER BE PULLED DOWN BY THAT WHICH KEEPS **US** HERE.

YOU HAVE **EARNED** THIS, MIGHTY EAGLE.

YOU HAVE **WON** THIS.



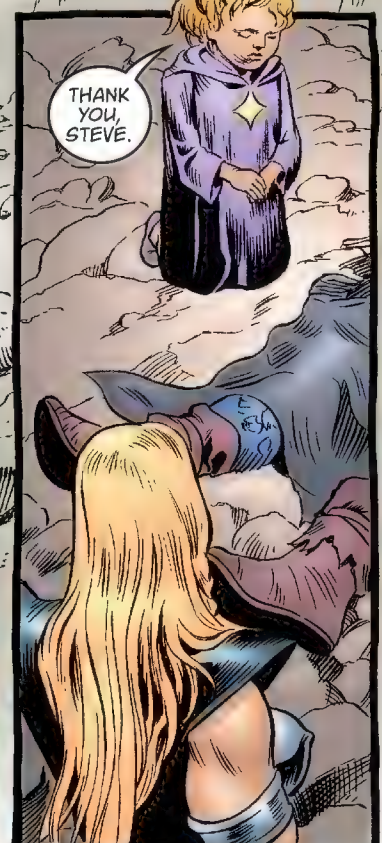
MY BROTHER IS A LIAR, CAPTAIN, TO SAY THAT WE ARE **NOT GODS**. BUT YOU...YOU...

...YOUR LIFE IS TESTAMENT THAT GODHOOD BE NOT **EXCLUSIVE** TO ASSGARDIANS.

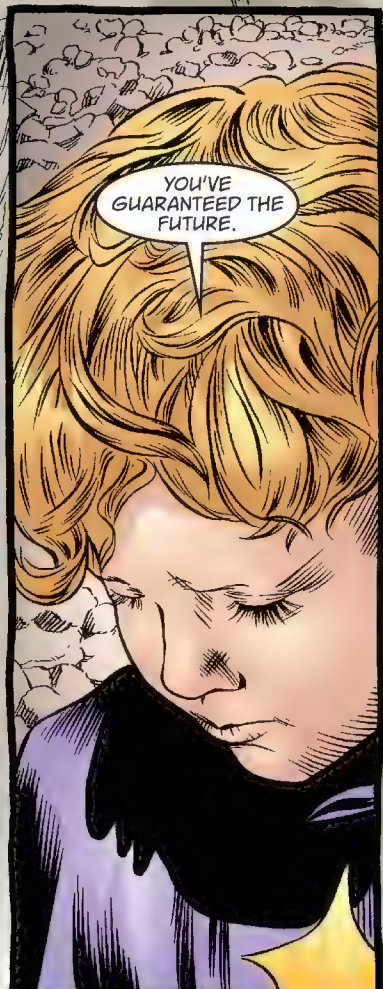
MAY **VALHALLA** GRANT THEE YOUR JUST REWARD.



YER THE **GREATEST AMERICAN** AH'VE EVER KNOWN, ROGERS.



THANK YOU, STEVE.



YOU'VE GUARANTEED THE FUTURE.

STEVE! DON'T
YOU RECOGNIZE ME?
IT'S JIM.

BUCKY?
IS THAT
YOU?

YEAH, I'M HERE
WITH THE HOWLERS.
WHERE HAVE YOU
BEEN?

I CAN'T
REMEMBER, REALLY.
IT'S LIKE A DREAM.

WIPE THAT COCKEYED
NANCY-FACED GRIN OFF YER
FACE, SOLDIER. WE'VE GOT
WORK TO DO.

NICK?

SHARON?

FALC?

MOM?

DAD?

YOU'RE ALL
HERE. WHY ARE
YOU CRYING?

WE THOUGHT
YOU WERE DEAD, STEVE.
AND HERE YOU ARE.
YOU'RE HERE.

UNIVERSE



KRUEGER
BRAITHWAITE
REINHOLD

"I am seeing the future, Isaac."

"Yes. Of course you are. And I write it down."

"You don't understand. This may explain why I am able to see so much of what happened on other worlds."

"You are correct, Kyle. I don't understand."

"Okay. I am seeing the future Immortus promises the followers of his church."

"The destiny whereby mankind leaves Earth and migrates throughout the stars?"

"Exactly. But this colonization leads to disunity amongst mankind. Each colony begins to war against the others. It's not a step forward. It's a step into hostility and barbarism — exactly as Reed Richards now warns Immortus. Don't you see? Both men's notions about the future become fact."

"Excuse me, Kyle, but how does this explain your ability to see the past? Or other worlds?"

"Because mankind will someday return to Earth, Isaac."

"I was under the impression that Earth's destruction was imminent?"

"When mankind comes home to Earth — it's not the Earth of the future — but a time before the Celestials even set foot on our world. I can see the past because it's the future. We live our lives over and over again, Isaac. What's happening now has all happened before."

UNIVERSE X

I S S U E 5

JIM KRUEGER

story and script

ALEX ROSS

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pencils

GARRY LEACH

inks

LAURA DEPUY

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TODD KLEIN

letters

MIKE RAICHT

assistant editor

MIKE MARTS

editor

JOE QUESADA

editor in chief

"SOMEHOW, THE POWER MARVELL RECEIVED TO ESCAPE THE REALM OF DEATH AND BE REBORN AMONGST THE LIVING IS RELATED TO HUMANITY'S DISTANT FUTURE."

"I SEE A PRINCE BEING TOLD BY HIS DYING FATHER THAT HE WILL NEVER BE A KING."

"BUT INSTEAD, WOULD ONE DAY SEE WITH MORE THAN HIS EYES."

"HE IS TOLD THAT HE WILL FIND A SWORD THAT WILL BURN WITH THE FIRE OF THE STARS."

"WHAT IS THE NAME OF THIS PRINCE?"

"WAYFINDER."

"DOES HE FIND THIS SWORD?"

"YES. BUT THE DISCOVERY BLINDS HIM. THE SWORD IS IMBEDDED IN A STAR."

"IT...GUIDES PRINCE WAYFINDER BACK TO EARTH, ALONG WITH THOUSANDS OF OTHERS FROM ALL THE PLANETS HIS QUEST TOOK HIM ON."

"BUT IT'S THE EARTH OF THE FAR PAST. AN EARTH OF DINOSAURS... AND DEMONS."

"DEMONS, KYLE?"

"WAYFINDER AND HIS FOLLOWERS CAN'T DEFEAT THE DEMONS. AND SO THE STAR, SKEWERED AS IT WAS, CREATES A WORLD WITHIN OUR WORLD TO LIVE UPON. A WHOLE UNIVERSE OF WORLDS. THE SUBATOMICA."

"A SWORD DID THAT?"

"...YES."

"IT ALSO TRANSFORMED WAYFINDER INTO THE FIRST BEING TO EVER WIELD THE ENIGMA FORCE."

"BUT WHEN WAYFINDER AND THOSE CLOSEST TO HIM DIED, THE SWORD WAS HIDDEN...AND THE ENIGMA FORCE SEARCHED FOR ANOTHER BEING TO REST UPON."

"IT FOUND ONE OF WAYFINDER'S OWN DESCENDANTS--COMMANDER ARCTURUS RANN."

"HE EXPLORED THE LIMITS OF SUBATOMICA FOR A THOUSAND YEARS IN A STATE OF WAKING SUSPENDED ANIMATION."

"EACH LIFE HE LIVED IN THIS STATE ADDED TO THE ENIGMA FORCE, MULTIPLYING ITS POWER EXPONENTIALLY."

"THIS IS AMAZING. I REMEMBER HEARING ABOUT RANN AND HIS REBELS FROM... 'INNERSPACE,' I BELIEVE WAS THE TERM."

"YES, BUT RANN WAS NOT THE FIRST TO REACH OUR WORLD."

"DURING THE TIME HE STILL SLEPT, ONE OF THE INHABITANTS OF SUBATOMICA ATTEMPTED TO INVADE EARTH."

"HE WAS KNOWN AS PSYCHO-MAN."

"HE USED A DEVICE TO ENSLAVE THOSE AROUND HIM BY PSYCHO-SUGGESTING SPECIFIC EMOTIONS WHICH WOULD LEAD THEM TO RIOT AND DESTRUCTION."

"PSYCHO-MAN WAS EVENTUALLY DEFEATED, BUT NOW REED RICHARDS KNEW THERE WERE DANGERS TO THIS WORLD FROM WITHIN ITS VERY STRUCTURE."

"FOR SOME, THOUGH, SUBATOMICA WAS CONSIDERED A SOLUTION TO THE DANGERS THAT FACED RICHARDS' WORLD. ONE SUCH DANGER WAS THE HULK."

"HE WAS BANISHED TO SUBATOMICA ONLY TO DISCOVER THAT THERE, HE DID NOT HAVE THE MIND OF A SOULLESS BEAST--"

"--BUT THE HEART AND PERSONALITY OF BRUCE BANNER."

"IN THIS WORLD, HE WAS TREATED LIKE A KING. AND SO HE TOOK A QUEEN."

"BUT EVEN THIS EXISTENCE WAS SHORT-LIVED. THE HULK WAS FORCED TO RETURN TO EARTH."

"AND IN THE HUMAN ENGINEERING LIFE LABORATORY, A DOCTOR PROMETHEUS, AFTER YEARS OF STUDY AND RESEARCH, CREATED A PORTAL TO SUBATOMICA KNOWN AS THE PROMETHEUS PIT."

"WHY HAS THIS INFORMATION BEEN KEPT QUIET?"

"FEAR. WHAT IF THE WAY INTO SUBATOMICA WAS THROUGH A MOLECULE OF OXYGEN? AND THEN THAT OXYGEN WAS INHALED?"

"WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF PEOPLE SUSPECTED THAT BY THE SIMPLE ACT OF BREATHING, THEIR BODIES WOULD BECOME THE GATEWAYS TO SOME UNSUSPECTED INVASION?"

"OR WORSE, THAT THEIR LUNGS MIGHT EXPLODE THE MOMENT THIS INVASION COMMENCED?"

"RANN AWAKENED FROM HIS MISSION AND RETURNED HOME TO FIND HIMSELF BRANDED AN **ENEMY** AND ON THE RUN FROM THE VERY SCIENTIST WHO HAD ONCE **SERVED** HIM.

"THIS SCIENTIST--WHO LEARNED ABOUT THE SECRETS OF ETERNAL LIFE THROUGH ANCIENT MAGICS AND THE SECRETS OF DEMONS--LATER **BECAME** THE DESPOT RULER OF SUBATOMICA.

"RANN FOUND **OTHERS** WHO WERE ALSO UNDER THE HEEL OF THIS REGIME AND THEY FLED TO EARTH.

"THERE THEY FACED EVEN **GREATER** DANGERS.

"LIKE THE **MAN-THING**."

"**ANOTHER** MONSTER. HE WAS WORKING ON A **SUPER-SOLDIER** FORMULA PROTOTYPE, WAS HE NOT? AN ATTEMPT TO **RECREATE** CAPTAIN AMERICA?"

"YES, BUT SOMETHING WENT **WRONG**. HE USED THE FORMULA--UNTESTED AS IT WAS--UPON **HIMSELF** AND TED SALLIS BECAME A **THING** DRAWN TO BURN THOSE FOOLISH ENOUGH NOT TO FACE HIM...OR THEIR FEARS.

"I HAD FORGOTTEN THE **MAN-THING'S** RELATIONSHIP WITH THE **DEFENDERS**, ISAAC. OR WITH THE **ENEMIES** OF THE DEFENDERS."

"WHAT ARE YOU INSINUATING, KYLE?"

"NOTHING YOU AREN'T **PAINFULLY** AWARE OF, ISAAC."

"PAIN IS ONE OF THE SENSATIONS **DENIED** ME IN MY CURRENT STATE, KYLE. I WISH IT WERE NOT. PLEASE CONTINUE. THIS PAGE IS ALMOST **COMPLETE**."

"THE ENIGMA FORCE WAS REVEALED TO HAVE AN EVEN **GREATER** POWER THAN ANYONE HAD EVER IMAGINED.

"IT **EMPOWERED** EARTH MEN LIKE RAY COFFIN, BRUCE BANNER AND SPIDER-MAN TO FIGHT OFF VARIOUS DANGERS IN THE GUISE OF **CAP-TAIN** UNIVERSE.

"AND IN RANN, THE ENIGMA FORCE **RE-PRODUCED** ITSELF."

"HOW?"

"IT'S A MATTER OF **TIME**, ISAAC."

"AS RANN LAY ASLEEP FOR ALL THOSE YEARS, HE LIVED **MANY LIVES** UPON WHICH THE ENIGMA FORCE RESTED. EACH MOMENT HE SLEPT WAS A NEW MOMENT IN THE TIME-STREAM. THE ENIGMA FORCE GREW MORE AND MORE **POWERFUL**.

"THE POWER THE ENIGMA FORCE HAD SACRIFICED TO CREATE SUBATOMICA HAD BEEN **RESTORED**. RANN BECAME THE MOST **POWERFUL** BEING IN SUBATOMICA.

"AND **FREED** INNER SPACE FROM **TYRANNY**."

"PEACE HAD BEEN WON."

"AND WAS **LOST** A FEW YEARS LATER, SEEMINGLY FOR NO REASON. EVEN ALLIES AND LOVERS TURNED AGAINST EACH OTHER.

"A **NEW TYRANT** HAD LAID CLAIM TO SUBATOMICA.

"RANN'S WIFE, **PRINCESS MARI**, WAS OVERCOME BY THE POWER OF PSYCHO-MAN'S DEVICES AND **KILLED** HER HUSBAND BEFORE THE EYES OF HER **OWN SON**."

"HOW TERRIBLE."

"BETRAYAL IS EVERYWHERE, ISN'T IT, ISAAC?"

"IS SOMETHING TROUBLING YOU?"

"THE PSYCHO-MAN'S ABILITY IS SO **SIMILAR** TO THE POWER THE SKULL HELD OVER THE ARMY HE MARCHED ON MANHATTAN. SO AFTER RANN WAS KILLED, THE ENIGMA FORCE, RATHER THAN CHOOSE SOMEONE **NEW** LIKE CAPTAIN RANN'S SON, CHOSE INSTEAD TO ENTER DEATH'S REALM AND **EMPOWER CAPTAIN MAR-VELL**?"

"YES, ISAAC. ARE YOU GETTING THIS ALL DOWN? RANN WAS THE CAPTAIN UNIVERSE OF HIS PEOPLE, THOUGH A **PORTION** OF THE ENIGMA FORCE WAS GIVEN AT TIMES TO PEOPLE OF EARTH.

"THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME SOMEONE WHO DWELT **WITHIN** THE ENIGMA FORCE DIED. IN EVERY OCCURRENCE IN THE PAST, THE ENIGMA FORCE HAD ALREADY **VACATED** THE EMPOWERED."

"NOTHING I HAVEN'T SEEN **BEFORE**, ISAAC."

"BUT IF THE ENIGMA FORCE IS IN THE LAND OF THE **DEAD**, WHAT'S **SUSTAINING** SUBATOMICA'S EXISTENCE?"

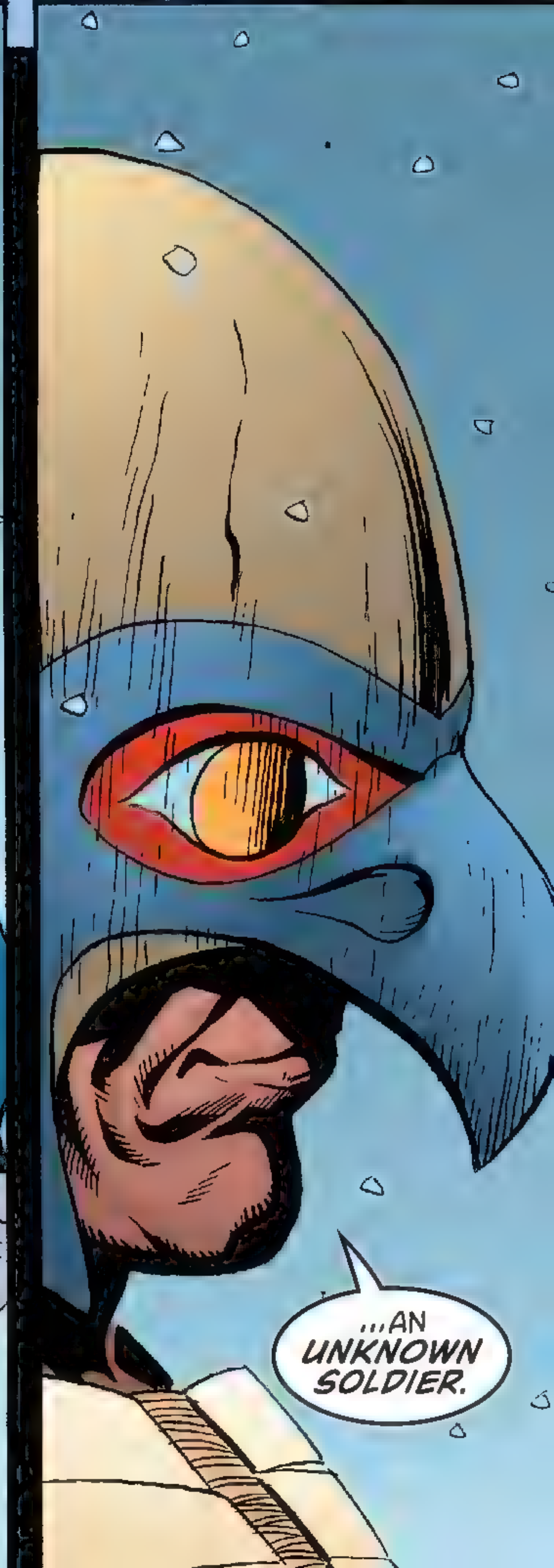
"THE **PSYCHO-MAN**."

FEAR

DOUBT

HATE

"HE HAD FAILED TO CONQUER EARTH, AND SO HE TURNED HIS ATTENTION **INWARD**."





BUT
AREN'T WE *ALL*?
TO DIE SO THAT
OTHERS WILL LIVE
HAS ALWAYS BEEN
OUR LOT. OUR
DEFINITION.



BUT *WHERE*
DOES THIS COME
FROM?

WHY
DO WE DO
IT?



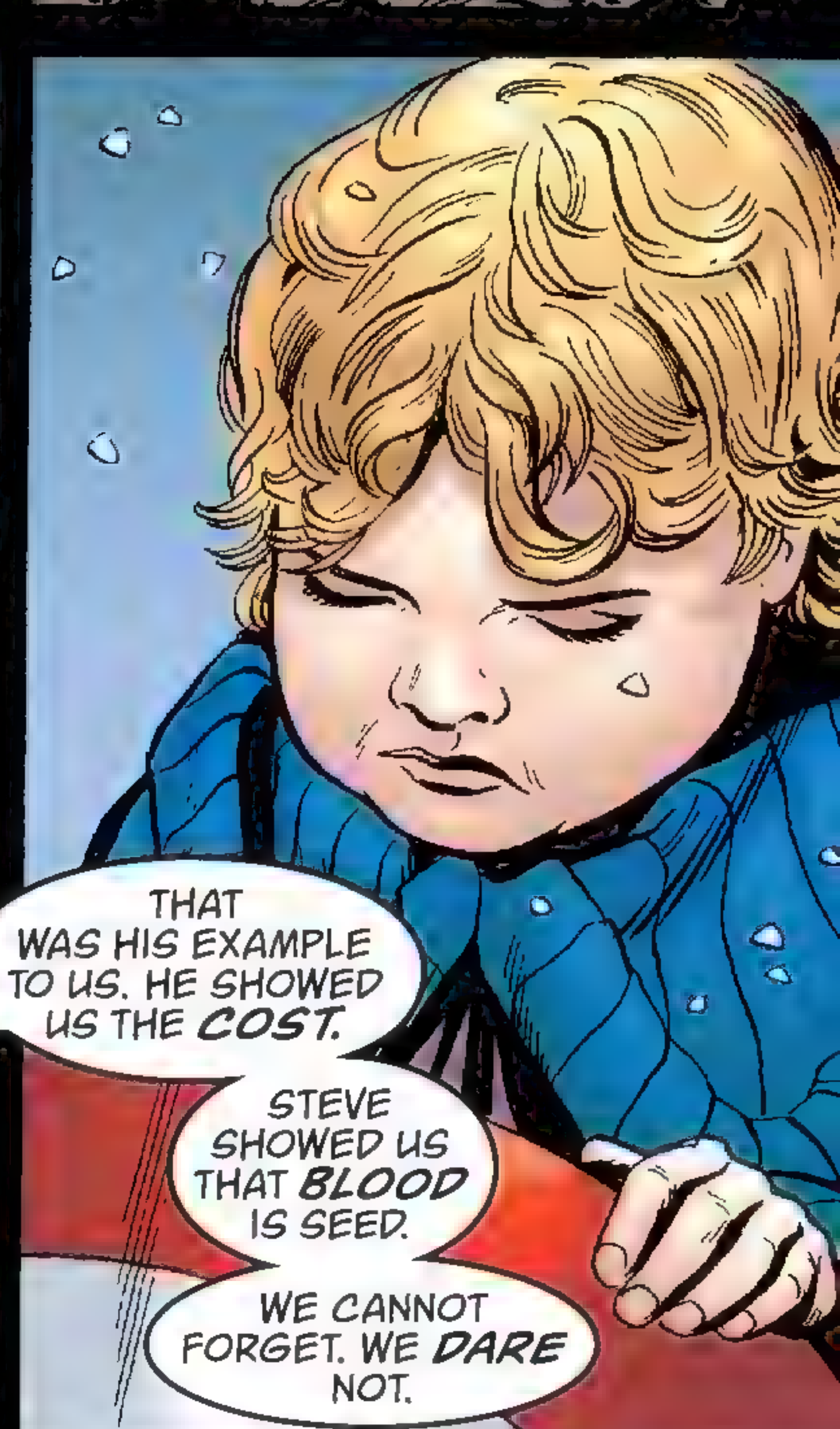
SOME
SAY WE DO
THIS FOR OUR-
SELVES. FOR THE
THRILL. TO BE
ADMIRED.

TO BE
LOOKED UP
TO.



YET HERE
WE ARE. *AGAIN*.
MOURNING PERHAPS
OUR *GREATEST*
CHAMPION. A NOMAD
IN A WORLD THAT NO
LONGER *BELIEVED*
IN THE AMERICA THAT
MADE HIM WHAT
HE WAS.

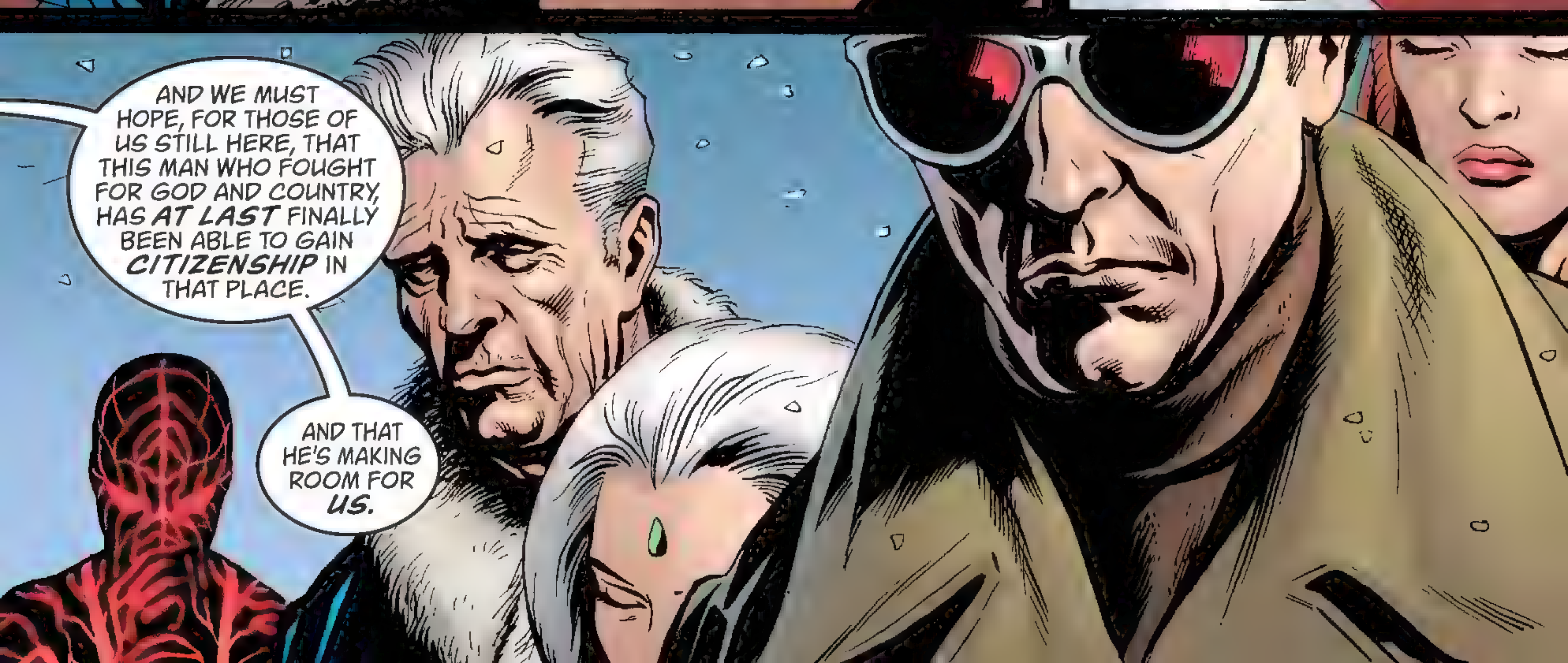
IT WAS
NOT FOR *THIS*
WORLD THAT HE
FOUGHT, BUT FOR THE IDEALS
OF THE WORLD HE HOPED
THIS ONE *MIGHT*
BECOME.



THAT
WAS HIS EXAMPLE
TO US. HE SHOWED
US THE *COST*.

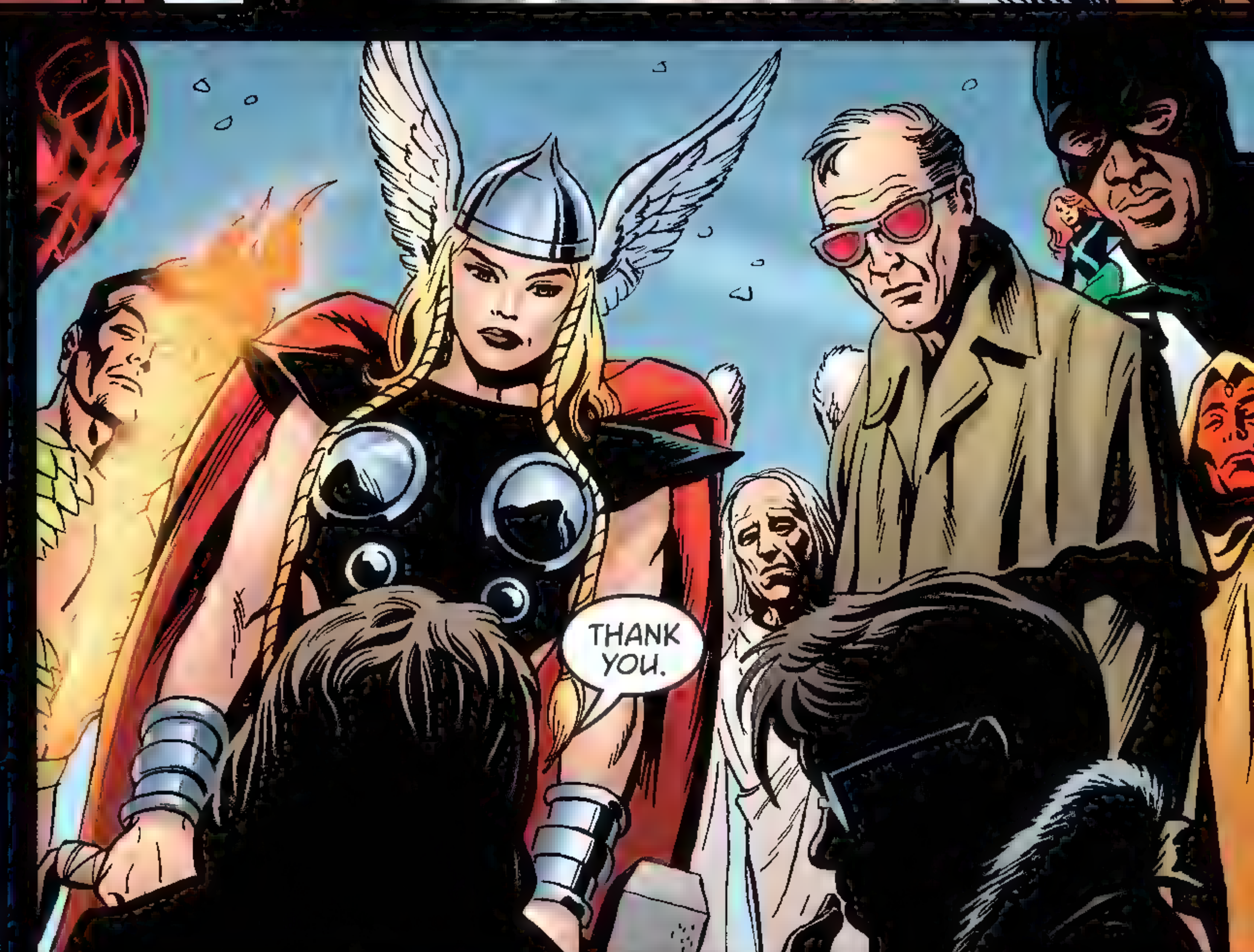
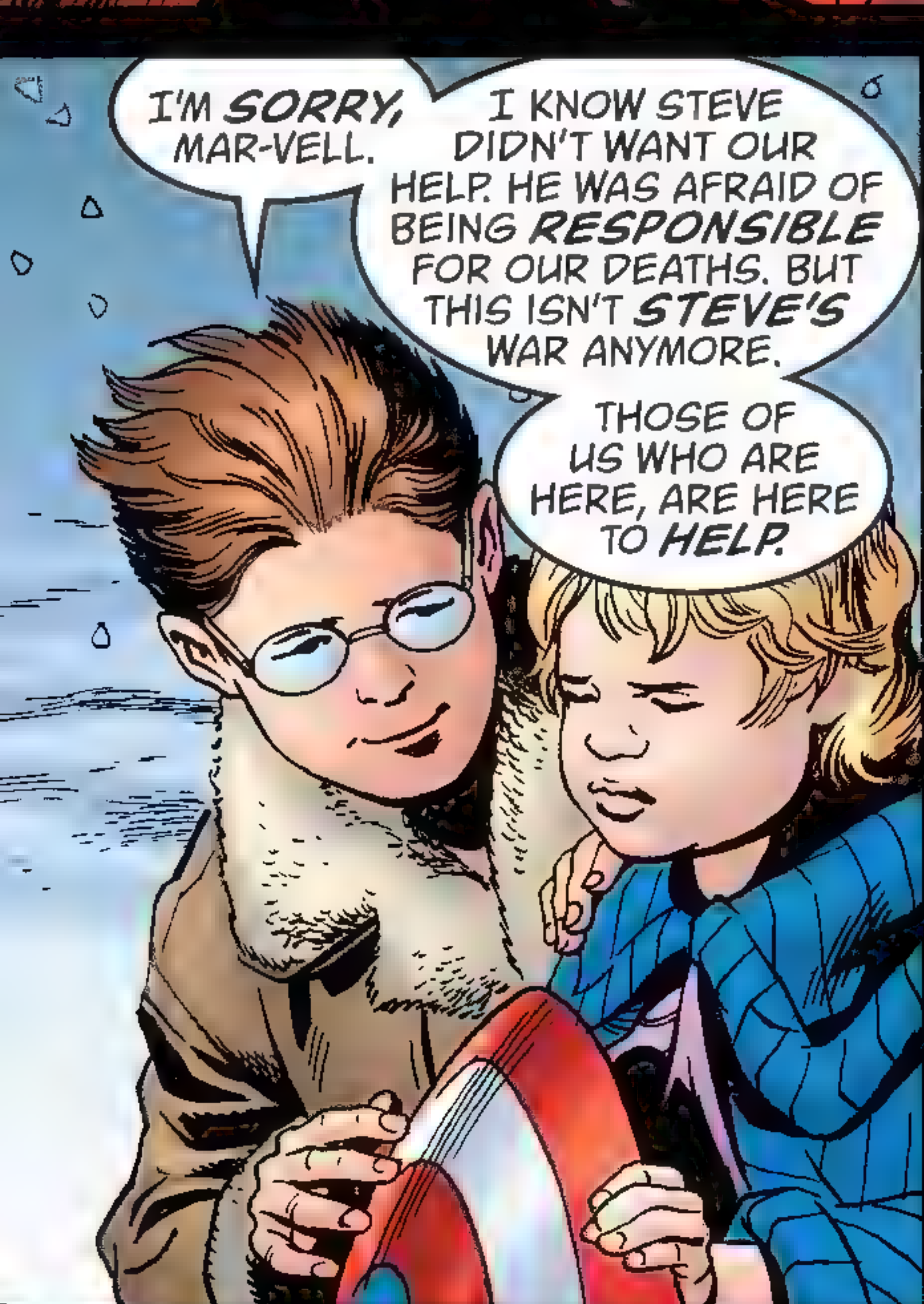
STEVE
SHOWED US
THAT *BLOOD*
IS SEED.

WE CANNOT
FORGET. WE *DARE*
NOT.

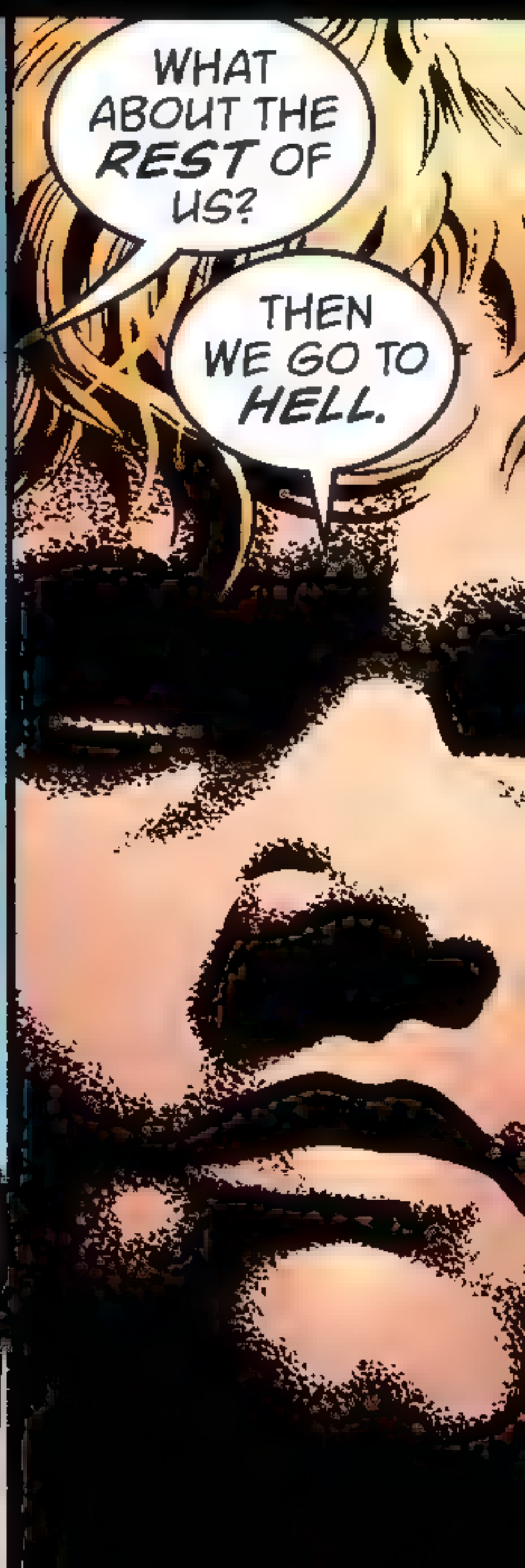
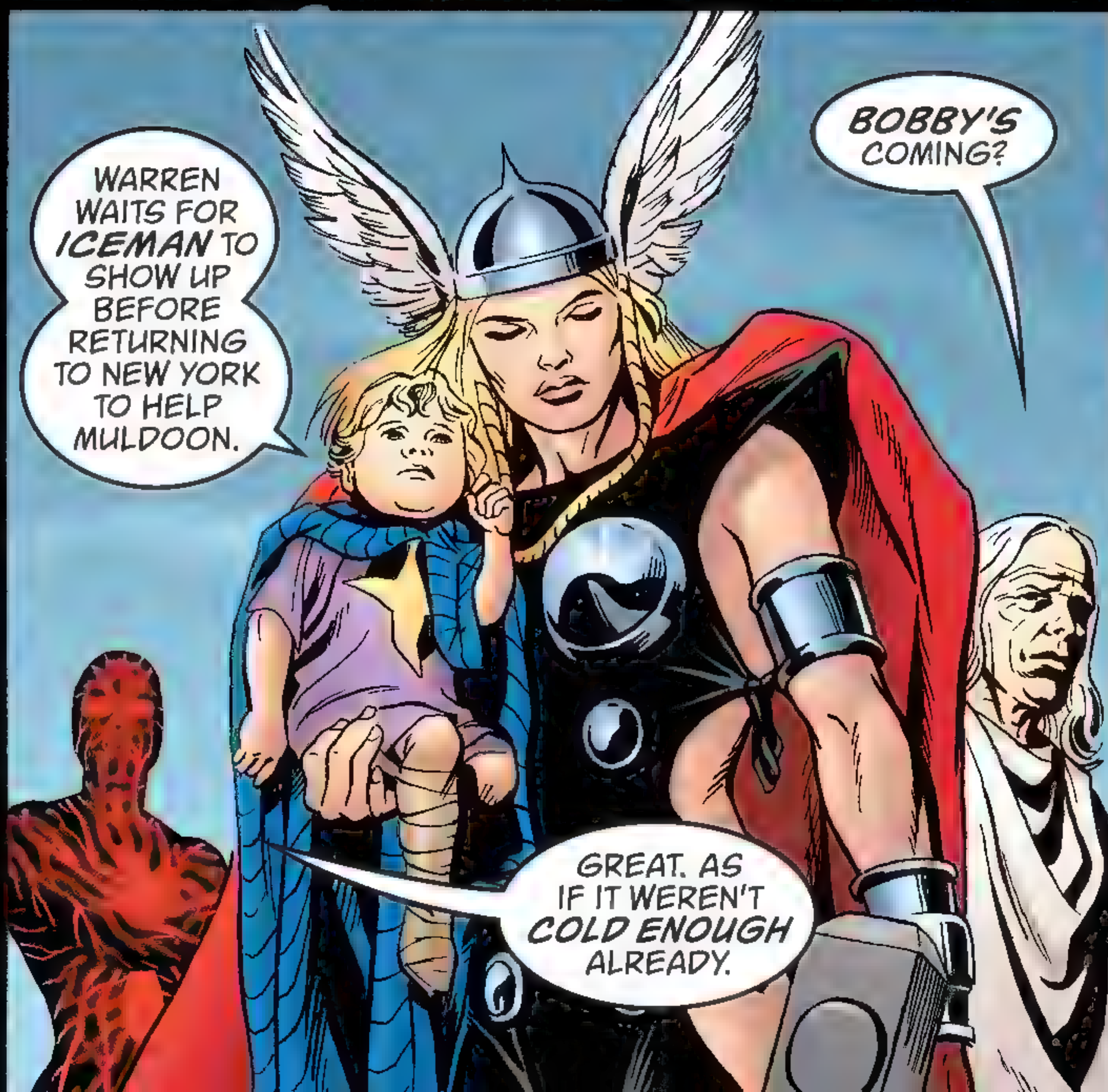
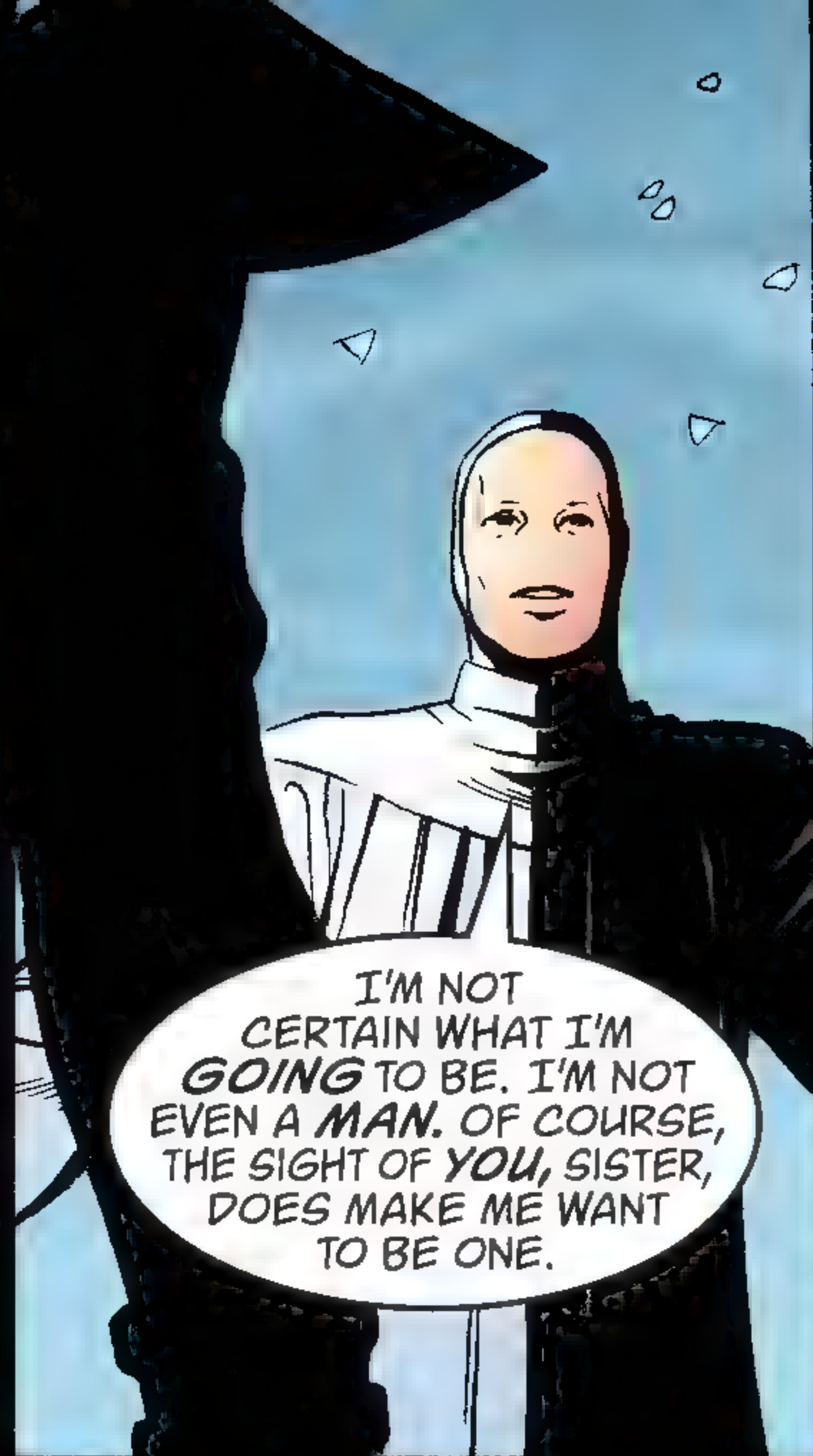


AND WE MUST
HOPE, FOR THOSE OF
US STILL HERE, THAT
THIS MAN WHO FOUGHT
FOR GOD AND COUNTRY,
HAS *AT LAST* FINALLY
BEEN ABLE TO GAIN
CITIZENSHIP IN
THAT PLACE.

AND THAT
HE'S MAKING
ROOM FOR
US.



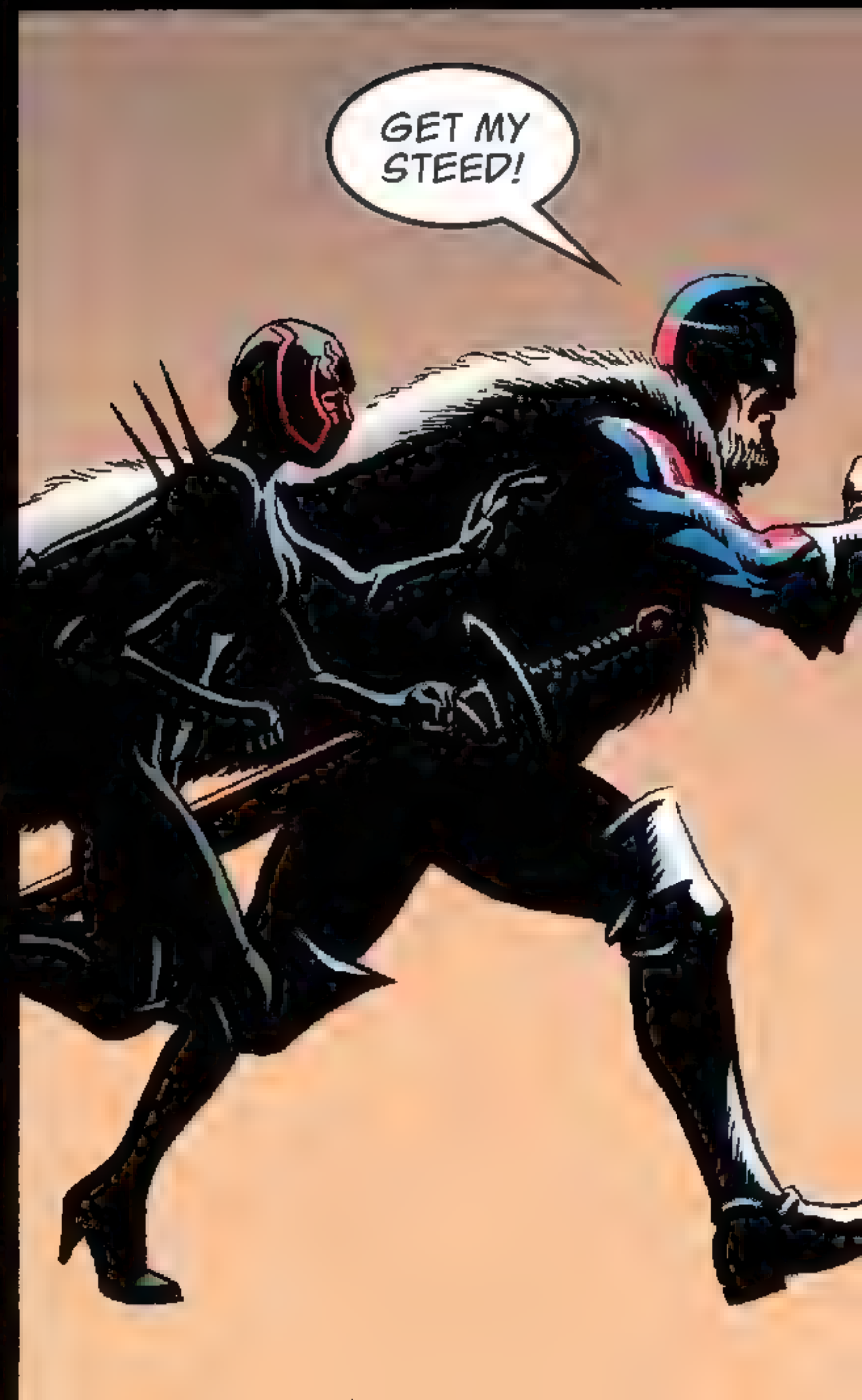
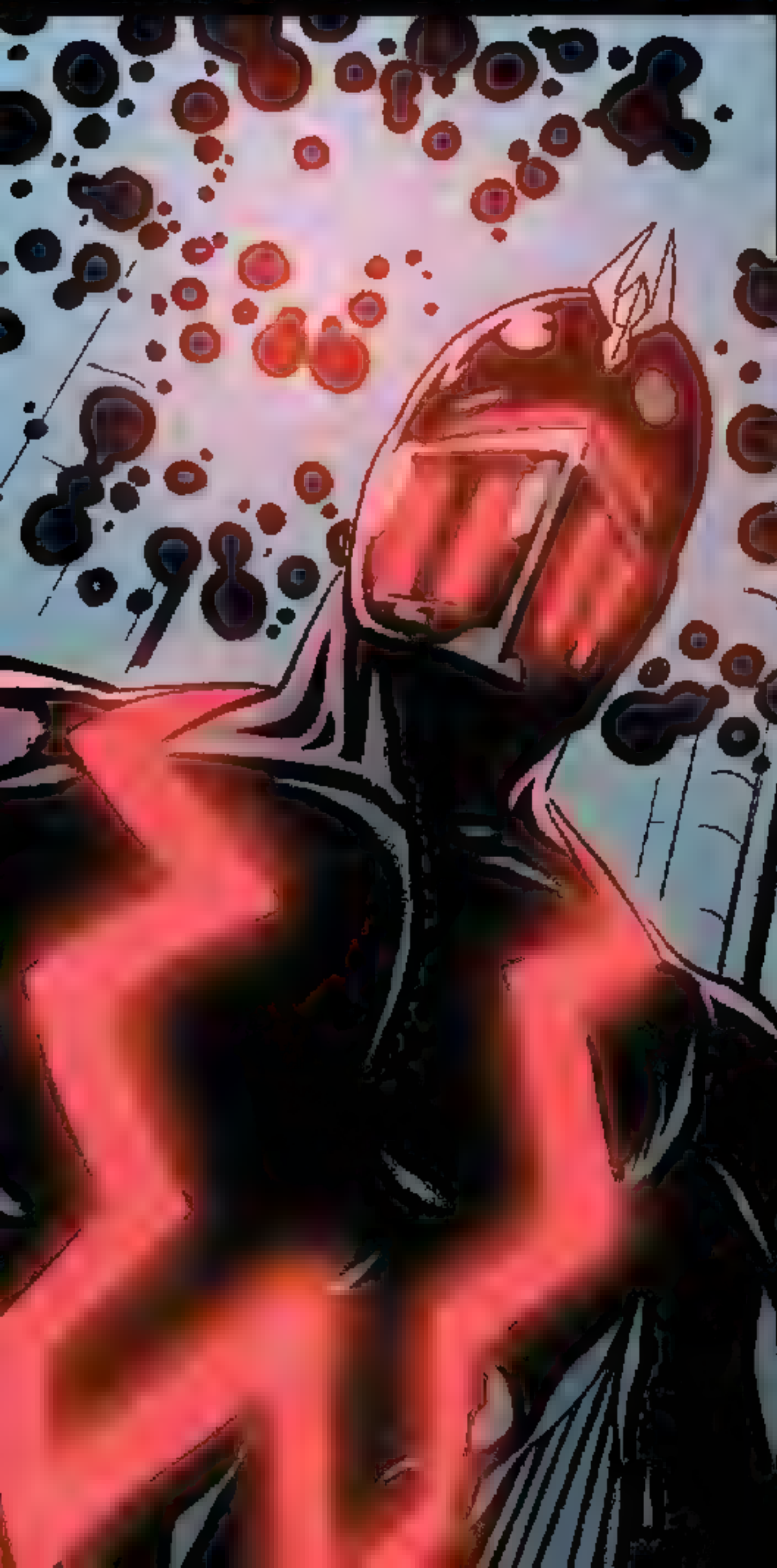


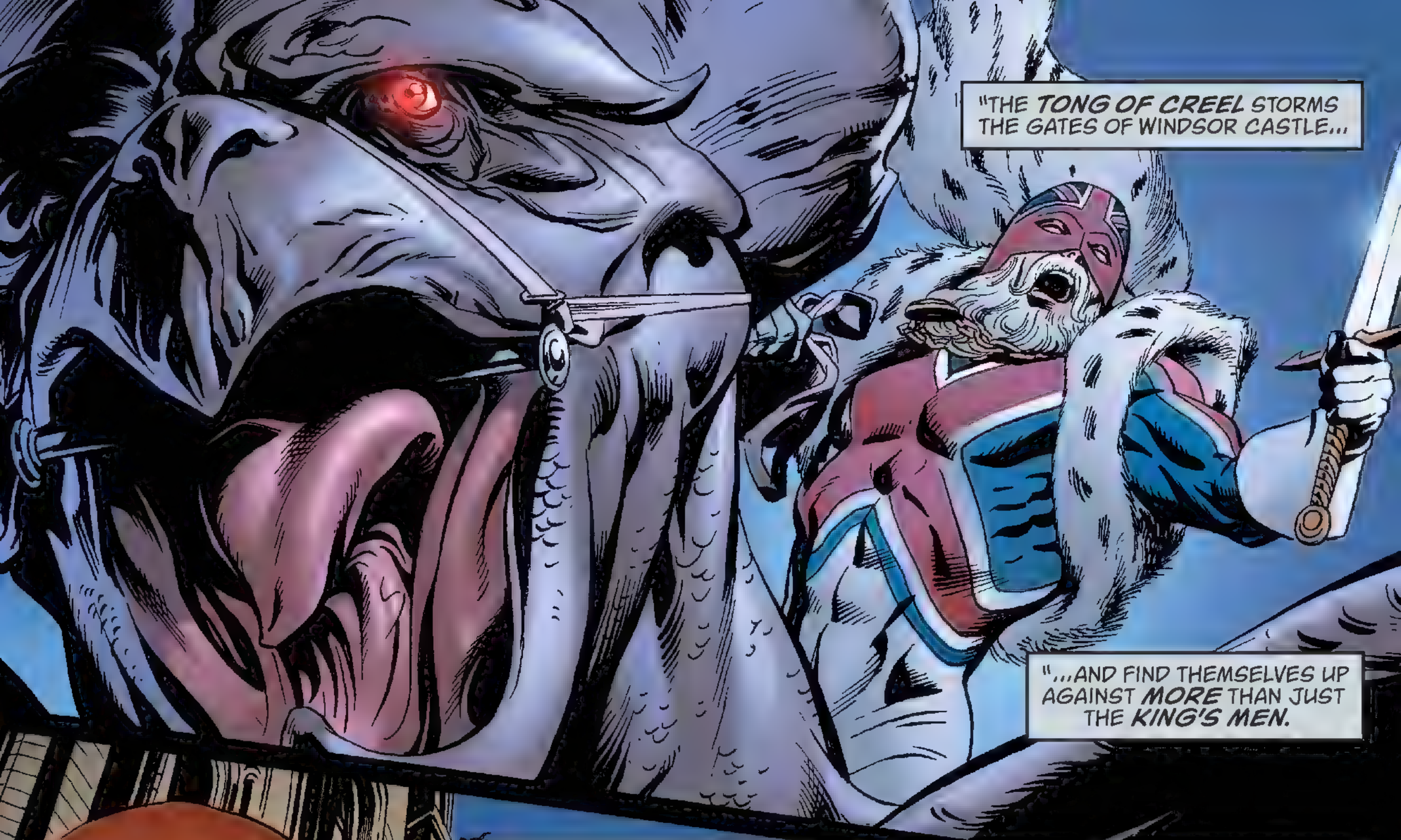


"KING BRITAIN RETURNS TO HIS HOMELAND WITH A NEW AMBASSADOR FROM LONDON, THE *BLACK WIDOW*."

...THE WORST OF IT IS, CZAR PETER STILL CALLS ME "NATASHA."

THE NAME YOU HAVE CHOSEN CARRIES A LEGACY TOO DIFFICULT TO LIVE UP TO...AND A HISTORY YOU CANNOT ESCAPE.





"THE *TONG OF CREEL* STORMS THE GATES OF WINDSOR CASTLE,...

"...AND FIND THEMSELVES UP AGAINST *MORE* THAN JUST THE *KING'S MEN*.



"THEY FACE THE *QUEEN OF THE INHUMANS*--A WOMAN WHO HAS NOT YET HAD TIME TO TRULY *GRIEVE* THE DEATH OF HER *HUSBAND*.

"THE *TONG* SQUARES OFF AGAINST THE *UNION JACKS*. YEARS OF GENETICALLY ENGINEERED TRAINING AND THE HONING OF INSTINCTS HAVE MADE THEM THE BEST KNIGHTS ENGLAND HAS *EVER* PRODUCED.

"THEY FACE THE ANIMATED LEGACY OF *TONY STARK*.

"THEY FACE EVERYTHING *KING BRITAIN* THROWS AT THEM.

"IT WON'T BE *ENOUGH*."



"THE FACT THAT THE TONG IS HERE AT ALL REVEALS THAT THEY KNOW WHAT'S BEEN *GIVEN* TO THE BLACK KNIGHT.

"THEY *KNOW*."

"HOW DO THEY KNOW?"



"THEY WERE *TOLD*. YET ANOTHER BE-TRAYAL, ISAAC."



THEY'RE LEAVING. WE DID IT!

WE WON!



NO. WE LOST.

WE LOST THE CHEST-PIECE OF CREEL.

"MAR-VELL AND ALL THOSE WHO HAVE JOINED HIS QUEST ARRIVE AT THE HOUSING THAT HELD THE **PROMETHEUS PIT.**"

PAY ATTENTION, X-MEN. THERE ARE THINGS FROM SUB-ATOMICA YOU WOULD NOT BELIEVE.

I SWEAR, IF MR. S GOES INTO THAT **DAZE** OF HIS AGAIN AND STARTS TALKING ABOUT HOW MUCH HE LOVES-- **PRESENT** TENSE--PHOENIX, I'M GOING TO BE **SICK.**

YOU'RE JUST **JEALOUS,** CHARMER.

SHUT UP.

THIS IS WHERE **HELL** RESIDES? STRANGE.

THAT'S IT. THE **PROMETHEUS PIT.**

NO, WHAT IS THAT **GUNK?**

THAT, MAY PARKER, IS WHAT REMAINS OF THE **MAN-THING.**

GROSS.

WHAT IS THAT?



YOU'VE
COME AT
LAST.

HE'S HERE,
NEUTRON. HE'S
HERE!

YES. BUT
THEN AGAIN, HE
IS ALSO WITH
RANN, IS HE
NOT?



PSYCHO-MAN'S
DEVICE IS **STUCK** IN THE
MAN-THING'S CARCASS,
MAR-VELL.

WHAT
HAPPENED?



THE PSYCHO-CASTER
HAD **CONQUERED** HOME-
WORLD...NOT BY LIFTING A FINGER,
BUT WITH THE **PUSH OF A
BUTTON.**

HATE TRANSFORMED
US ALL INTO DOING THINGS
WE **SWORE** WE'D NEVER BE
CAPABLE OF DOING.

ONLY **PROTON** AND
NEUTRON WERE FREE OF
THE PSYCHO-CASTER'S
EFFECTS.

IT WAS AFTER
ARCTURUS'S DEATH WHEN
WE REALIZED THAT IF WE DIDN'T
SEE EACH OTHER, WE WOULDN'T
STRIKE AT EACH OTHER OUT
OF THESE ARTIFICIAL
HATREDS.

IT WAS
HERE, BACK-TO-
BACK, STRIKING AT
EVERYONE WE SAW,
THAT WE PLANNED
OUR **ESCAPE**
TO EARTH.

BUT THE DEATH
OF THE WIELDER OF
THE ENIGMA FORCE HAD
A **FAR GREATER**
EFFECT ON THIS
WORLD.

THIS WORLD
WAS **SUSTAINED** BY
THAT FORCE, AND WITH
THE DEATH OF ITS GOD,
CAME THE ENSUING
DEATH OF THAT GOD'S
CREATION.



"BUT EVEN AS HOME-WORLD FELL APART, WE CONTINUED TO **FIGHT**. WE CONTINUED TO **KILL** EACH OTHER UNTIL THIS WORLD FINALLY KILLED **US**.

"OUR PLAN WAS TO **LIBERATE** AS MANY OF THOSE STILL LEFT ON HOME-WORLD AS POSSIBLE.

"USING THE STAR-DRIVE ENGINES WITHIN THE **ENDEAVOR**, PROTON AND NEUTRON **BLINDED** THOSE WE FOUGHT AGAINST.



"MOMENTARILY FREE OF THE PSYCHO-MAN'S INFLUENCE, MANY STOPPED FIGHTING, **HORRIFIED** BY WHAT THEY HAD BEEN MADE TO DO. THEY CLUNG TO EACH OTHER, **BEGGING** FOR FORGIVENESS AND CRYING FOR IT ALL TO END.



"THOSE THAT CONTINUED FIGHTING WITHOUT REMORSE OR RECOGNITION OF THEIR OWN FREEDOM, WE **PASSED OVER**.



"MY HUSBAND WAS DEAD, MAR-VELL. BUT I COULD STILL **FEEL** HIM IN MY THOUGHTS.

"HE TOLD US TO USE THE ENDEAVOR'S CABLE-SYSTEM TO **STEAL** THE PSYCHO-MAN'S EMOTIO-CASTER AWAY."



"ARCTURUS WAS CONCERNED THAT THE PSYCHO-MAN...OR PROMETHEUS...OR THE HATRED WOULD **FOLLOW** US BACK TO EARTH.

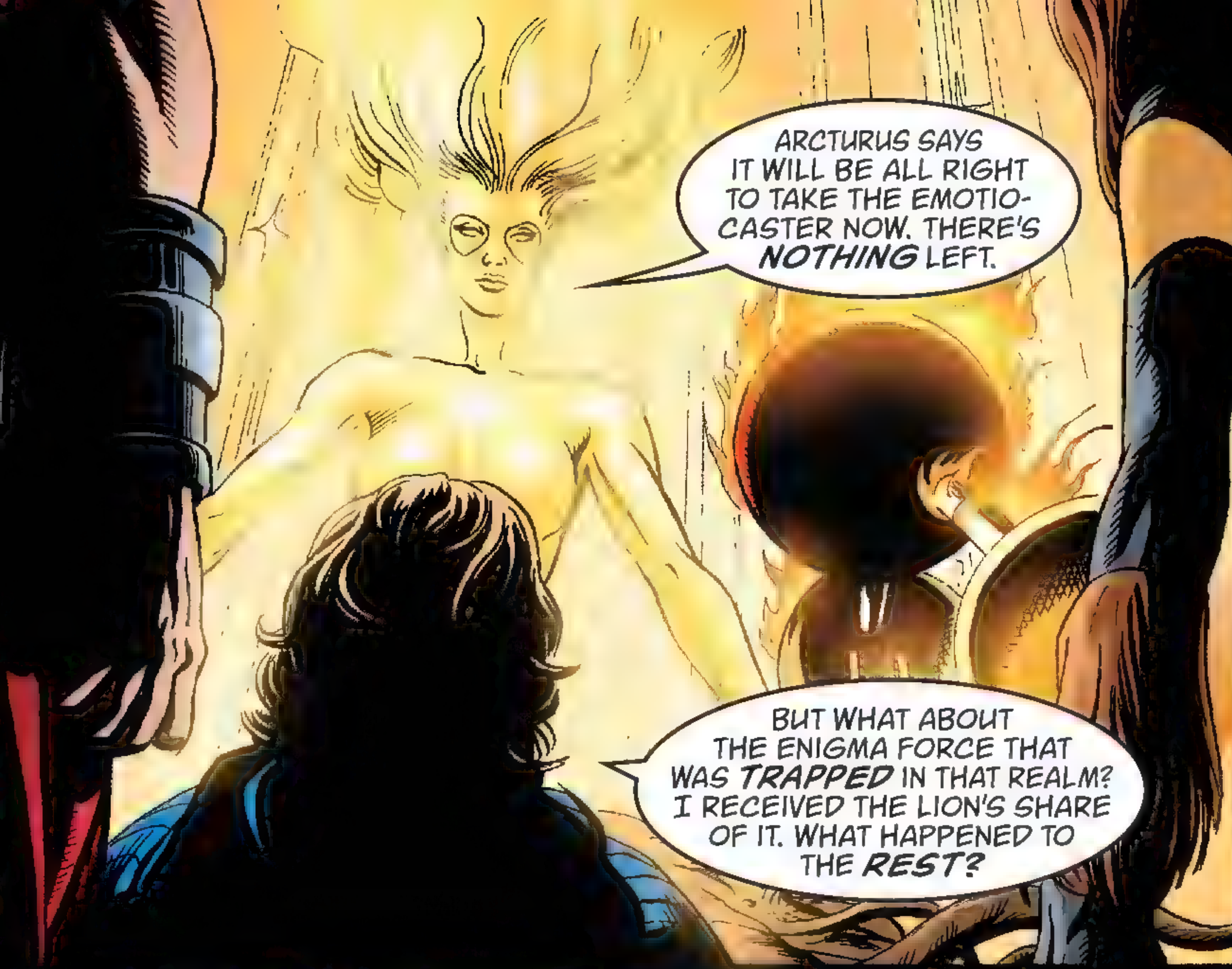
"AND TO ERADICATE THIS FEAR HE NEEDED A **PLUG** FOR THE PROMETHEUS PIT.

"HE KNEW OF A **CREATURE** THAT LIVED OUTSIDE SUBATOMICA THAT **BURNED FEAR** LIKE A TORCH MIGHT BURN OIL.



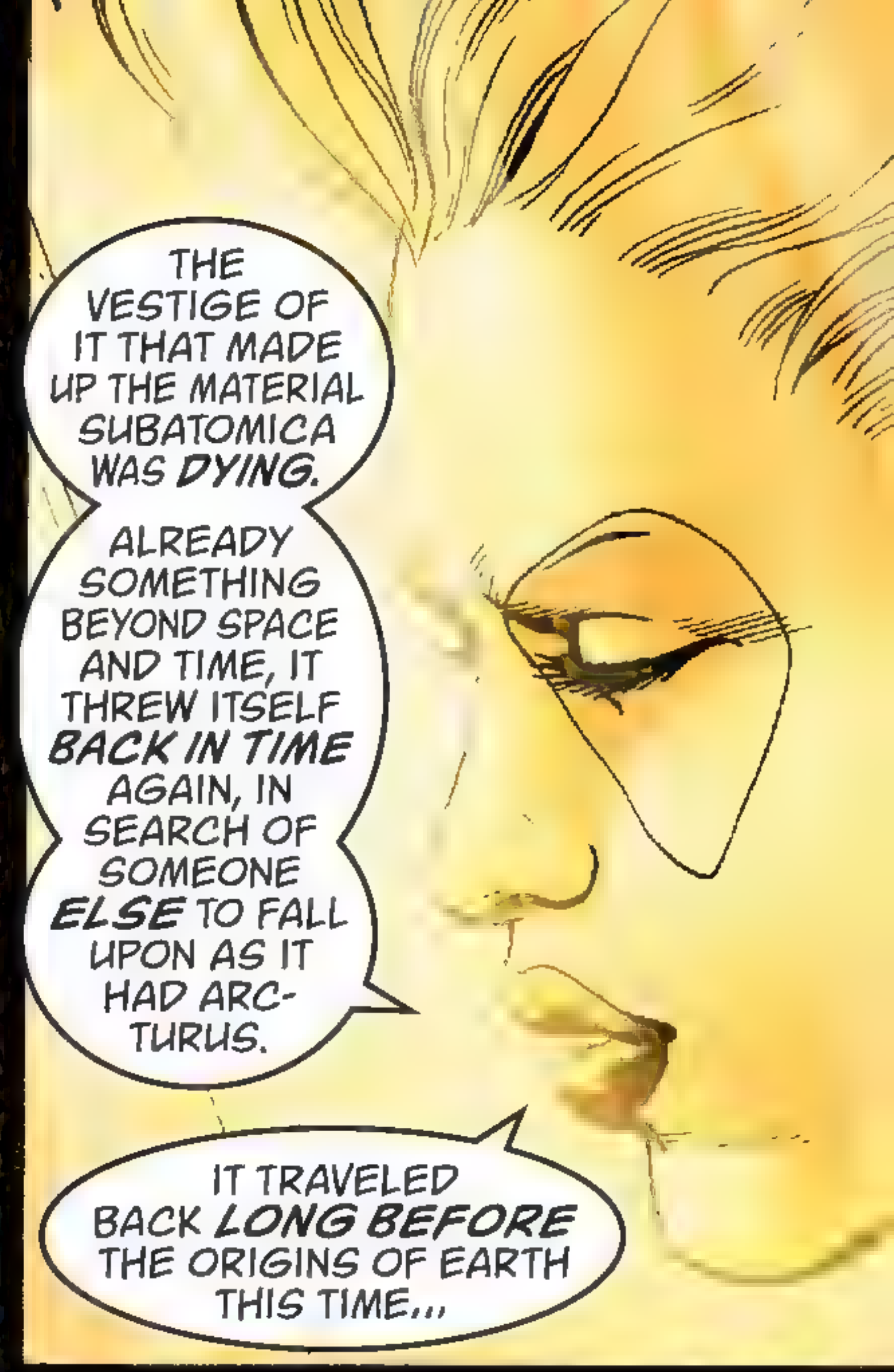
"ARCTURUS TOLD ME LATER THAT FOR MANY, THE FIGHTING CONTINUED. FOR THOSE THAT DIED BURNING FROM THE TOUCH OF THE MAN-THING'S TENDRILS, **FEAR** WAS NOT ANY DIFFERENT THAN **HATRED**.

"FOR ALL I KNOW, SUBATOMICA IS **STILL BURNING**."



ARCTURUS SAYS IT WILL BE ALL RIGHT TO TAKE THE EMOTIO-CASTER NOW. THERE'S **NOTHING** LEFT.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE ENIGMA FORCE THAT WAS **TRAPPED** IN THAT REALM? I RECEIVED THE LION'S SHARE OF IT. WHAT HAPPENED TO THE **REST**?



THE VESTIGE OF IT THAT MADE UP THE MATERIAL SUBATOMICA WAS **DYING**.

ALREADY SOMETHING BEYOND SPACE AND TIME, IT THREW ITSELF **BACK IN TIME** AGAIN, IN SEARCH OF SOMEONE **ELSE** TO FALL UPON AS IT HAD ARCTURUS.

IT TRAVELED **BACK LONG BEFORE** THE ORIGINS OF EARTH THIS TIME...



...TO A BEING THAT WAS THE **LAST** OF HIS OWN RACE, SOMEONE WHO WAS **ALSO** DYING. HIS NAME WAS **GALAN**.

ARCTURUS TELLS ME THAT **JOHN BLAZE** JUST JOINED THE REBELLION AGAINST DEATH.



YOU CAN ACTUALLY **HEAR** YOUR HUSBAND FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE?

YOU CAN HEAR WHO'S WITH **MAR-VELL** NOW?

IS **PHOENIX**?



WHY DON'T YOU ASK HER **YOURSELF**? YOU SHARE A SIMILAR **LINK** WITH HER... CAN'T YOU **FEEL** IT?



I...CAN? I THOUGHT IT WAS ONLY **MEMORIES** I WAS FEELING. OR NIGHTMARES. HI, BABY.



SORRY, CHARM. LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE **NO MATCH** FOR THE GIRL OF HIS DREAMS.



HELP ME PULL THE **EMOTIO-CASTER** OUT, PHOTON.

CERTAINLY, NEUTRON. I WILL **ALLOW** YOU TO ASSIST ME.



WATCH OUT! DON'T FALL IN!



SUBATOMICA IS NO MORE.

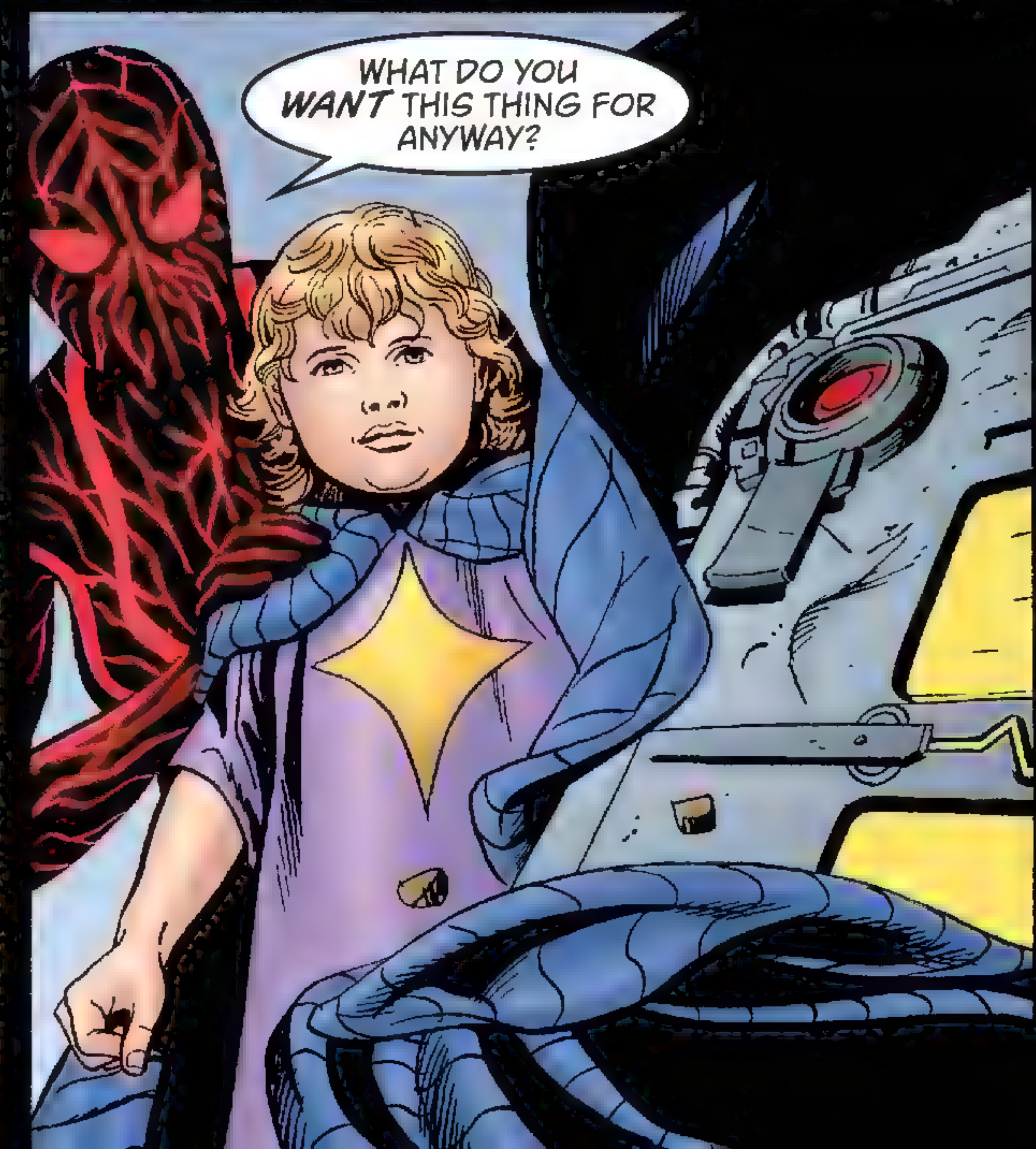
AND **NEITHER** IS MAN-THING.



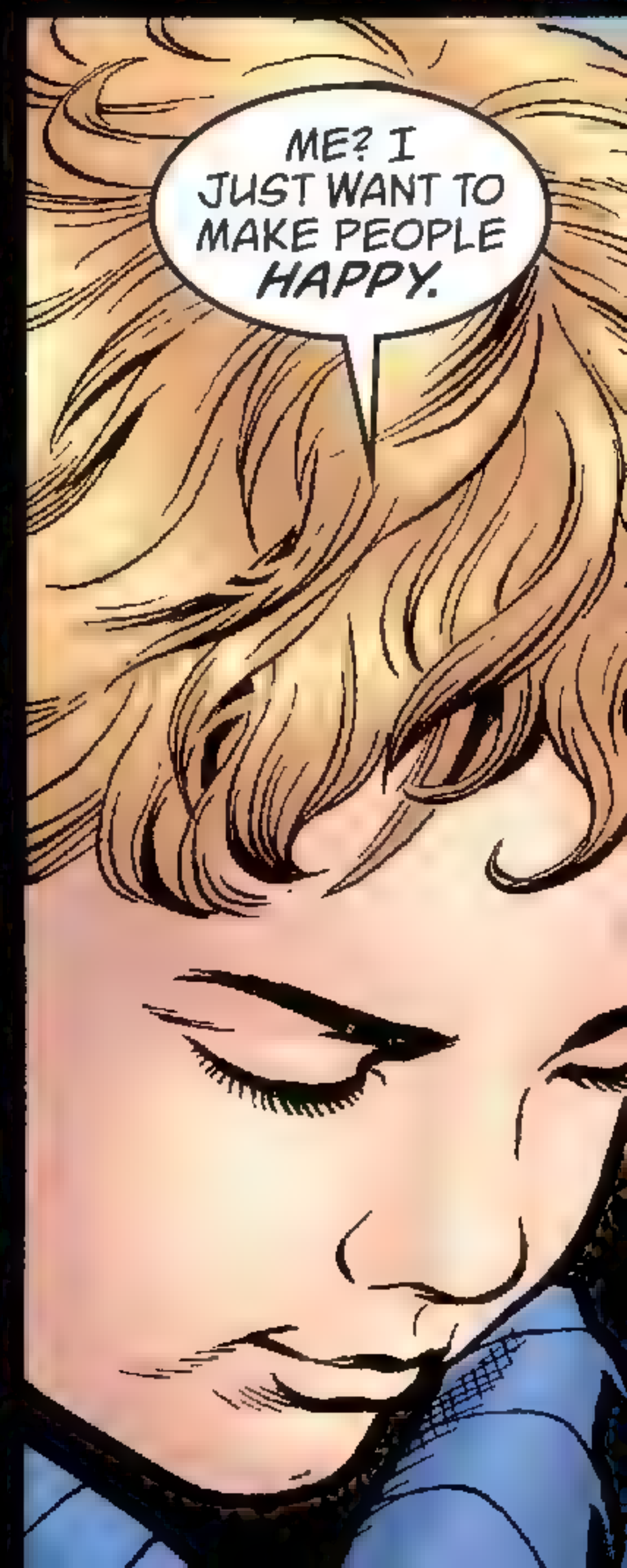
THE WORLD IS BECOMING A DANGEROUS PLACE FOR **MONSTERS**, OLD FRIEND. WE NEED TO BE MORE **CAREFUL**, OKAY?



IT'S OKAY, BRUCE. TED'S ON MAR-VELL'S TEAM IN THE DEAD-REALM NOW, TOO. IT'S OKAY. I CAN **SEE** HIM. HE'S A **SUPER-SOLDIER** NOW. HE'S NOT AFRAID ANYMORE.



WHAT DO YOU **WANT** THIS THING FOR ANYWAY?

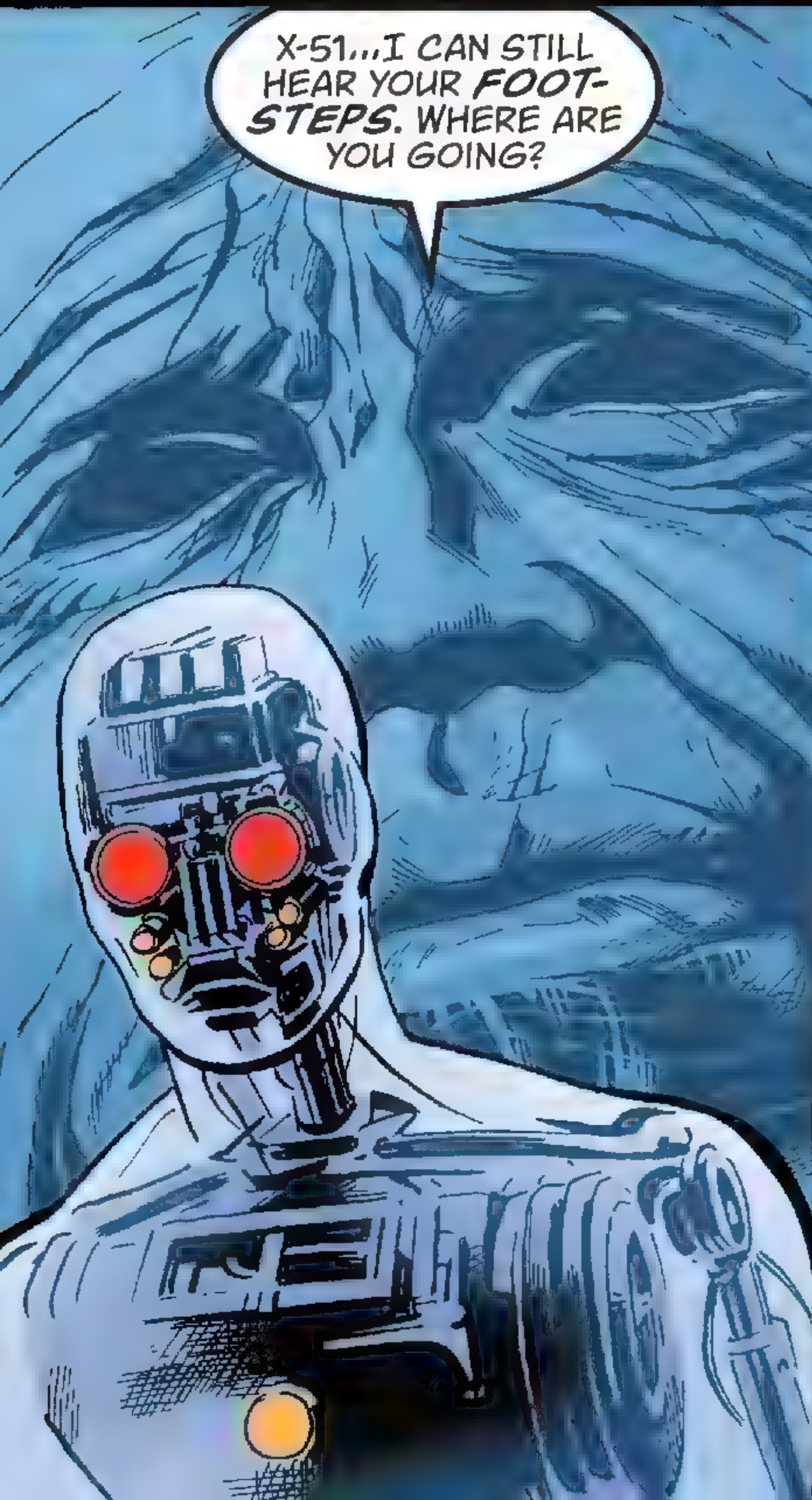


ME? I JUST WANT TO MAKE PEOPLE **HAPPY**.

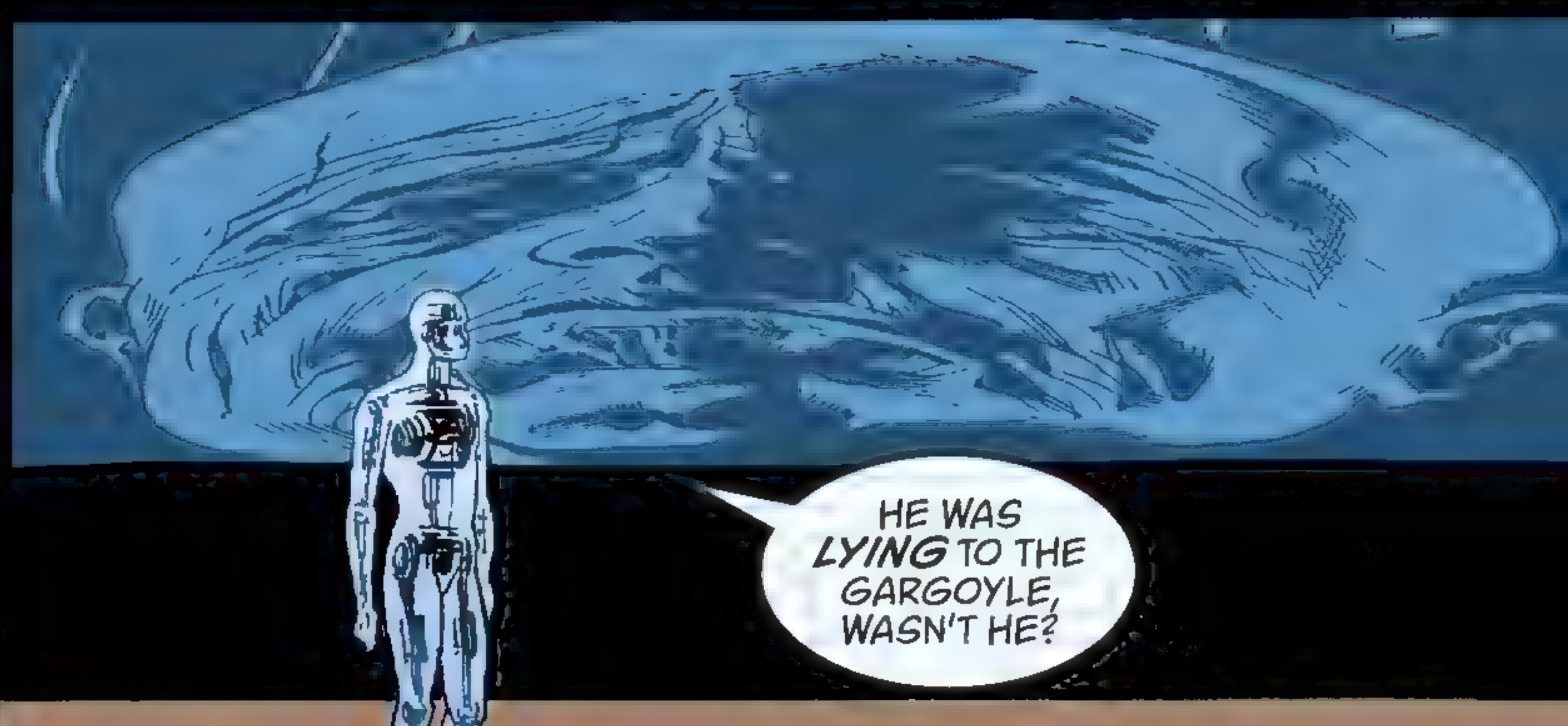


I HEARD
WHAT *KYLE RICHMOND*
SAID, HATU.

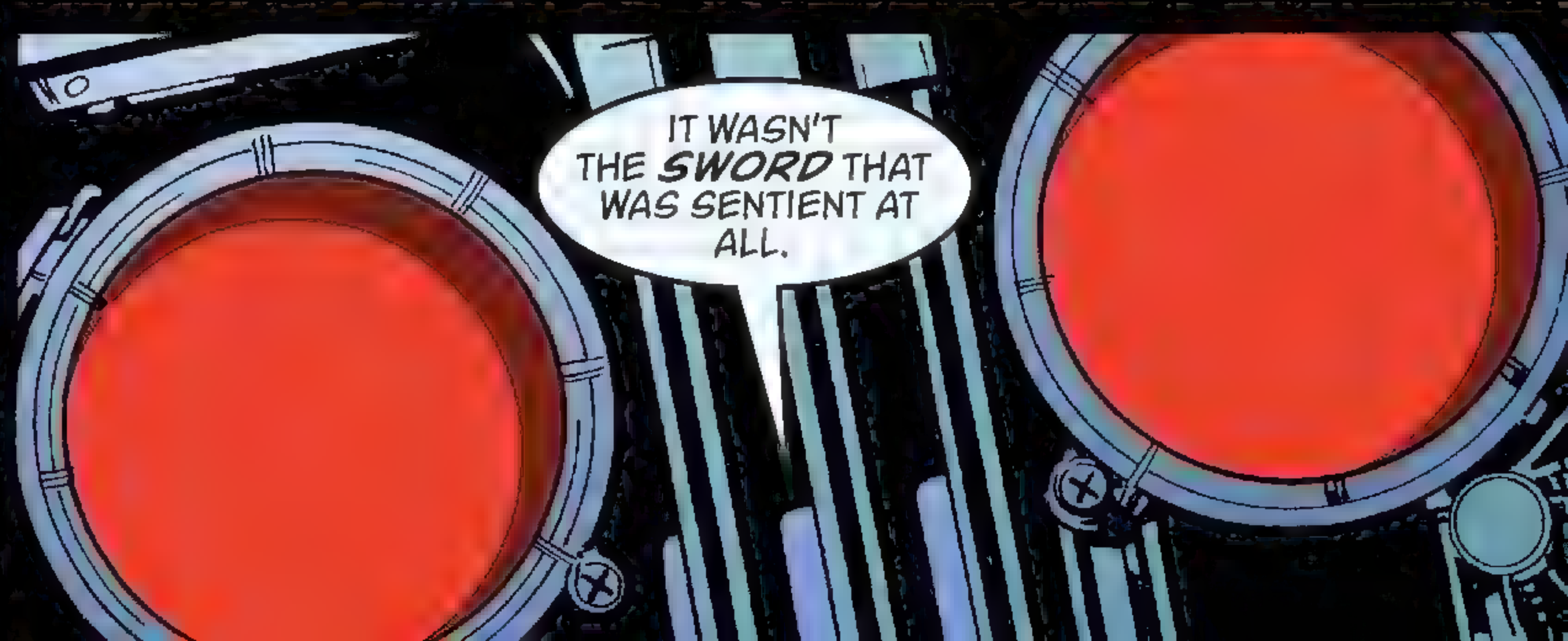
ABOUT THE
SWORD CREATING THE
ENIGMA FORCE AND ALL.
HOW THE ENIGMA FORCE
WAS *SENTIENT*. IT
DOESN'T MAKE *ANY*
SENSE.



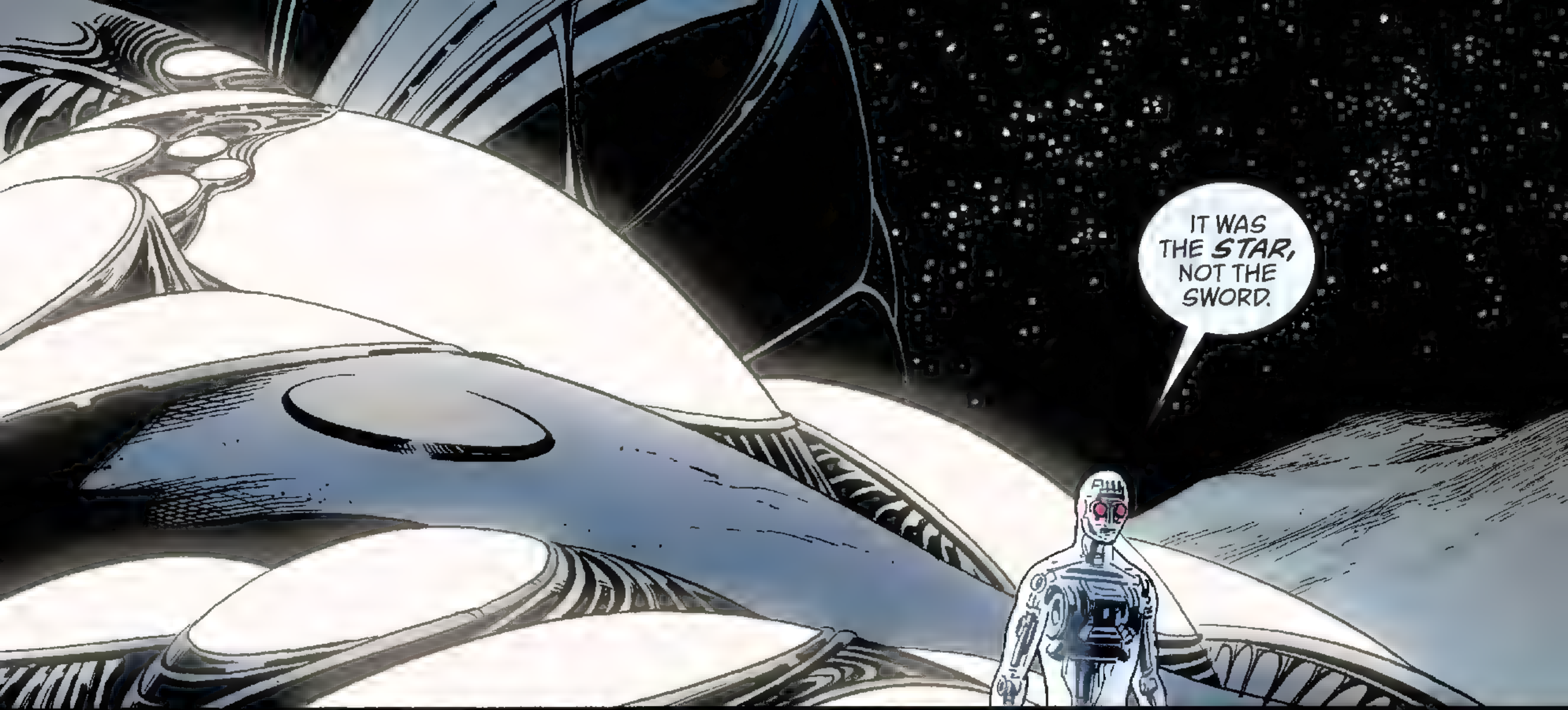
X-51...I CAN STILL
HEAR YOUR *FOOT-*
STEPS. WHERE ARE
YOU GOING?



HE WAS
LYING TO THE
GARGOYLE,
WASN'T HE?



IT WASN'T
THE *SWORD* THAT
WAS SENTIENT AT
ALL.



IT WAS
THE *STAR*,
NOT THE
SWORD.



AND
THERE'S ONLY
ONE STAR I CAN
IMAGINE THAT MIGHT
BE SENTIENT.

THE ONE
CREATED BY
REED RICHARDS
OUT OF THE WORLD-
DEVOURER.



THE NAME
THE DYING VESTIGE
OF THE ENIGMA FORCE
GRAFTED ONTO LONG
AGO WAS *GALAN*. OF
THE PLANET *TAA*.



THAT WAS
THE NAME
OF THE BEING
THAT BECAME
THE *FIRST*
GALACTUS,
WASN'T IT?



IT WAS
GALACTUS *ONCE*.
AND IT *WILL BE*
AGAIN.

I THINK
THE TERM IS
DEJA VU.

“Full circle, he thought while
the final lethargy crept into his limbs.
Full circle. A new terror born in
death, a new superstition entering
the unassailable fortress of forever.”
— *Richard Matheson,*
I AM LEGEND

U N I V E R S E X



APPENDIX TO CHAPTER FIVE

W R I T T E N B Y J I M K R U E G E R

"Again, this is an internal monologue being recorded in the event that this reality be destroyed. I am not suggesting at all that there is some enemy or threat to Earth that might result in its destruction, but because of the nature of these alternate realities and time cycles that seem to circle through all of human history.

"There was something in Mar-Vell's eyes that Captain America saw that gave him a courage to face Death and see her touch as a relief. What was that?

"The discovery of Supremor on the moon's surface leads to more questions than answers. Why would the Supreme Intelligence, with all its power and scope choose the moon of all places to wait?

"And why do I have a sense of such "wrong" when it comes to the existence of alternate realities?"

"Uatu, the former alien Watcher of Earth, a chronicler of not our history, ut the growth and health of the Celestial that once grew in the heart of planet Earth, has little to say. In reality, inclinations towards fear and concern mean little to him. Things are as they are. Alternate realities exist because of the potential choices a being is capable of making... or the possibility of one event falling like a domino into another, changing the path of that event's fall.

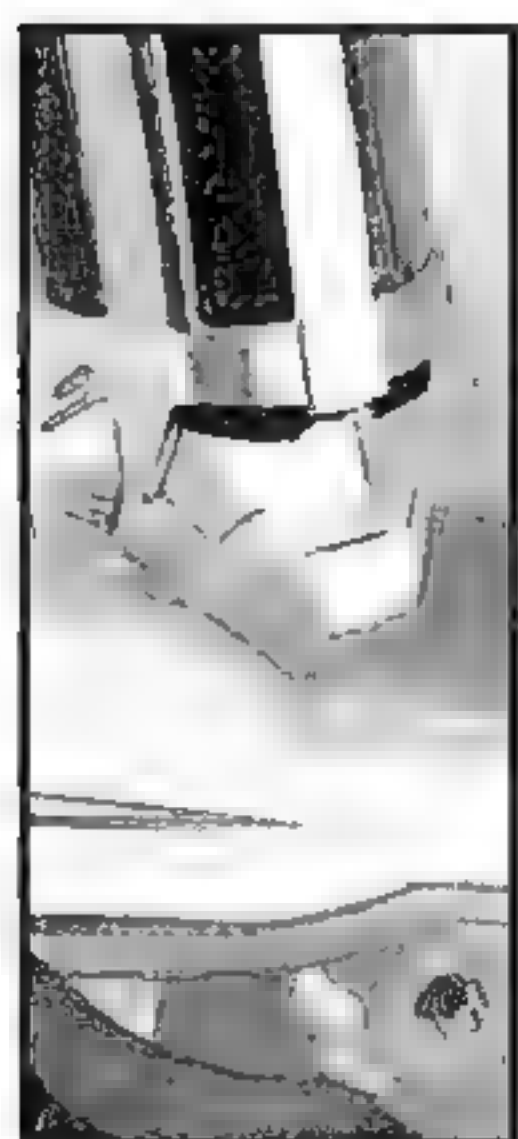
"I will consider Peter Parker as an exercise to illustrate this problem.

"What if Peter Parker had stopped the thief who killed his Uncle Ben? Would he have made the same mistakes he did so early in his career? Or would Spider-Man exist at all? The death of his uncle was the catalyst for the creation of the hero know as Spider-Man."

"What if Spider-Man joined the Fantastic Four? Would he have continued in the path that he had? Would he have been able to save the son of J. Jonah Jameson is he had been off-world with Reed Richards? What would that have meant for the rest of the world?

"Or what if he had remained an entertainer? Would this have somehow impacted the fear people have of mutants if they were now seen as entertainers. Would these 'powers' now only be seen as 'talents' or 'special effects'?

"Or what if someone else in Peter Parker's class had been bitten by the spider that gave him his wall-crawling abilities? Would Peter have been killed by the same thief that killed his Uncle Ben?



"Or what if Gwen Stacey had lived? There would be no May Parker. No Venom to distract the Skull those months before. No reason for Peter to even remain a hero. After all, it was in the emptiness caused by his Uncle Ben's death that created the need for responsibility. If Peter had new responsibilities that were not born out of tragedy, how would that change him?

"Or if Mary-Jane had not died? Perhaps there would never have been the wall between Peter and May. Perhaps the Spiders Man would never have gotten control of Peter.

"Or if Peter Parker had not joined the fight against the Skull?

"This does not even consider all the different ways Peter's life affects' others.

"All these possible scenarios create new histories, new continuities, new possibilities. But do they not also suggest a loss of character? Don't they create a dispersion of being? After all, if the range of my choices exist on other worlds, do I ever truly make a choice at all?

"Uatu has said that I do not. That this is why he is not concerned with even the death of the Celestial Embryo at the Earth's core. He says that on at least one other world, I did not rebel against Uatu and I did not send warning to Reed Richards on Earth. I am pained to think this is true. That is, regardless of utilitarian capability, would betray the very people I was built to protect and live alongside.

"I suppose the real problem with this is the loss of individual freedom. It suggests

that I don't make choices at all, but only satisfy and fulfill some cosmic niche in the realm of possibility.

"I am most concerned with how these worlds intermix with time manipulations. The creation of Galactus seems now to be a direct loop that runs from this universe's far future to its ancient past.

"And what of Franklin Richards, the new Galactus? What if he did not choose to become Galactus when his predecessor was transformed into a star? What if Reed Richards discovered the nature of embryo within Earth before he transformed Galactus into a star?

"The problems faced with these questions is this. The choices mankind makes in large part determines the direction humanity will go in the future. If all choices are, to some extant, lived out, than there is no direction at all.

"Forget time. It's a loop, a cycle. Man is going nowhere.

"But, of course, this creates new difficulties, because there is growth. There is progress. It is not as Uatu states, an endless cycle of civilizations rising and falling. Surely the mere fact that we can now record what has gone before suggests some sort of hope for the future. Surely some.

"No. These alternate worlds cannot be merely the existence and collection of humanity's combined possibilities.

"Have there... or perhaps this needs to be stated differently, will there be at some point in the future the possibility of so many time manipulations that this is what has caused the differing worlds that I and Uatu have peered into?

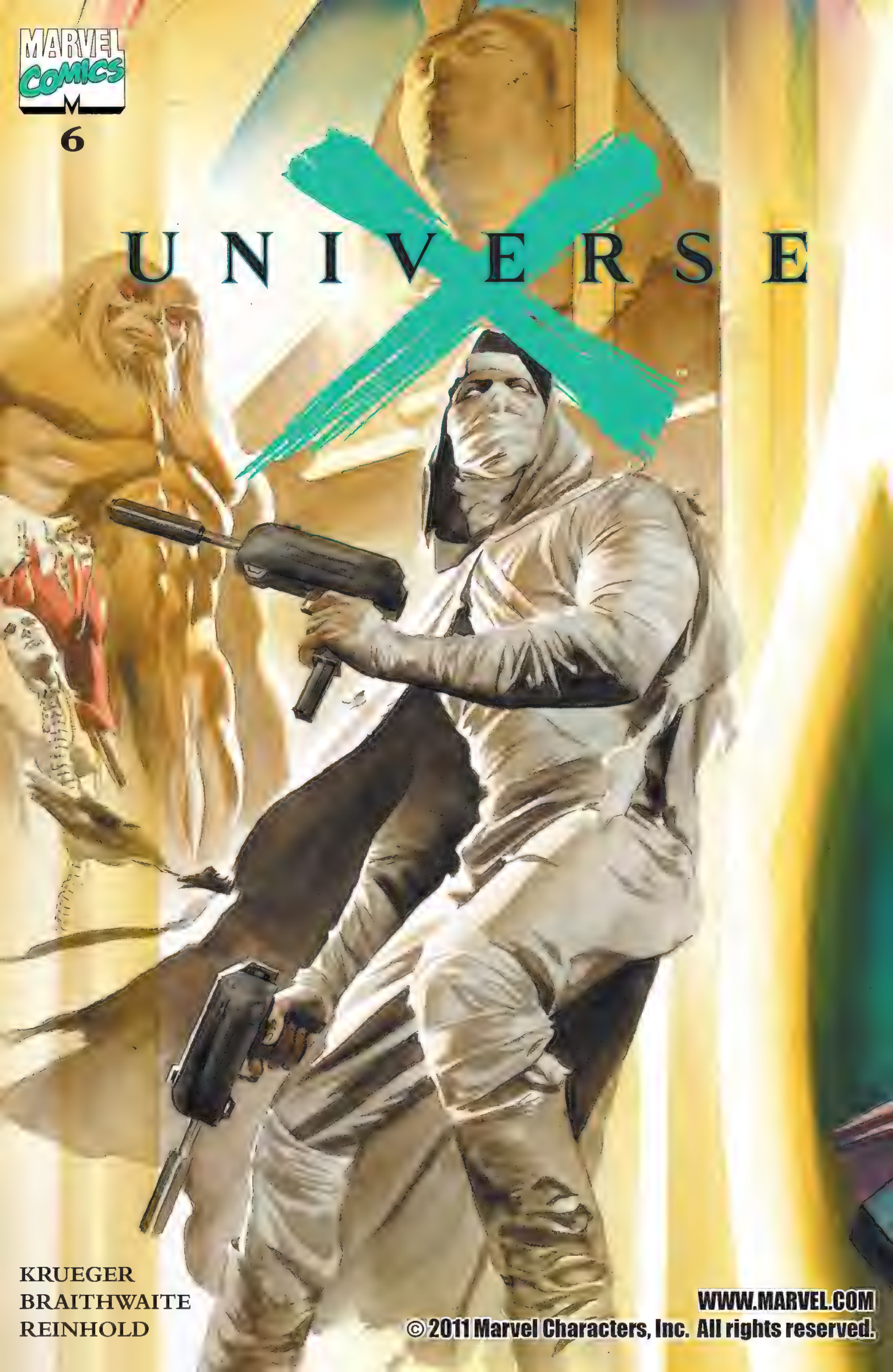
"But are all these trips random? Or is there some sort of design to the multi-verse, some motivation behind its being?

"I feel like I am once again debating with Uatu about whether good or evil exist. Meaning. How does this come about. Must an object's design suggest a designer? Does chaos have to demand an accidental origin?

"The key to these problems, I now believe, somehow rests in the eyes of Kyle Richmond. He can see things I cannot. Into places Uatu's equipment cannot peer. I must meet him, speak to him. If only to know what is to become of the rest of us."



UNIVERS E



KRUEGER
BRAITHWAITE
REINHOLD

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“Kyle?”

“Yes, my friend?”

“What have I done, Kyle?”

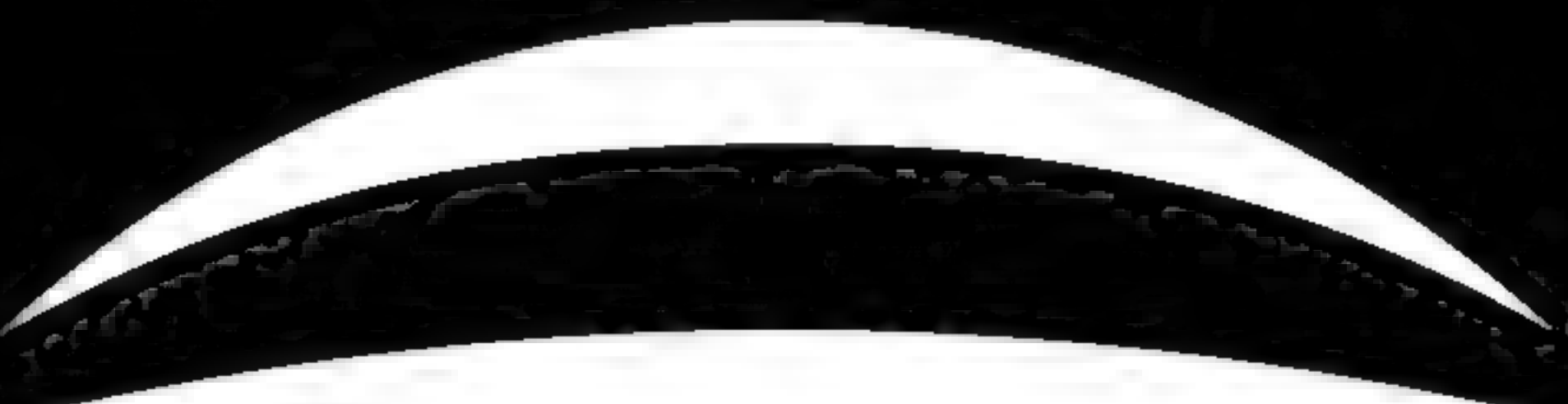
**“I’m thinking about what I’ve been in the past, Isaac.
I was a villain once, you know.”**

“That was a long time ago.”

**“Not so long that I don’t remember. I remember that girl I
put in a wheelchair. I remember the people I killed. Even the
people I thought I killed. And I’m asking myself if that’s any
worse...”**

“Worse than what?”

“Worse than what’s about to happen.”



UNIVERSE X

I S S U E 6

JIM KRUEGER
story and script

ALEX ROSS
story, cover painter and character designer

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pencils

BILL REINHOLD
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colors

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letters

MIKE RAICHT
assistant editor

MIKE MARTS
editor

JOE QUESADA
editor in chief

"ONCE, A LONG TIME AGO, LONG AFTER MOSES FREED THE SLAVES AND AFRICA BECAME THE NEW SOURCE-PLACE FOR THE WORKERS AND BUILDERS OF THE PYRAMIDS, PHARAOH **AREM-SETI** LEARNED OF A GLORIOUS DESTINY FOR MANKIND THAT CAME FROM THE STARS--A DESTINY TO BECOME LIKE THE **GODS** THEMSELVES.

"HE WOULD CLAIM LATER THAT HE LEARNED THIS FROM THE GOD OF THE **MOON**.

"THE METEOR WAS MADE OF A MALLEABLE METAL THAT IMMEDIATELY BEGAN TO **ROOT** ITS WAY INTO THE EARTH.

"PHARAOH ORDERED HIS SERVANTS TO RIP THE METEOR FROM THE EARTH. THEY FORMED THE METAL INTO THE IMAGE OF THE MOON-GOD **KHONSHU**.

"PHARAOH **AREM-SETI--OR SET** AS HE WAS NOW CALLED--WAS CONVINCED THAT THE DESTINY THE MOON GOD HAD TOLD HIM OF, WAS, IN FACT, **IMMORTALITY**.

"WHILE THE SLAVES BUILT THE TEMPLE FROM WHICH HE WOULD BE REBORN INTO THIS NEW DESTINY, PHARAOH'S CHIEF PRIEST WAS ORDERED TO MIX A SPECIAL **EMBALMING FLUID** TO BE BLESSED BY THE GODS.

"THIS EMBALMING FLUID WAS BELIEVED TO BE THE **SECRET** OF IMMORTALITY.

"IT WAS CUSTOMARY THAT AFTER THE PYRAMIDS WERE BUILT, THE SLAVES WHO BUILT THEM WOULD BE SYSTEMATICALLY **SLAIN**.

"HAVING HEARD OF THIS INHUMANITY, **CHIEF N'KANTU**, A SLAVE HIMSELF, LED HIS PEOPLE IN REVOLT AGAINST HIS MASTERS.

"HE **KILLED** PHARAOH **SET**.

"BUT INSTEAD OF THE BURIAL MEANT FOR THE PHARAOH--**N'KANTU** WAS EMBALMED AND MUMMIFIED BY SET'S OWN CHIEF PRIEST--WHO HAD ASPIRATIONS FOR THE THRONE HIMSELF."

"I DON'T UNDERSTAND, **KYLE**. WHY EMBALM THE **SLAVE** AND NOT THE **PHARAOH**?"

"BECAUSE HE FEARED PHARAOH WOULD INDEED **COME BACK FROM THE DEAD** TO RE-CLAIM HIS THRONE, **ISAAC**.

"AN EARTHQUAKE STOLE THE DESTINY THE CHIEF PRIEST HAD PLANNED FOR HIMSELF, BURYING ALL WITHIN FOR **ETERNITY**."

"AN **EARTHQUAKE**? YOU'LL PARDON MY DISBELIEF, BUT ISN'T THAT SOMEWHAT '**SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE BIJOU**'?"

"YES, **ISAAC**. BUT THE STATUE OF **KHONSHU**, THOUGH CHANGED IN ITS FORM, STILL ROOTED ITSELF WITHIN THE **TEMPLE**. IT DUG ITSELF DEEP INTO THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE TEMPLE AND LACED ITSELF ALONG THE FAULT LINES OF THE REGION."

"YOU MAKE IT SOUND ALMOST **SENTIENT**."

"IT WAS. IT WAS TRYING TO **HIDE** ITSELF."

"BUT **WHY**? WHAT WAS IT?"

"IT WAS ONE OF A **NUMBER** OF METEORS. ANOTHER WAS DISCOVERED AND WORSHIPPED FURTHER SOUTH BY THE AFRICAN TRIBE KNOWN AS THE **WAKANDANS**. MANY OF THE OTHERS WERE NEVER DISCOVERED AT ALL.

"WHAT COULD HE FEAR FROM A **SLAVE**? AFTER ALL, IT WAS THE PRIEST WHO ALLOWED CHIEF **N'KANTU** TO DISCOVER THE **FATE** MEANT FOR HIS PEOPLE.

"IT HAD THE POWER TO **BRING LIFE**, SHOULD IT EVER BE DISCOVERED.

"BUT TO THE EGYPTIANS, IT BROUGHT **DEATH**. A CURSE FROM BEYOND THE STARS."

"YOU ARE OF A **RARE HUMOR** THIS DAY, **KYLE**. YOU SOUND LIKE PULP FICTION. WHAT ABOUT ARCHAEOLOGISTS...WAS THIS TOMB NEVER FOUND?"

"IT WAS. BUT IT WAS NOT THE EMBALMING FLUIDS **ALONE** THAT AWAKENED **N'KANTU**. THEY WERE TRIGGERED BY THE STATUE OF **KHONSHU**."

"THE **LIVING MUMMY**?"

"THAT WAS HOW **N'KANTU** WAS **REFERRED** TO AS, BUT THAT IS NOT WHAT HE **WAS**."

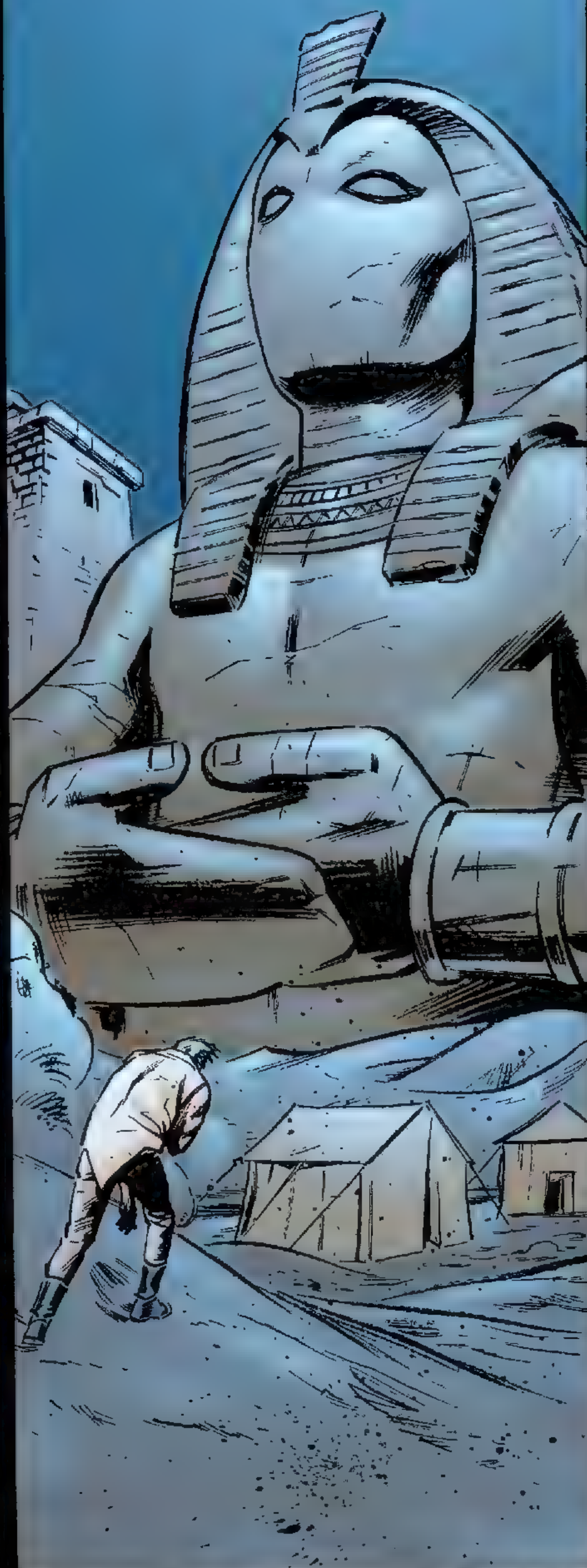
"YEARS LATER, A **MERCENARY** MORE DEAD THAN ALIVE, BETRAYED BY THOSE HE HAD STOLEN, KILLED AND PLUNDERED WITH, CAME UPON THE EXCAVATION SITE OF THE TOMB OF SET.

"HE **DIED** IN THE SHADOW OF THE STATUE OF KHONSHU, ISAAC.

"HE WAS **AWAKENED** A MINUTE LATER, BELIEVING THE GOD THAT THE STONE WAS FASHIONED AFTER HAD BROUGHT HIM **BACK TO LIFE**.

"BUT WITH HIS BLOOD STILL INTACT AND NO EMBALMING FLUID TO DISTORT HIS APPEARANCE, IT WAS AS IF **MARC SPECTOR** HAD NEVER DIED AT ALL.

"SPECTOR BECAME THE **MOON KNIGHT** AND BECAME A **HERO**.



"INTERESTING, ISN'T IT?"

"WHAT?"

"THAT THIS MERCENARY WAS OF **JEWISH** DESCENT."

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN?"

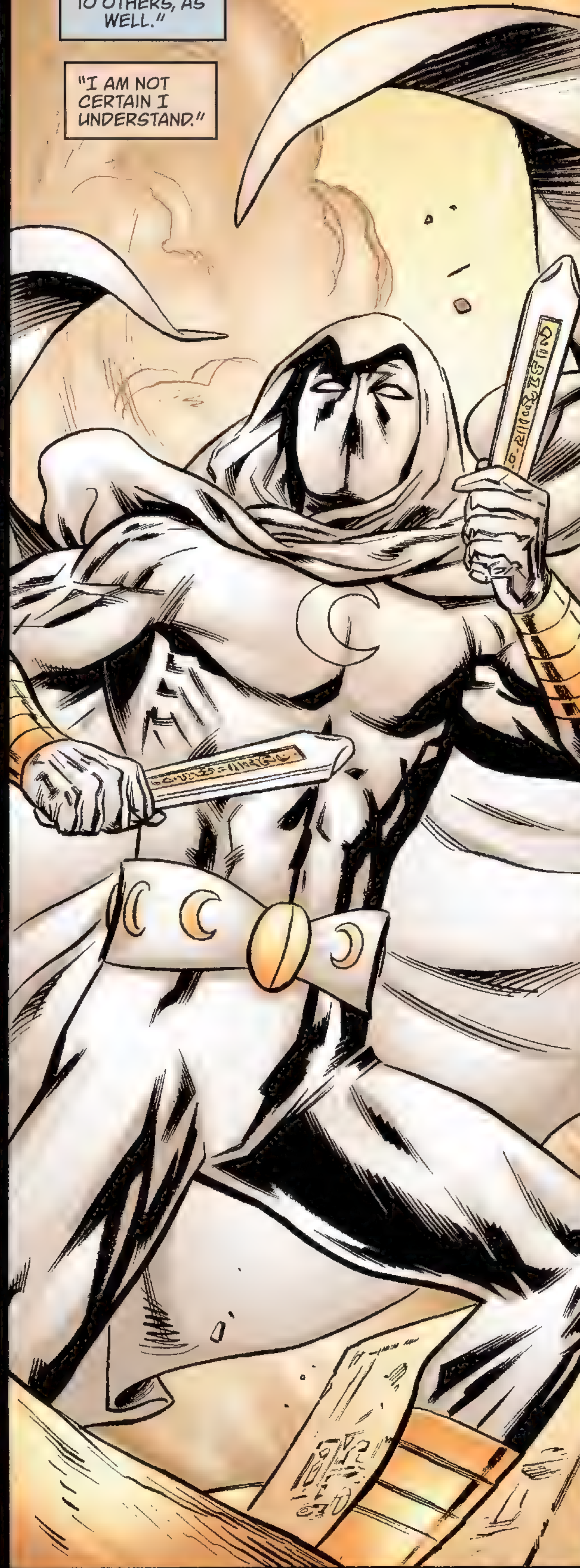
"THAT THIS JEW WOULD BECOME A SLAVE TO THE **EGYPTIANS** AGAIN.

"A SLAVE TO **JUSTICE**.



"SPECTOR'S RESURRECTION WAS NOT ONLY LIMITED TO HIS **OWN** LIFE, BUT TO OTHERS, AS WELL."

"I AM NOT CERTAIN I UNDERSTAND."



"THE WOMAN THAT SPECTOR LOVED WAS KILLED BY HIS DERANGED **BROTHER**, WHOM SPECTOR HIMSELF THEN KILLED.

"DAYS LATER THEY LIVED AGAIN. THE DOCTORS CALLED IT A **MIRACLE**.

"BUT IN TIME, LONG AFTER EITHER REFUSED TO DIE, SPECTOR REALIZED THE **TRUTH**."

"THAT THEY COULD NOT DIE?"

"NO. THAT THEY WERE **ALREADY DEAD**."

"SHE TRIED TO LEAVE HIM A NUMBER OF TIMES, BUT ALWAYS **RETURNED**. NO OTHER MAN WOULD HAVE HER.

"THEY WERE **AFRAID** OF HER..."

"...AS THEY **FEARED** SPECTOR."



"SPECTOR? AS IN A **GHOST**?"

"YES, ISAAC."

"BUT HE WAS **NOT** A GHOST. HE WAS **ALIVE** AGAIN."

"NO HE WASN'T. AND NEITHER WAS THE **'LIVING'** MUMMY."

"I DO NOT UNDERSTAND."

"**DUST**, ISAAC. IT WAS IN THE AIR WHEN SPECTOR BREATHED HIS LAST BREATH. HE **INGESTED** THE DUST OF KHONSHU. HE **BECAME** THE STONE.

"SPECTOR ONLY **REFLECTED** THE LIGHT OF THE SUN. HE DIED **YEARS** AGO IN THE TOMB OF KHONSHU.

"I ASK YOU, IS THAT **JUSTICE**?"





DON'T YOU SEE, ISAAC? THE MOON KNIGHT IS AS DEAD AS THE MOON.

I'M... ALIVE.

HEAT. I CAN FEEL HEAT.



CHURCH DID IT! HE REALLY DID!

AND COLD! IT'S FREEZING OUTSIDE! HOW GLORIOUS!



ISAAC? IF IT'S TOO COLD, THEN CLOSE THE WINDOW.

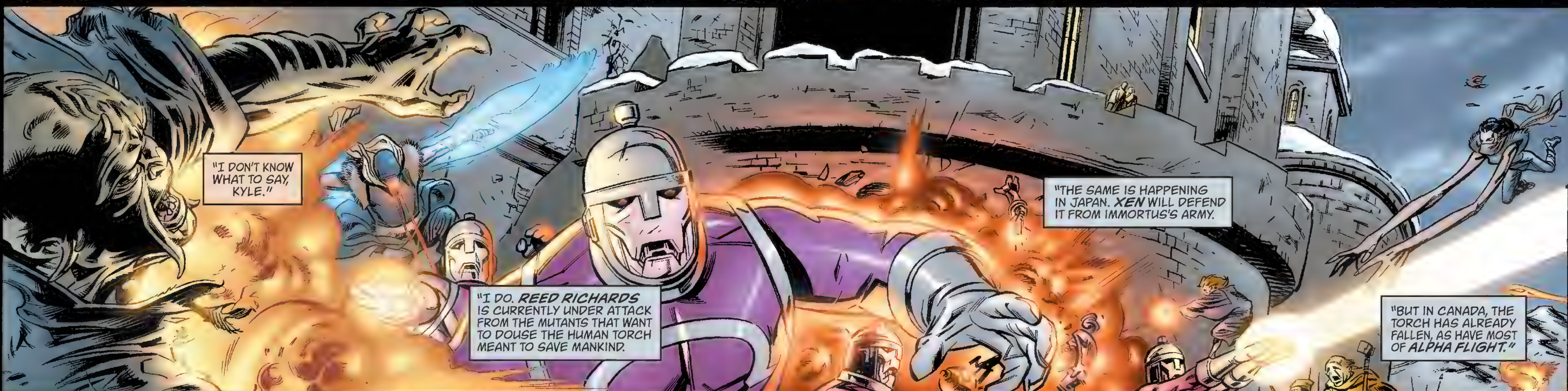
NO. NOT TOO COLD. DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW LONG I'VE WAITED FOR... FOR...



I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE TOO COLD FOR YOU, KYLE. I DON'T FEEL COLD. OR HEAT. YOU KNOW THIS?

WHAT I KNOW, ISAAC, IS WHAT YOU'VE DONE.

AND WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO DO.

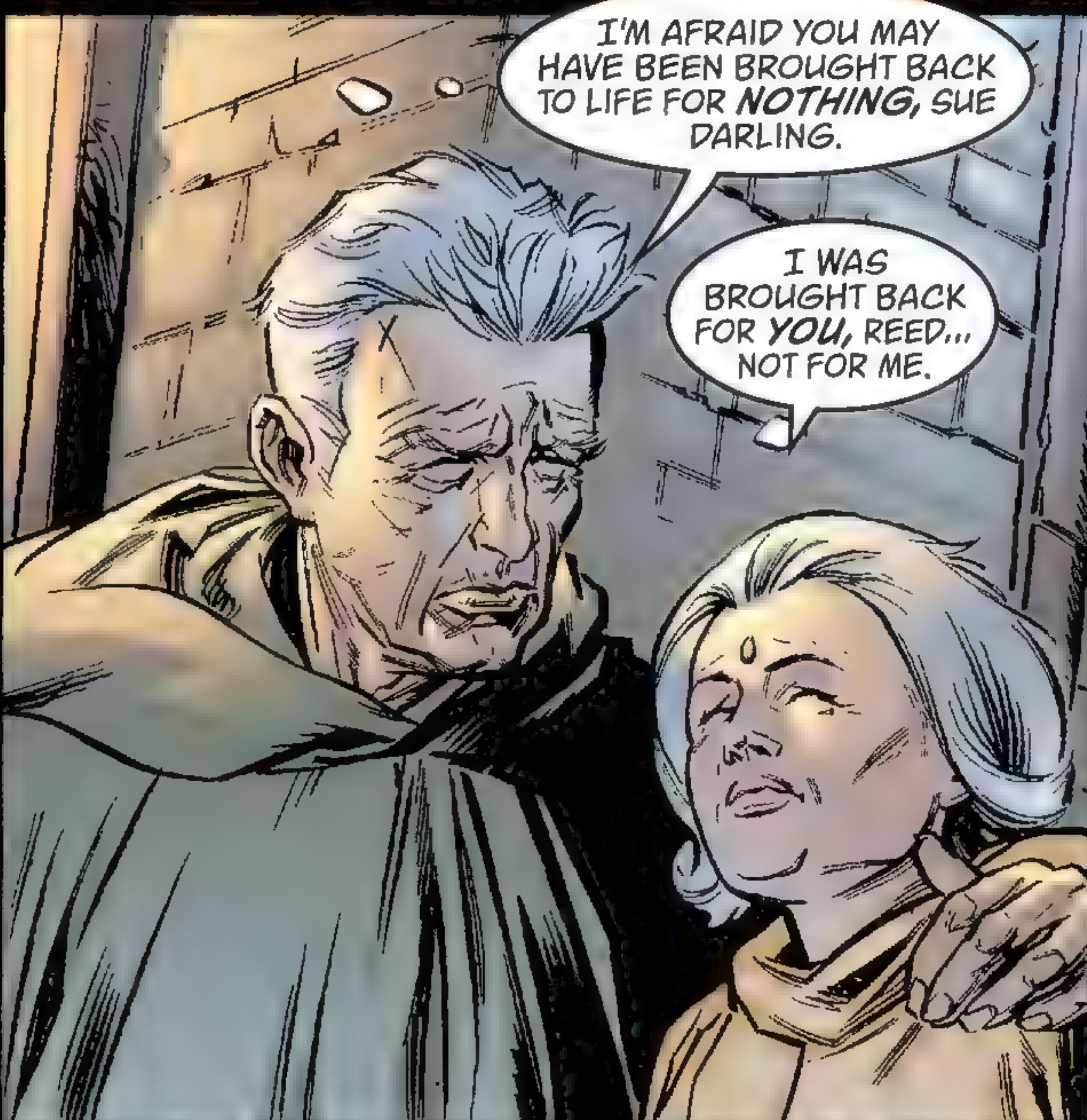


"I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY, KYLE."

"I DO. REED RICHARDS IS CURRENTLY UNDER ATTACK FROM THE MUTANTS THAT WANT TO DOUSE THE HUMAN TORCH MEANT TO SAVE MANKIND."

"THE SAME IS HAPPENING IN JAPAN. XEN WILL DEFEND IT FROM IMMORTUS'S ARMY."

"BUT IN CANADA, THE TORCH HAS ALREADY FALLEN, AS HAVE MOST OF ALPHA FLIGHT."



I'M AFRAID YOU MAY HAVE BEEN BROUGHT BACK TO LIFE FOR NOTHING, SUE DARLING.

I WAS BROUGHT BACK FOR YOU, REED... NOT FOR ME.



"WILL ALL THE TORCHES BE DOUSED?"

"WILL THE PIECES OF CREEL BE REASSEMBLED?"



"WILL MAR-VELL SUCCEED NOW THAT CAP IS DEAD?"

"I WON'T TELL YOU, ISAAC. AND IT'S NOT BECAUSE OF THE DEAL YOU MADE WITH MR. CHURCH, WHO IN MOMENTS WILL BE ATTACKING RICHARDS IN LATVERIA."

"IT'S NOT BECAUSE HE PROMISED TO MAKE YOU FEEL AGAIN IF YOU MADE WRITINGS OF THE NEAR FUTURE AVAILABLE TO HIM."

"CHURCH? I DON'T KNOW ANY--"

"NO MORE LIES, ISAAC. YOU DON'T THINK I CAN SEE YOUR FUTURE? I CAN. I'M GOING TO TELL YOU ANY MORE."

"NOT BECAUSE I HAVEN'T DONE, OR WOULDN'T HAVE DONE WHAT YOU'VE ACCOMPLISHED. BUT BECAUSE IT WON'T MAKE A DIFFERENCE."

"DO YOU WISH FOR ME TO
LEAVE THIS PLACE?"

"I KNOW **YOU** DIDN'T DO THIS THING TO ME,
ISAAC. I KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE NOT TO KNOW
WHAT YOU'RE DOING. I'M SORRY I COULDN'T--"

"COULDN'T
WHAT?"

"LET ME TELL YOU A STORY,
ISAAC. I CAN SEE **EVERYONE**
SOMETIMES. I CAN SEE ALL
THE **MONSTERS** THAT NOW
LIVE IN THIS WORLD.

"AND THOSE THAT ARE THE
MOST **MONSTROUS**, THE
MOST **HIDEOUS**, DON'T
WANT TO BE MONSTERS ANY-
MORE.

"**YOU** ARE LIKE THEM,
ISAAC, BUT YOU'RE
NOT.

"THEY'RE GOING TO
PICK A **SIDE**, ISAAC.

AND YOU ARE **NOT**."

"THE BATTLE ISN'T WON OR LOST OVER THE *TORCHES*, ISAAC. IT'S WON OR LOST IN A DECISION. A *MOMENT*. A LOT OF THOSE MOMENTS MAKE UP A *WAR*."

"I REMEMBER THE WAR. THE BRAVE AND THE COWARDLY *DIE*, KYLE. AS DO THE GOOD AND THE BAD. DON'T YOU *DARE* PREACH TO ME."

"I WON'T, ISAAC. IT'S TOO *LATE* FOR WORDS."

OH MY GOD. NOT AGAIN.

ALPHA FLIGHT'S DEAD, MAC.

BUT DON'T WORRY. IT'S NOT OVER.

I'LL FIND SOMEONE TO PUT YOU IN AS SOON AS WE ESCAPE THE *MOB*. THEN WE'LL COME BACK AND WE'LL... AS SOON AS WE...



WHAT IS IT? *TALK* TO ME, WALTER.

IT'S THE *END*, MAC. WE'VE LOST *CANADA*.



"LOOK AT MARC SPECTOR NOW, ISAAC. HE'S DEAD AND HE **KNOWS** IT. YET STILL HE **FIGHTS**. AND HE'S LOST **FAR MORE** THAN WE HAVE. HE IS NOT AMONGST THE DEAD, NOR CAN HE TRULY TAKE A PLACE WITH THE LIVING."

THERE, MAR-VELL. THE STONE IS HIDDEN IN THE **TOMB**.



"BUT HE DIDN'T HAVE A **CHOICE**, KYLE. WHAT'S BEEN DONE TO HIM WAS NOT HIS CHOICE. AND THERE WAS **NO WAY** TO STOP IT OR CHANGE IT."

"HE COULD **WALK AWAY**. BUT HE HASN'T."

"HE THINKS ABOUT WHAT'S BEEN **DONE** TO HIM, ISAAC, AND IT MAKES HIM **SO ANGRY**."

"AND THEN HE THINKS OF WHAT THE **ENEMY** WOULD DO WITH THE POWER HE NOW PROTECTS, AND HE **WEEPS**, ISAAC. HE **WEEPS**."

YOU CAN'T HAVE IT! I WON'T LET YOU! **KHONSHU** WON'T LET YOU!



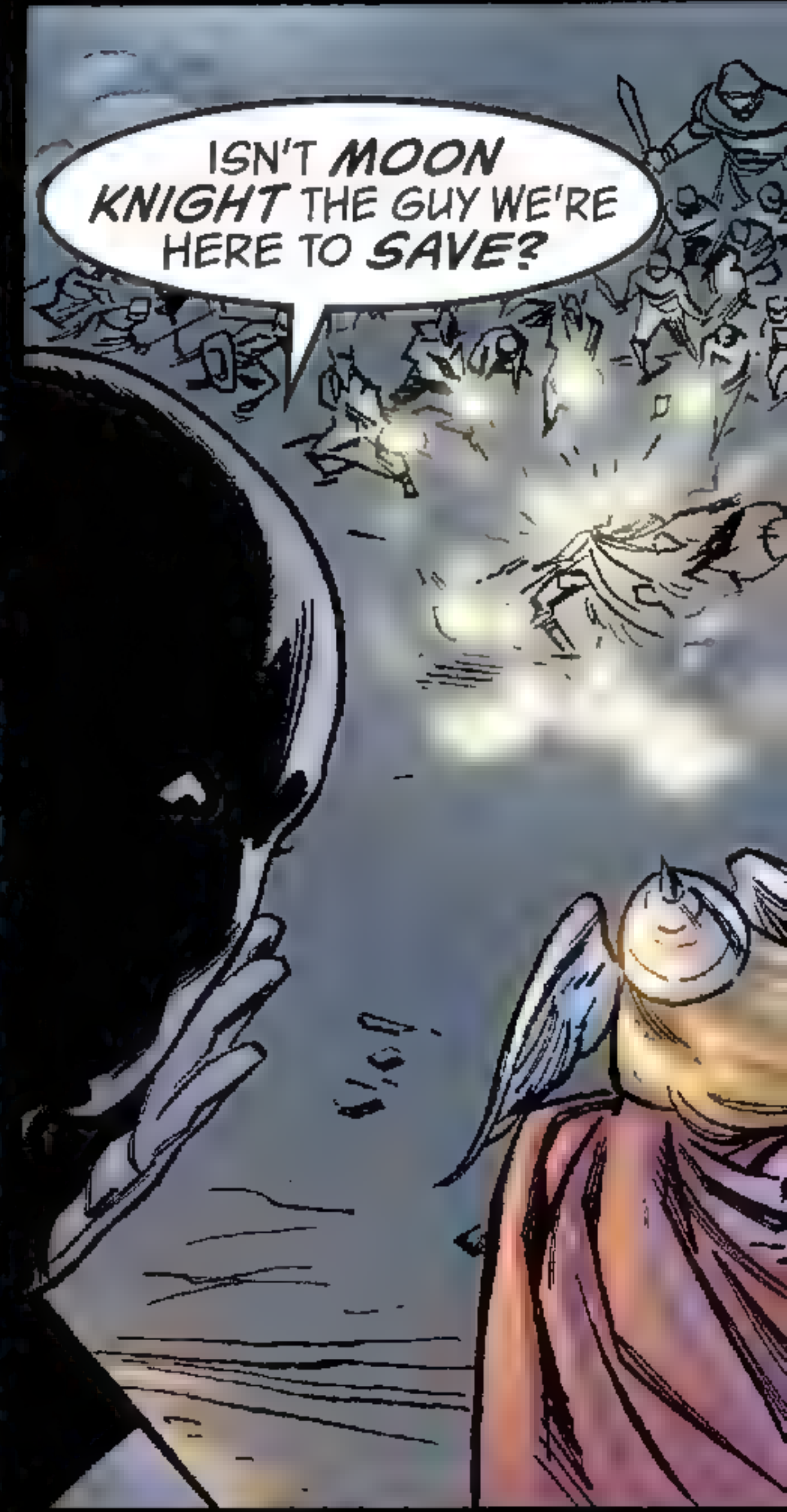
HAVEN'T YOU... **KOFF**... LEARNED?



KNOWLEDGE CARRIES **NO LESSONS**, SPECTOR.



YOU'RE RIGHT!





FRY 'EM,
THOR. THEY'RE DEAD
ALREADY.



"I WAS UNDER THE IMPRESSION THAT THE SONS
OF SET COULD NOT BE **STOPPED**, KYLE."

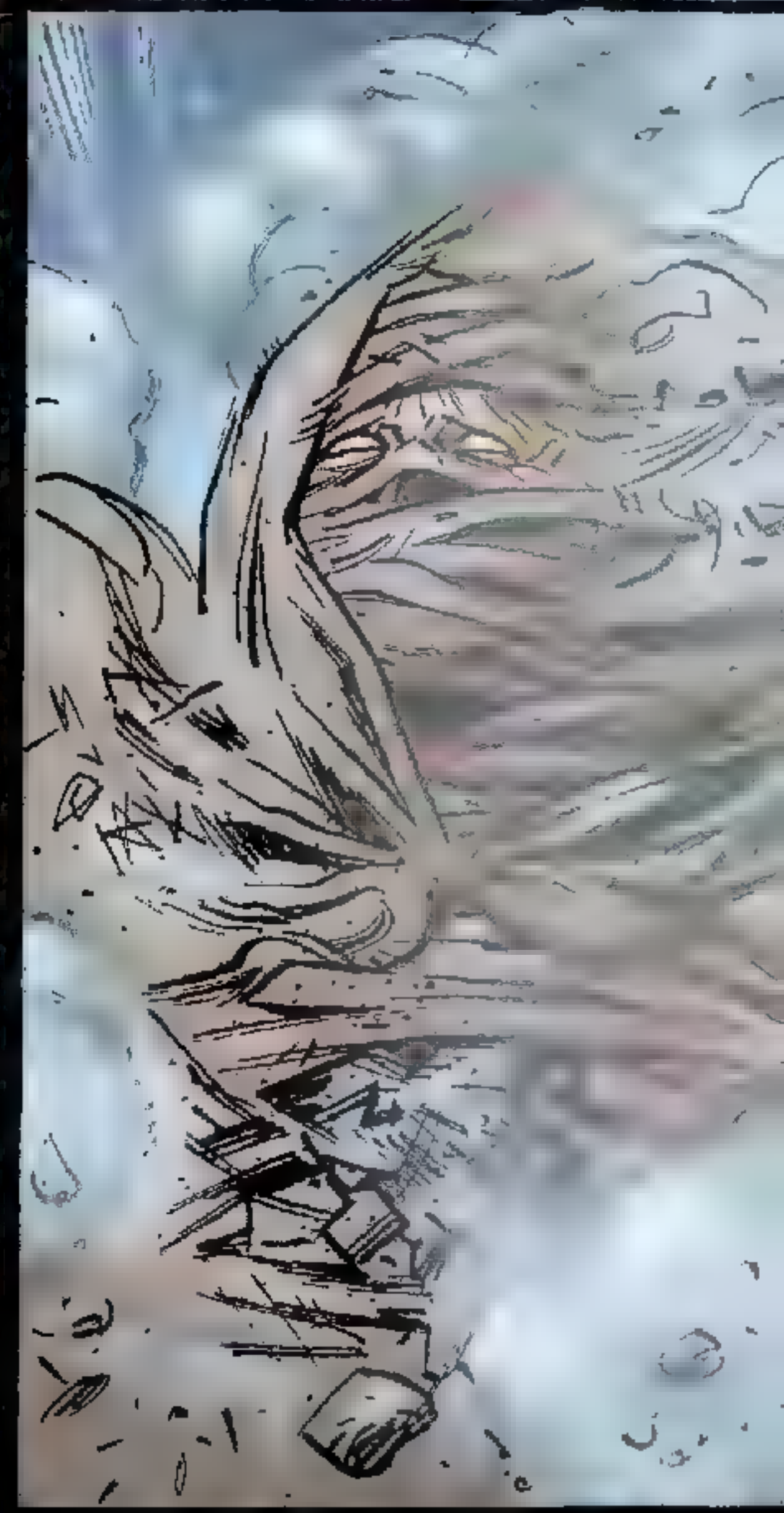


"NOT FOR LONG, ISAAC."



WHY
HAVE YOU
COME?

TO **END**
YOUR SUFFERING.
WELL DONE, KNIGHT.
YOUR REWARD
AWAITS.





THERE THEY GO. OFF TO SAVE THE WORLD.

RAH-RAH-RAH. JERKS.

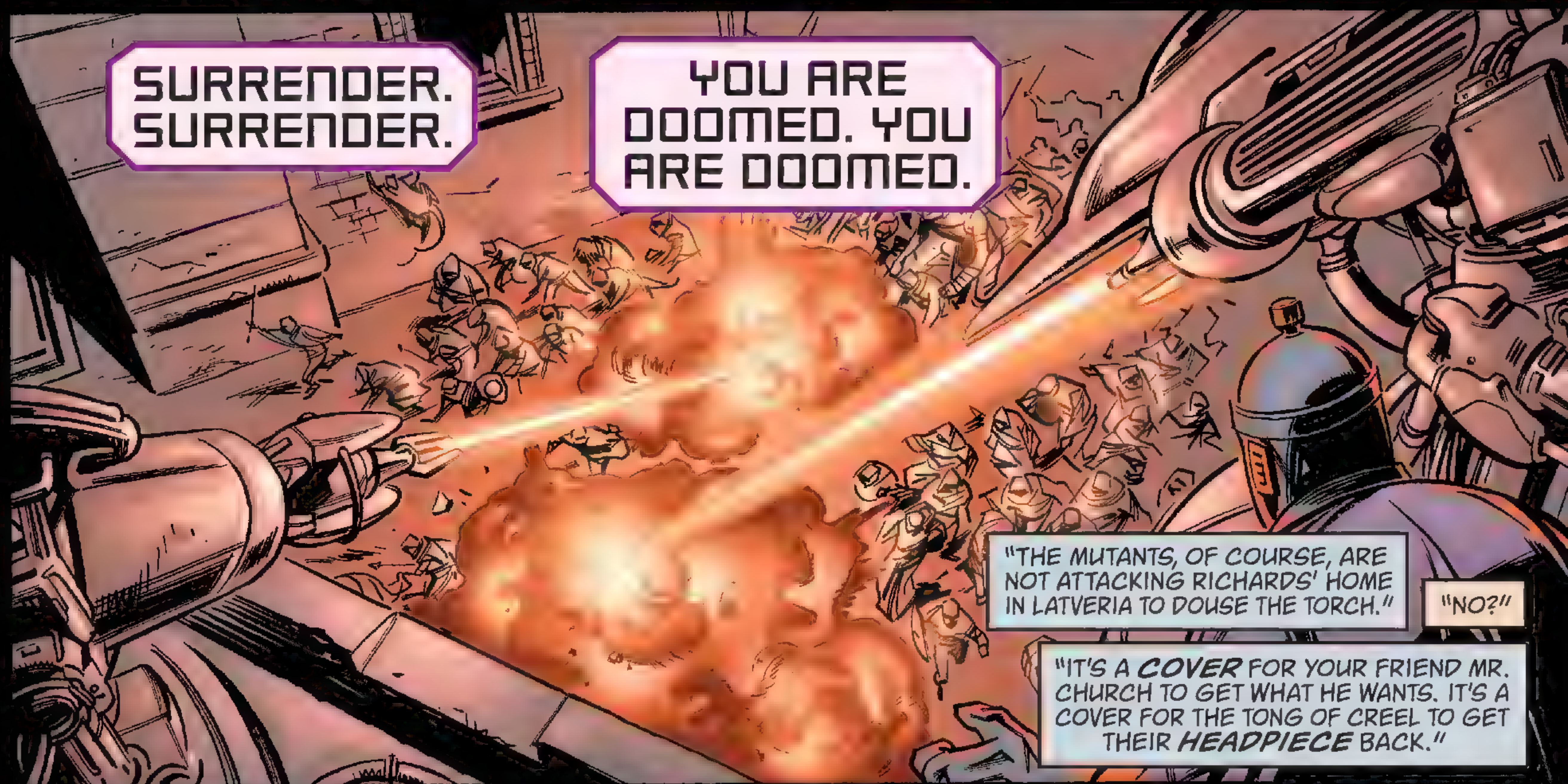
HAIL THE CONQUERING HEROES.

YEAH, GO GET 'EM! DEATH TO THE GUY WHO WOULD DARE WANT TO CHANGE US BACK TO HUMAN. BEAUTIFUL AGAIN.



GET 'EM, CHUCK!

OH, GOOD IDEA, BUZZ! ANY MORE BRIGHT IDEAS?



SURRENDER. SURRENDER.

YOU ARE DOOMED. YOU ARE DOOMED.

"THE MUTANTS, OF COURSE, ARE NOT ATTACKING RICHARDS' HOME IN LATVERIA TO DOUSE THE TORCH."

"NO?"

"IT'S A COVER FOR YOUR FRIEND MR. CHURCH TO GET WHAT HE WANTS. IT'S A COVER FOR THE TONG OF CREEP TO GET THEIR HEADPIECE BACK."

"THE INFORMATION THEY NEEDED WAS SUPPLIED RIGHT *HERE*, ISAAC. MY WORDS. YOUR PEN. IN NARRATIVE FORM FOR MR. CHURCH, *EXACTLY* WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN AND *WHEN*..."

"THE *WHEREABOUTS* OF THE HEADPIECE OF CREEL.

"*WHEN* BEN GRIMM AND ADAM WARLOCK WOULD BE AWAY AND *UNABLE* TO DEFEND RICHARDS.

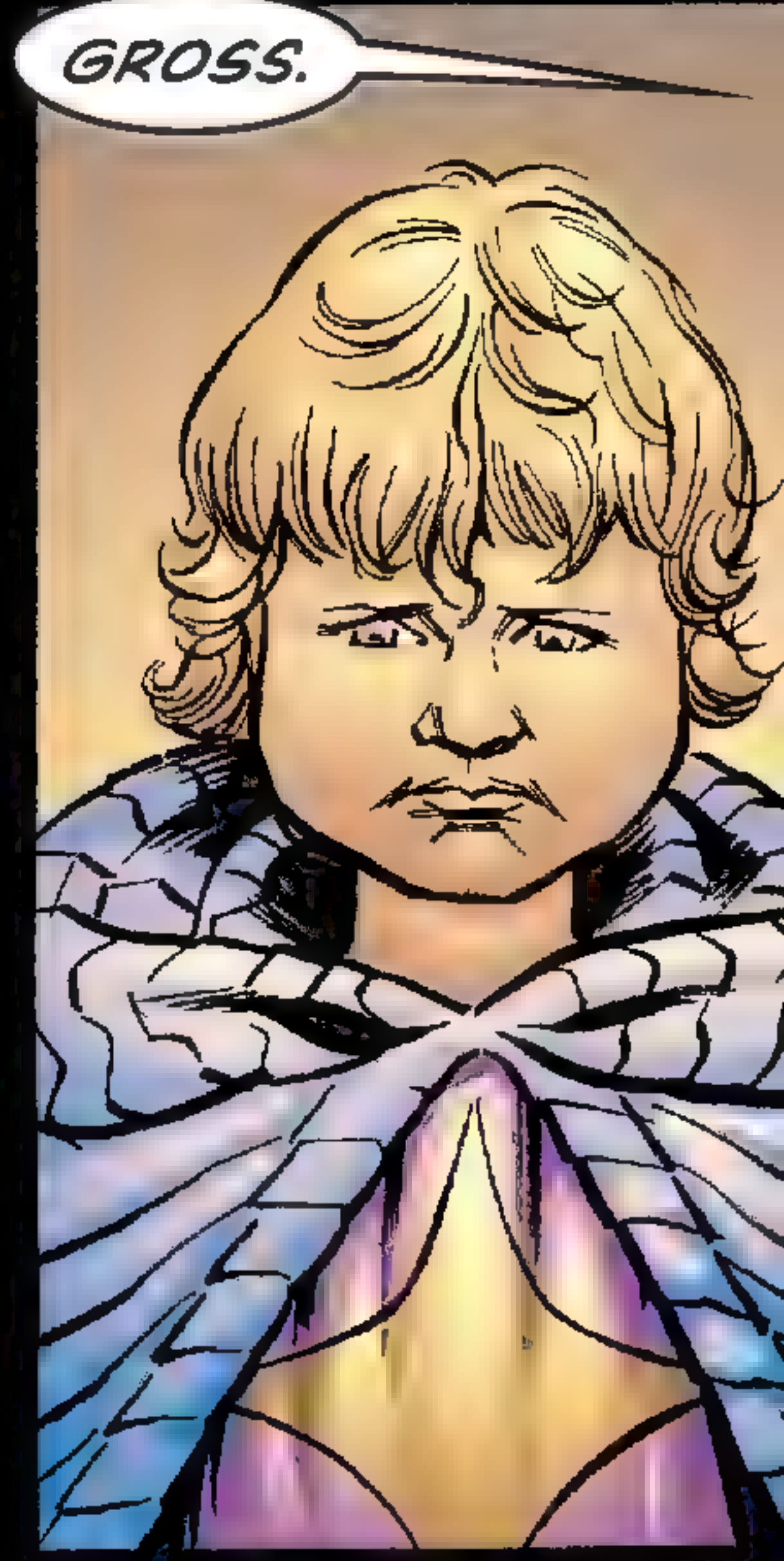
"*WHERE* CAPTAIN AMERICA WOULD BE. *HOW* HIS LOSS WOULD LEAD MOST OF THE HEROES IN NEW YORK TO JOIN MAR-VELL'S QUEST...LEAVING NEW YORK'S TORCH *UNDEFENDED*.

"*WHERE* DOCTOR DOOM'S TIME MACHINE WAS KEPT.

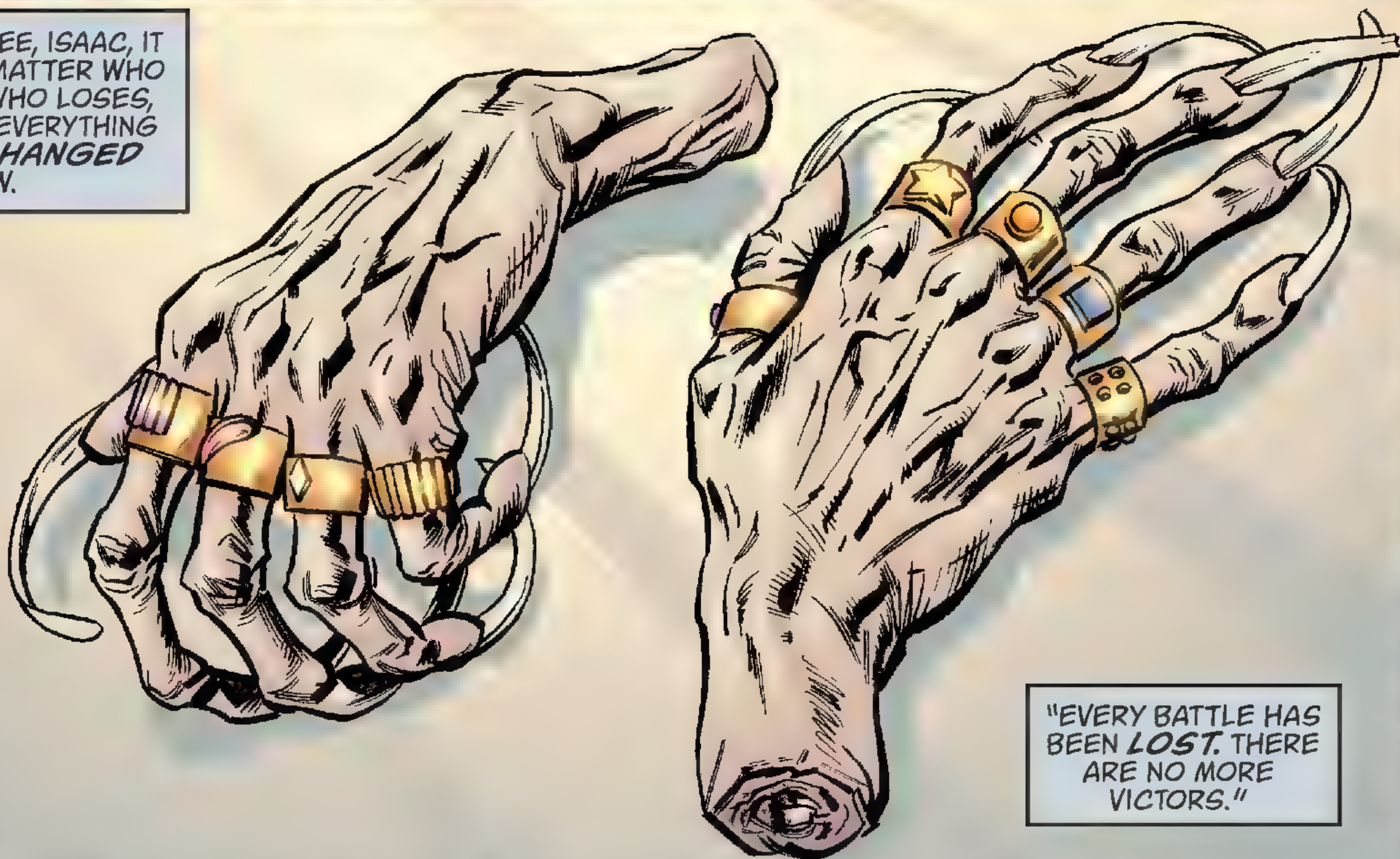
"YOU SEE, ISAAC, YOU'RE GOING TO *FEEL* AGAIN.

"I HOPE IT WAS *WORTH* IT."

"AND ALL IT COST THE REST OF THE WORLD...WAS *EVERYTHING*.



"SO YOU SEE, ISAAC, IT DOESN'T MATTER WHO WINS OR WHO LOSES, BECAUSE EVERYTHING CAN BE **CHANGED** NOW."



"EVERY BATTLE HAS BEEN **LOST**. THERE ARE NO MORE VICTORS."

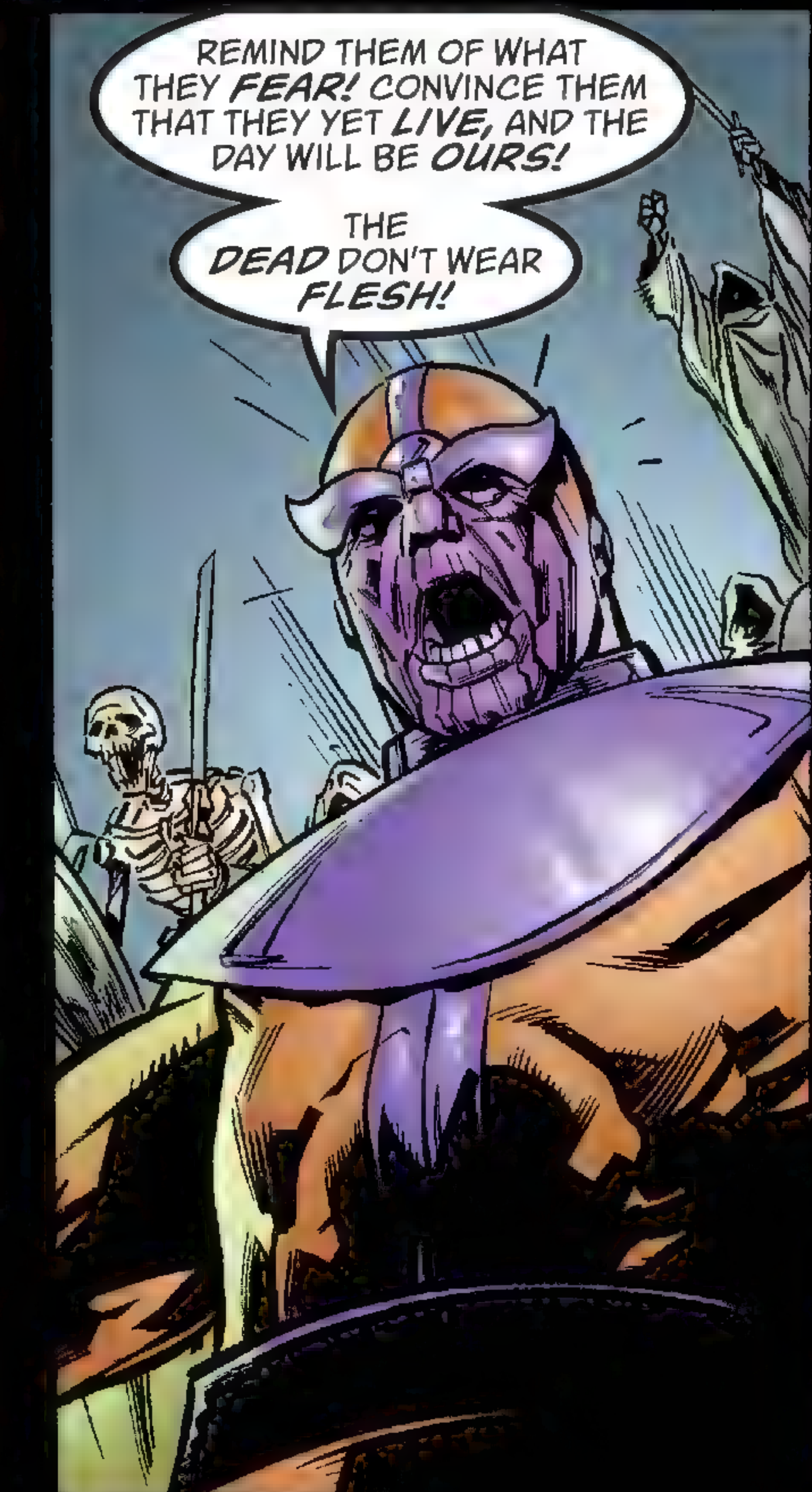


"WE'RE ALL AS GOOD AS *DEAD*."

SO HOW
DO WE *STOP*
THEM?

THE SAME
WAY AS WHEN
YOU WERE
ALIVE.

THAT'S RIGHT.
SOME THINGS *NEVER*
CHANGE.



REMIND THEM OF WHAT
THEY *FEAR*! CONVINCE THEM
THAT THEY YET *LIVE*, AND THE
DAY WILL BE *OURS*!

THE
DEAD DON'T WEAR
FLESH!



WHAT'S
HAPPENING?
WHY ARE THEY
WALKING
AWAY?

THEY THINK
THEY'RE *ALIVE* AGAIN.
THAT'S HOW WE LOSE
HERE.

IT'S NOT
THAT WE CAN *DIE*
AGAIN.



WE CAN ONLY
RELEARN THE FEAR
OF LOSING OUR
LIVES.

WE
RELEARN
THE NEED FOR
SAFETY.



I'VE
BEEN WAITING
FOR THIS FOR A
LIFETIME!

MAR-VELL!

WE'VE
SEARCHED
EVERYWHERE.
NO SIGN OF
THEM.



THEY ARE NOT HERE, MAR-VELL.

YOUR PEOPLE ARE NOT IN *DEATH'S REALM*.



I BEAT YOUR MASTER ONCE! I CAN DO SO AGAIN!

BUT THIS IS *HIS* REALM, NOT YOURS. YOU ARE *NOTHING* HERE.



WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO THE *KREE*?



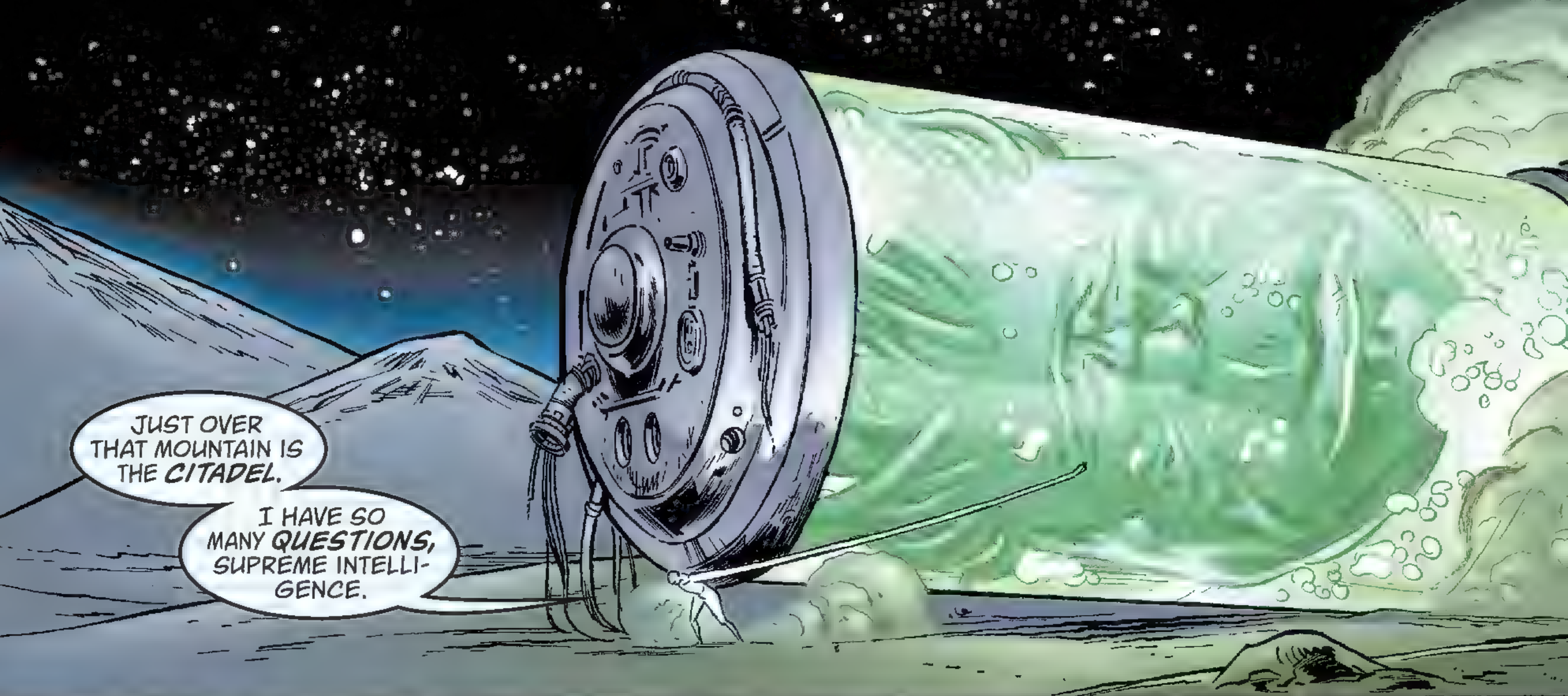
THE *SUPREME INTELLIGENCE* WILL KNOW.

SHOULD WE GET HIM? WHERE IS HE?



HE'S *STILL ALIVE*.

I'LL HAVE TO GO AND SEE HIM WITHOUT YOU.



JUST OVER
THAT MOUNTAIN IS
THE *CITADEL*.

I HAVE SO
MANY *QUESTIONS*,
SUPREME INTELLI-
GENCE.



THEN *SPEAK*,
AARON. I KNOW WHAT
IT IS LIKE TO BE TRAPPED
UP HERE.

I KNOW
WHAT IT IS LIKE
TO BE *ALONE* ON
THE MOON.



I'M ONLY
ALONE IF YOU
DON'T COUNT
UATU.

SO...FIRST
OF ALL...WHAT'S
GOING ON WITH
MAR-VELL'S
SEARCH?

HOW
IS IT RELATED
TO *MULTIPLE*
REALITIES?



I'M AFRAID
I WON'T HAVE *TIME*
TO ANSWER YOUR
QUESTIONS.

MAR-VELL
IS COMING
HERE TO *KILL*
ME.



YOU MUST
FIND A WAY TO
STOP HIM, FOR THE
GOOD OF THESE
MULTIPLE REALITIES
YOU SPEAK OF.



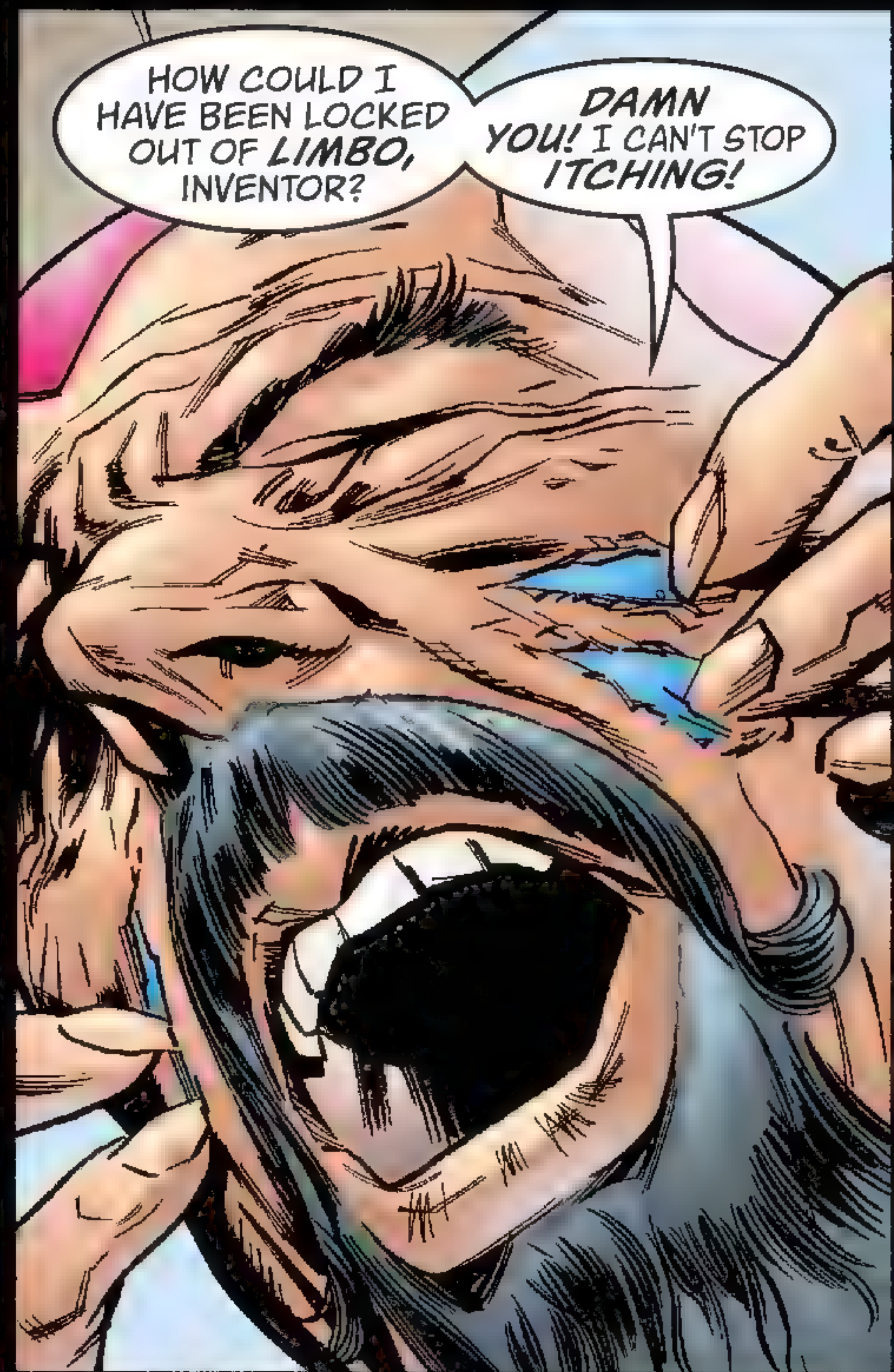
I GAVE THEM *SO MUCH*, INVENTOR.



I GAVE THEM A *RELIGION*. SOMETHING TO *BELONG* TO. I TOLD THEM THEY COULD *LIVE FOREVER*. A DESTINY TO LOOK FORWARD TO. *YOU* ONLY OFFERED FRAILTY AND MORTALITY. A TOMORROW TO *FEAR*.

IT DOESN'T SEEM *RIGHT* THAT YOU SHOULD BE CORRECT. STUPID TO HAVE COME. THEIR DESTINY DID NOT *REQUIRE* ME.

STUPID TO HAVE GIVEN THEM A *CRUTCH* WHEN I AM NOW LEFT CRIPPLED BEFORE THE *TERRI-GEN MISTS*.



HOW COULD I HAVE BEEN LOCKED OUT OF *LIMBO*, INVENTOR?

DAMN YOU! I CAN'T STOP *ITCHING!*

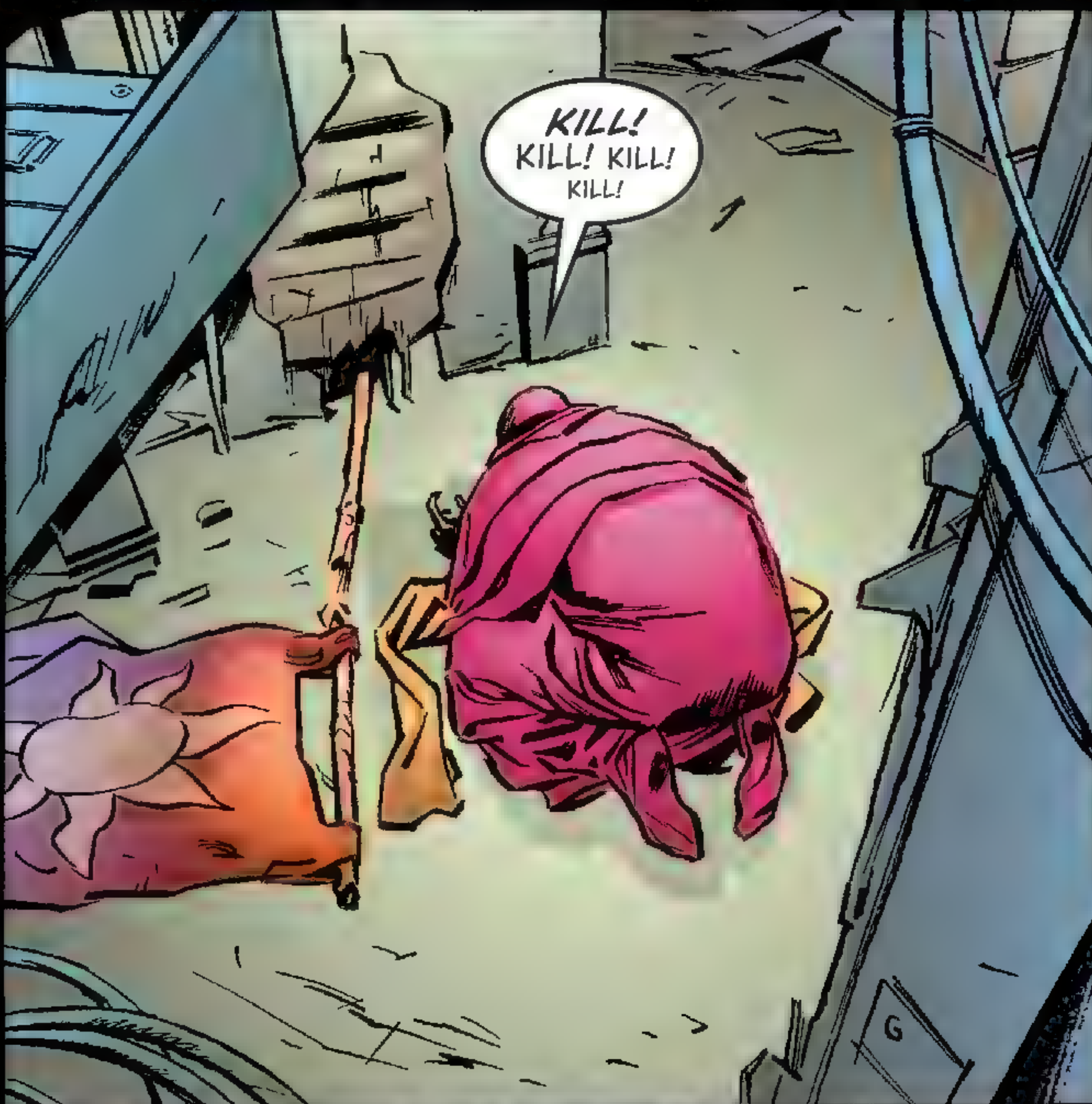


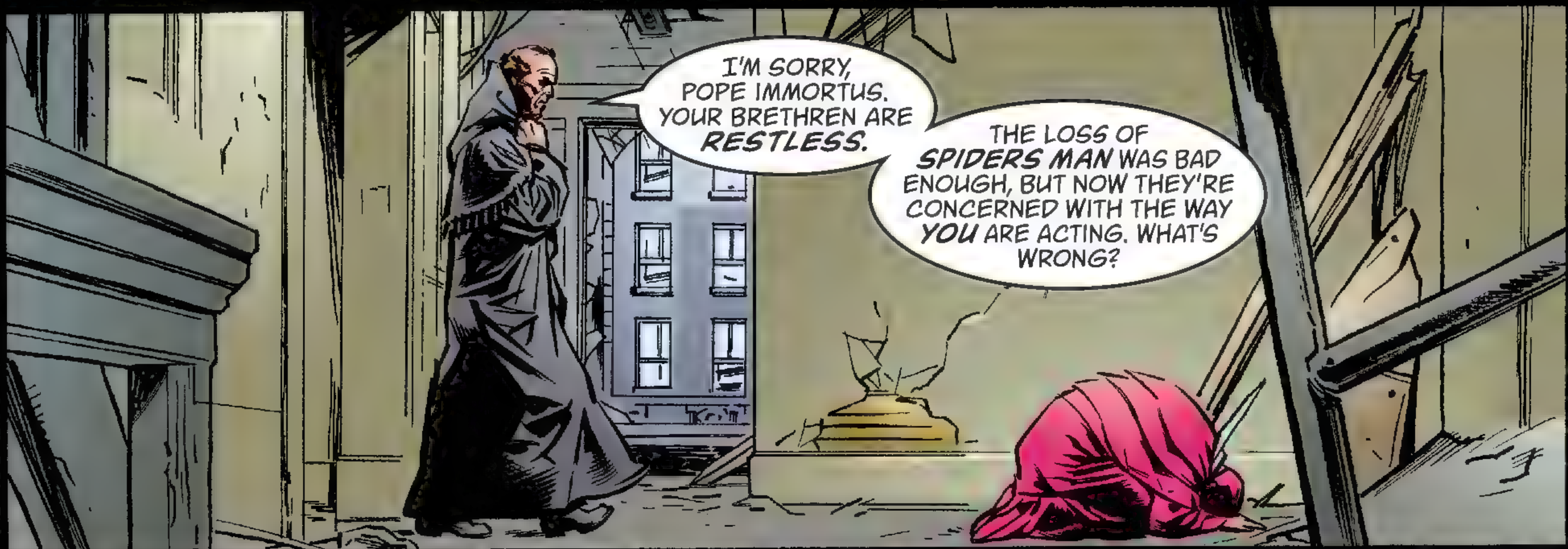
THESE CURSED *MISTS* HAVE AFFECTED MY BIOLOGY TO THE POINT WHERE I *CAN'T GO BACK!*

I WASN'T *CAST OUT* OF MY HEAVEN...I STEPPED OUT ON *MY OWN*.



I'VE BECOME SO... *SMALL*.





I'M SORRY,
POPE IMMORTUS.
YOUR BRETHREN ARE
RESTLESS.

THE LOSS OF
SPIDERS MAN WAS BAD
ENOUGH, BUT NOW THEY'RE
CONCERNED WITH THE WAY
YOU ARE ACTING. WHAT'S
WRONG?



WELL?



IT'S GOING
VERY WRONG. I'M
LOSING **PERSPEC-**
TIVE.

CAN'T STOP
THE ANGER. THE
RAGE. I'M LOSING
IT, MR. CHURCH. I'M...
MUTATING.



PERHAPS IT WOULD
BE BETTER IF **YOU** BEGAN
SPEAKING TO MY FOLLOWERS
ON MY BEHALF. THEY
TRUST YOU.



IF
THAT IS YOUR
WISH.

"The patterns of
your behavior
reveal my methods."
— Ed Marquand,
The Devil's Mischief

U N I V E R S E X



APPENDIX TO CHAPTER SIX

W R I T T E N B Y J I M K R U E G E R

"Continuing the internal monologue in regards to the events of the past few days. This monologue will serve as warning and basis for understanding all the events occurring simultaneously upon planet Earth. My name is Aaron Stack. I am my planet's watchman. its keeper.

"This may be, to an extent, a countermeasure to the volume currently written upon the planet Earth by Kyle Richmond and Isaac Christians. But to the degree that Richmond and Christians tell of events in the near future, I will continue, as best I can, to chronicle the happenings of this present day.

"Perhaps the best I can offer of this endeavor is a bird's eye view of sorts to better understand the purpose of the details and conflicts engaged in upon the Earth.

"The world is not unlike those periods of time when all countries seemed to be at war with each other. The inconsistency of the planet's polarities has affected those things its inhabitants took on faith, that all other such foundations are now being questioned. As a result, the morality and rationality of mutanity is indeed now questionable. Whether this is due to the aggressive seed implanted by the Celestials in all of mankind or the loss of certainty in its own world, I do not know.

"Or perhaps this present chaos is due to the loss of this world's champions. The Avengers. Iron Man. And now, Captain America. Can a world dependent upon its champions to establish the rules of behavior survive once those champions are gone?

"Somehow, this all revolves around Richmond. I'm not certain how, yet. But it does. His vision is mutating. Why? What has happened in the last three years that would cause a second wave of mutation? Once, he could only see the future. But now, he seems capable of seeing the past, the ancient histories of other worlds, even into the heart and mindset of those who have long since died.

"Interestingly enough, there is a sort of blindness that has come with this second sight. Neither Richmond nor Christians seem to see how all of this is coming together. What secret patterns will these patchwork conflicts reveal once we pull away from them?

"In Egypt, the battle for the Khonshu re-animator stone has ended. All those, whose physical being was extended as a result of its power, have turned to ash. This is not only referring to Marc Spector or to the Followers of Set, but also to the woman Spector claimed to love, Marlene and his retired assistant, Frenchie. Spector's brother has crumbled to dust as well.

"In South Africa, the Living Mummy, Chief N'Kantu collapsed, after months of attempting to break through an energy-based barrier surrounding the African realm of Wakanda. There will be no recognition save this recording for the wandering king who had been a slave in ancient Egypt.



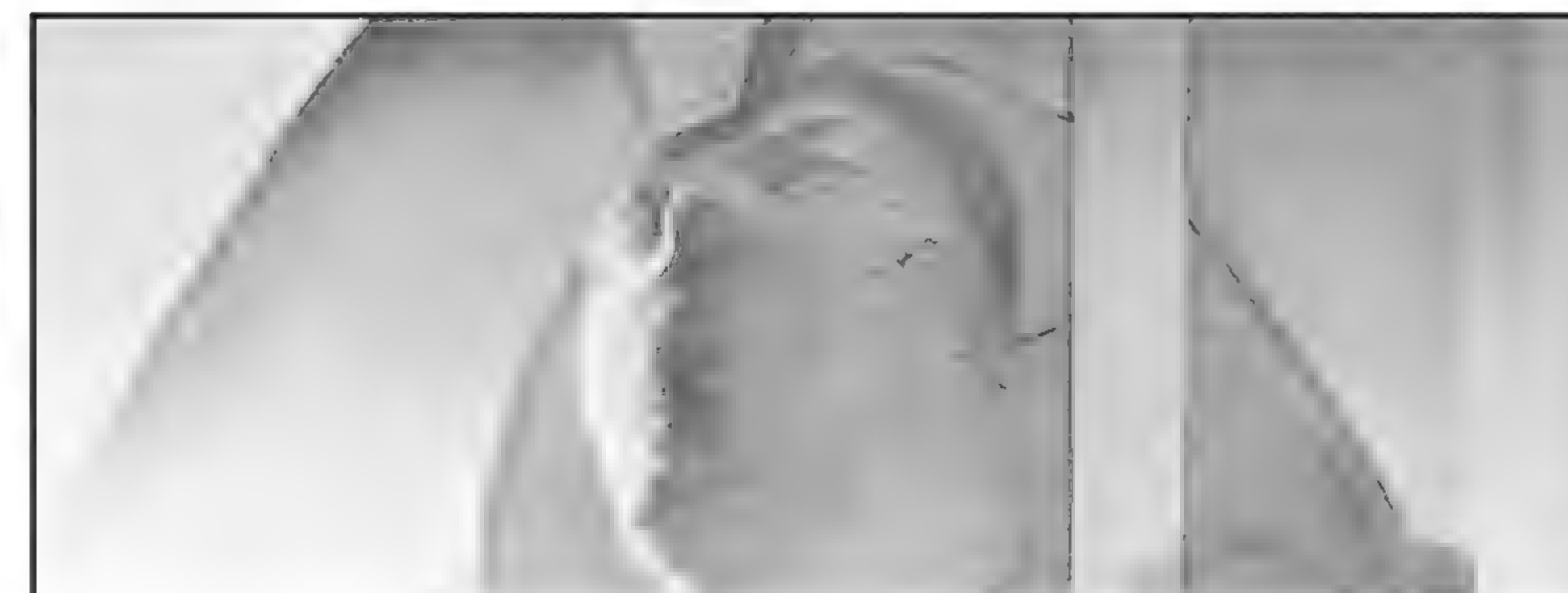
"Some might say there is no pattern here.

"But the fall of the Moon's Knight is yet another piece played on this chessboard match between Mar-Vell and Death. Mar-Vell now has the re-animator stone. For what purpose I know not, but his power is growing. He has already added the power of the Books of the Darkhold and Vishanti, Anti-Metal, the Orb of Agomotto, the Psycho-Man's Emotion Caster, and the Mandarin's Power Rings. Mar-Vell's power continues to grow. I wonder at times if the remaining heroes of Earth should trust Mar-Vell so easily. I wonder what they see that perhaps I cannot. It is obvious that I am, to some degree, incomplete. There are places Richmond can see that I cannot. Perhaps this is true to humanity as well. Do they see things in themselves that I cannot? How limited was my Father in building a living computer?

"In Latveria, one of the last of Reed Richards' Human Torches may fall this very day... Richards reprogrammed the Doombots to protect the castle without killing those who would kill him without thinking. But Mr. Church is there as well, and I wonder, if perhaps there isn't far more to him than the lackey he pretends to be.

"I cannot find a childhood for Mr. Church. There is no history for me to watch here on the moon. It is as if he was born shortly after Immortus began his opposition to Richards' plan to cure the world of its mutations.

"In Canada, Sasquatch and James MacDonald are the only members of Alpha Flight to have escaped death. As well as the destruction of the Human Torch that once burned there so brightly. But how long have



they escaped? Even now they are being tracked by a race whose basic biological basis is similar, perhaps too similar to that of Wolverine. Are they perhaps Logan's children?"

The battle for these Human Torches has now changed hands. It is no longer Immortus who leads his armies against Richards' Torches, but Mr. Church himself... the very bookbinder who has been collecting page after page of future visions given from the pen and words of Richmond and Christians. There are only a few still remaining in the world. New York. Latveria. The Savage Land. Japan.

"I now see a pattern forming and fear that if the armies of Immortus should win the world before the power collection of Mar-Vell's is completed, the battle will be lost in the land of the dead along with the skirmishes being fought here in the land of the living. There is a convergence of these two conflicts I had not considered.

"Where I had believed there was only chaos, I see order now. I see strategy. According to Richmond's writings, Mar-Vell and his followers will be coming here to the moon, next.

"I hope Mar-Vell is aware that the Supreme Intelligence is waiting for him. I hope he is aware that the Intelligence means for me to betray Mar-Vell.

"But if I betray Mar-Vell, do I betray all those who have died? Do I betray my father, the man who built me?"



UNIVERSE

KRUEGER
BRAITHWAITE
REINHOLD

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**"Mr. Church is only an underling in Immortus's army, Kyle.
He is a second tier mystic. That's all."**

**"As bad as things are going to be for the rest of us, it's going to be far worse for you,
Isaac. You've survived wars. You've fought as a member of the Defenders. You've
endured so much. How could you be so naïve?"**

**"I am twice your age, Kyle. What the young call naivete is the wisdom of the aged. Youth
is, indeed, wasted upon the young. Your visions do not always come to pass. You cannot
guarantee your vision will come true. Life...even the life of one who can peer into the
future, does not offer guarantees."**

"I have not seen what will happen, Isaac."

"No? No? Well then, there it is. I have nothing to fear."

"I can't see what's going to happen, Isaac, because it's already happened. I'm sorry."

"But Mr. Church..."

"Do you really think that's his real name, Isaac?"

**"What do you mean? Have you seen him transform into someone else?
Have you seen him unmask, so to speak?"**

"I have seen him in all his faces, Isaac. Mr. Church is the Adversary I have spoken of."

"No. You are wrong. I have a right to feel again. This is my time. This is my day."

**"The future repeats the past, Isaac. Night always follows day.
Let me tell you a story."**

UNIVERSE X

I S S U E 7

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story and script

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editor in chief

"TIME, ISAAC, FOR PEOPLE LIKE US, HAS BEEN MEASURED ACCORDING TO OUR UNIVERSE. BUT HOW WAS IT MEASURED BEFORE OUR UNIVERSE EVER CAME INTO BEING?"

"HOW WAS IT MEASURED ON *GALAN'S WORLD*, WHEN A PLAGUE WAS RIPPING IT AND ITS PEOPLE TO PIECES?"

"THE UNIVERSE--THE ONE THAT EXISTED BEFORE OURS--WAS DYING. ITS PLANETS WERE DYING. AND IF IT WERE NOT FOR THE REMNANT OF THE DYING MICRO-VERSE, A VESTIGE OF THE ENIGMA FORCE ITSELF FROM THE FAR FUTURE, GALAN TOO WOULD HAVE DIED."

"THE ENIGMA FORCE, AS IT HAD DONE WITH COMMANDER RANN AND SO MANY OTHERS, *GRAFTED* ITSELF TO GALAN."

"THEY BECAME *GALACTUS*."

"THE *DEVOURER OF WORLDS*."

"BUT *WHY*, KYLE?"

"GALAN'S WORLD WAS ALSO ONE THAT HAD BEEN *MANIPULATED* BY THE CELESTIALS. BUT THE EMBRYO DESTROYED THAT WORLD... AND THEN THE UNIVERSE BEFORE IT HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO BE BORN."

"I DON'T UNDERSTAND."

"WE HAVE NO GRASP OF WHAT THE STARS IN THE SKY DO FOR US, ISAAC. OUR EVERY FREE MOVEMENT IS SOMEHOW *LINKED*, NOT JUST TO THE GRAVITY AND PULL OF THE EARTH TO THE SUN, BUT TO THEIR *PROXIMITY* TO US. WE MOVE FREELY BECAUSE OF THEM."

"THE UNIVERSE BEFORE OURS FELL AS A RESULT OF *CELESTIAL* MANIPULATION."

"EVERY CELESTIAL BIRTH STOLE A STAR OR PLANET FROM THE UNIVERSE. EVERY BIRTH WEAKENED THE FIRMAMENT."

"GALAN *KNEW* THIS. AND WHEN GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO STOP THE NEWLY FORMING UNIVERSE FROM THE SAME FATE, HE TOOK IT. RICHARDS THOUGHT GALACTUS DEVoured WORLDS BECAUSE OF THE POWER THAT LINKED ITSELF TO GALAN."

"BUT IT WAS GALAN, EMPOWERED BY THE ENIGMA FORCE, ALL THE TIME."

"A WATCHER NAMED *ECCE* SAW THE NEWLY BORN GALACTUS TRY TO *BALANCE* THE COSMOS. HE COULD HAVE STOPPED GALACTUS. OR *KILLED* HIM."

"BUT ECCE DID NOTHING AS WAS THE CUSTOM OF HIS RACE. AND FROM THAT DAY FORWARD, HIS ACT OF APATHY WAS CONSIDERED THE *ENSLAVEMENT* OF HIS PEOPLE."

"WHAT HAS THIS TO DO WITH YOUR MORAL JUDGMENT OF *ME*, KYLE? I HAVE HEARD THAT THE WATCHERS ARE CAPABLE OF MOVING AT THE *SPEED OF THOUGHT*. HOW COULD THEY BE *ENSLAVED*?"

"THE REASON WHY THE WATCHERS DON'T INVOLVE THEMSELVES IN THE AFFAIRS OF OTHER WORLDS... IS BECAUSE THEY *ONCE DID*."

"THEY HAD GIVEN A PRIMITIVE RACE, THE PROSILICANS, THE KNOWLEDGE OF ATOMIC MANIPULATION."

"SADLY, THAT WORLD ENDED IN *NUCLEAR ARMAGEDDON*."

"AND SO THE WATCHERS SWORE TO NEVER AGAIN INVOLVE THEMSELVES IN THE AFFAIRS OF ANOTHER RACE."

"MORALITY."

"DO YOU THINK **NORRIN RADD** A HERO, ISAAC...WHEN HE SWORE TO FIND **OTHER WORLDS** FOR GALACTUS TO CONSUME IF THE WORLD DEVOURER BUT SPARED **ZENN-LA**?

"HE WAS WILLING TO LET EVERY OTHER WORLD **PERISH** JUST TO SAVE HIS OWN.

"HE WAS WILLING TO DAMN **ALL OTHERS** FOR THE SAKE OF WHAT HE WANTED.

"SOUNDS **FAMILIAR**, DOESN'T IT?

"GALACTUS HONORED RADD'S REQUEST AND MADE HIM A MESSENGER. A **HERALD** TO WARN OTHER PLANETS DESECRATED BY THE CELESTIALS THAT GALACTUS WAS COMING TO **PURGE** THEM OF THEIR **ALIEN SEED**.

"BUT IN TIME, RADD LEARNED ABOUT THE **HORROR** OF WHAT HE'D BEEN WILLING TO SACRIFICE TO SAVE ZENN-LA..."

"...AND BECAME THE **HERO** HE'D FOOLED HIMSELF INTO BELIEVING HE WAS."

"THIS BALANCE YOU SPEAK OF, KYLE...I THOUGHT YOU SAID GALACTUS **DESTROYED** THESE WORLDS AS WELL."

"NO, ISAAC, ONLY THE CELESTIAL EMBRYO **WITHIN** THEM--BUT THOSE WORLDS, WHOSE LIFE ENERGY HAD BEEN MANIPULATED INTO SERVING THE NEEDS OF THE EMBRYO, COULD HARDLY SUSTAIN MUCH LIFE AFTER THE EMBRYO WAS DESTROYED.

"BUT THE WORLDS THEMSELVES **REMAINED**...TO SERVE THE STRUCTURE OF THE UNIVERSE."

"BUT WHAT HAVE THE **WATCHER** AND THE **SILVER SURFER** TO DO WITH **ME**, RICHMOND?"

"BECAUSE THEIR RIGHTS HAD BECOME TOO **PAINFUL** TO CONTINUE GRASPING. NOT HAVING TO MAKE A DECISION AT ALL BECAME A **RELEASE** FROM THE DESTRUCTION THEY HAD CAUSED. THEY WERE **FREE**."

"BUT ACCORDING TO YOU, THE CELESTIALS HAD BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR **UNTOLD DESTRUCTION**. MURDERS THAT GO **BEYOND** ANYTHING THAT COULD BE COUNTED...THE END OF A UNIVERSE. WHY, IF THEY ARE SO MORAL--"

"YOU DON'T **UNDERSTAND**, ISAAC. THE ONLY MORALITY THAT MATTERED TO THE WATCHERS WAS THEIR **OWN**."

"YOU'RE RIGHT, I **DON'T** UNDERSTAND, KYLE. WHAT ARE YOU **SAYING**?"

"THAT YOU'RE JUST **ANOTHER WATCHER**, ISAAC. YOU DO WHAT YOU'VE DONE **REGARDLESS** OF HOW IT HURTS OTHERS."

"BUT THE WATCHERS COULD **FEEL HURT**, KYLE. I CANNOT."

"YOU'RE JUST **ANOTHER SLAVE**, ISAAC. A HERALD TO THE END OF EVERYTHING."

"**UATU**, WHO IS THE SON OF THE WATCHER WHO FIRST REVEALED THE SECRETS OF ATOMIC POWER TO THE PROSILICANS, WAS **BLINDED** ON THE MOON, ISAAC.

"THE SURFER WAS **BLIND**, BUT CAME TO **SEE**."

"WHICH ARE YOU, ISAAC?"

"I AM A **MORAL MAN**..."

"...WHO WISHES TO **FEEL** LIKE A MAN AGAIN...INSTEAD OF BEING **TRAPPED** IN THIS GROTESQUE CAGE OF STONE. NOW HOW WERE THE WATCHERS ENSLAVED BY THE CELESTIALS?"

"THEY WERE BOUND BY THEIR **OWN LAWS**. WHEN THE WATCHERS ADVANCED ONE RACE AND IT ENDED IN DESTRUCTION, THEY WERE **BOUND** BY THEIR OWN LAWS OF **MORALITY**."

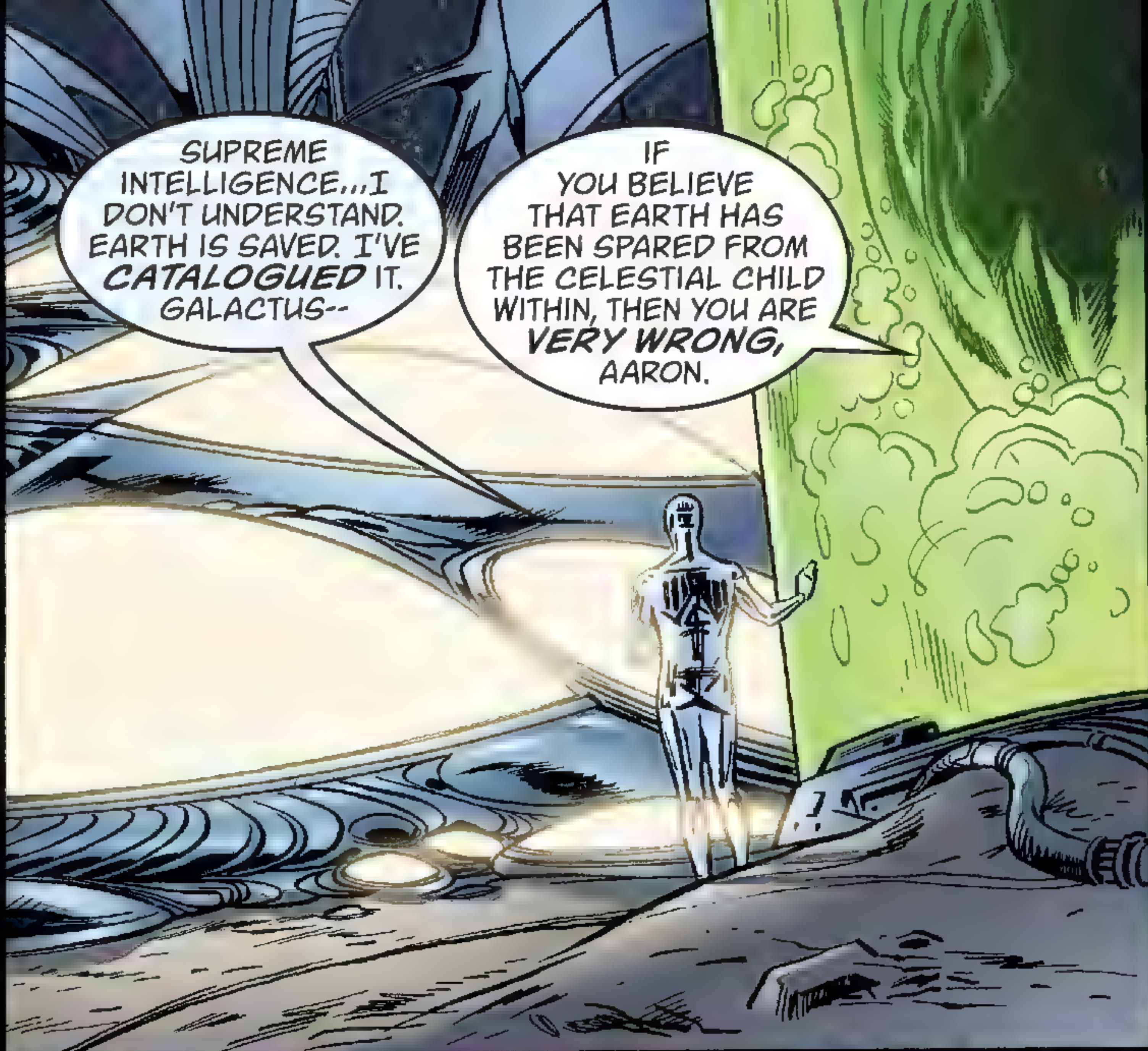
"AND WHEN THEY MIGHT HAVE STOPPED THE BIRTH OF GALACTUS AND DID **NOTHING**...THEY WERE AGAIN CONDEMNED BY THEIR LAWS."

"SO WHAT HAPPENED?"

"THEY THREW OFF THE **CONFINES** OF THEIR OWN GUILT AND THE **INABILITY** TO LIVE UP TO THEIR OWN LAWS."

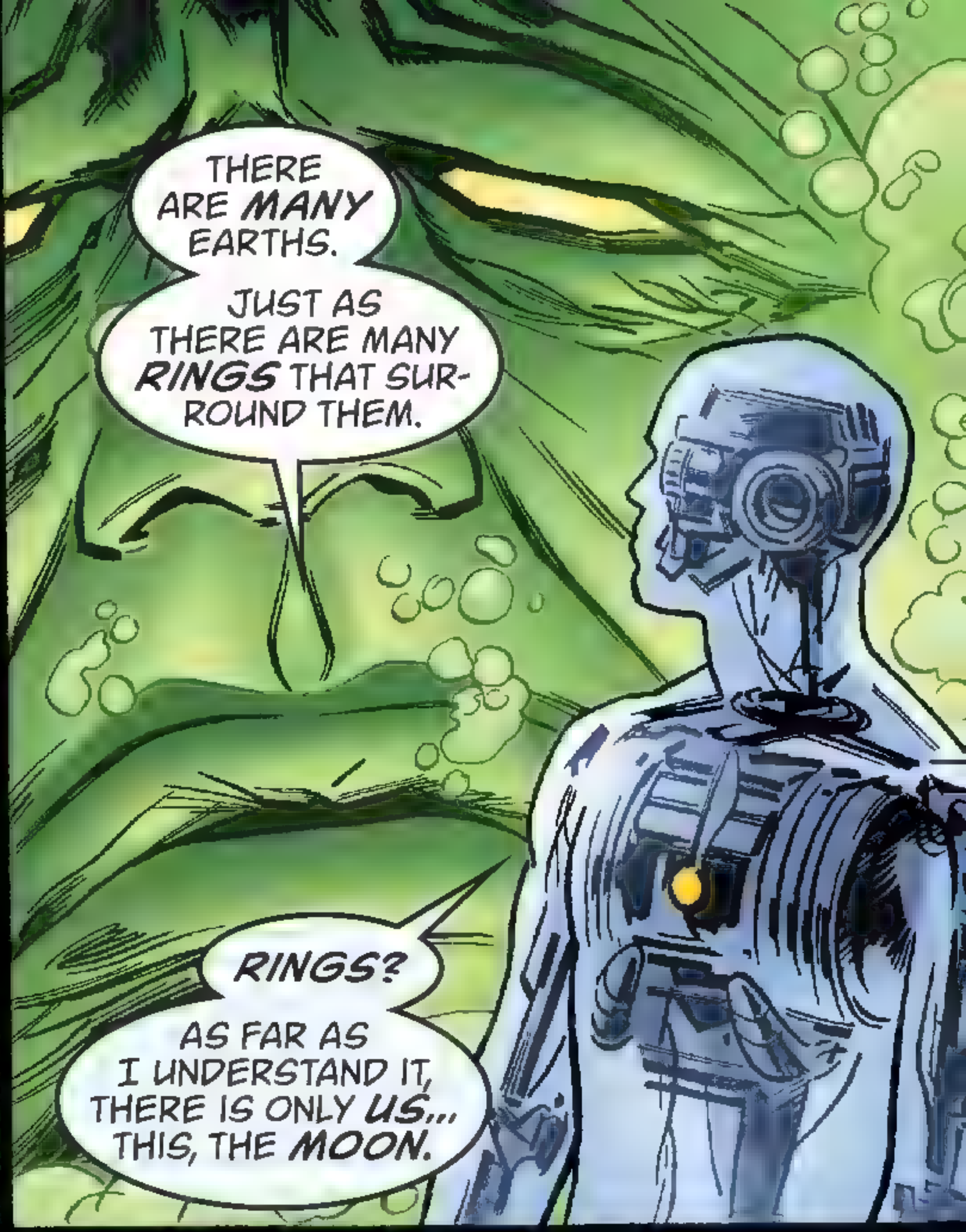
"THEY PETITIONED FOR **SLAVERY** TO THE CELESTIALS, GIVING UP THEIR RIGHT TO **FREE CHOICE**."

"BUT WHY?"



SUPREME INTELLIGENCE...I DON'T UNDERSTAND. EARTH IS SAVED. I'VE **CATALOGUED** IT. GALACTUS--

IF YOU BELIEVE THAT EARTH HAS BEEN SPARED FROM THE CELESTIAL CHILD WITHIN, THEN YOU ARE **VERY WRONG**, AARON.



THERE ARE **MANY** EARTHS.

JUST AS THERE ARE **MANY RINGS** THAT SURROUND THEM.

RINGS?

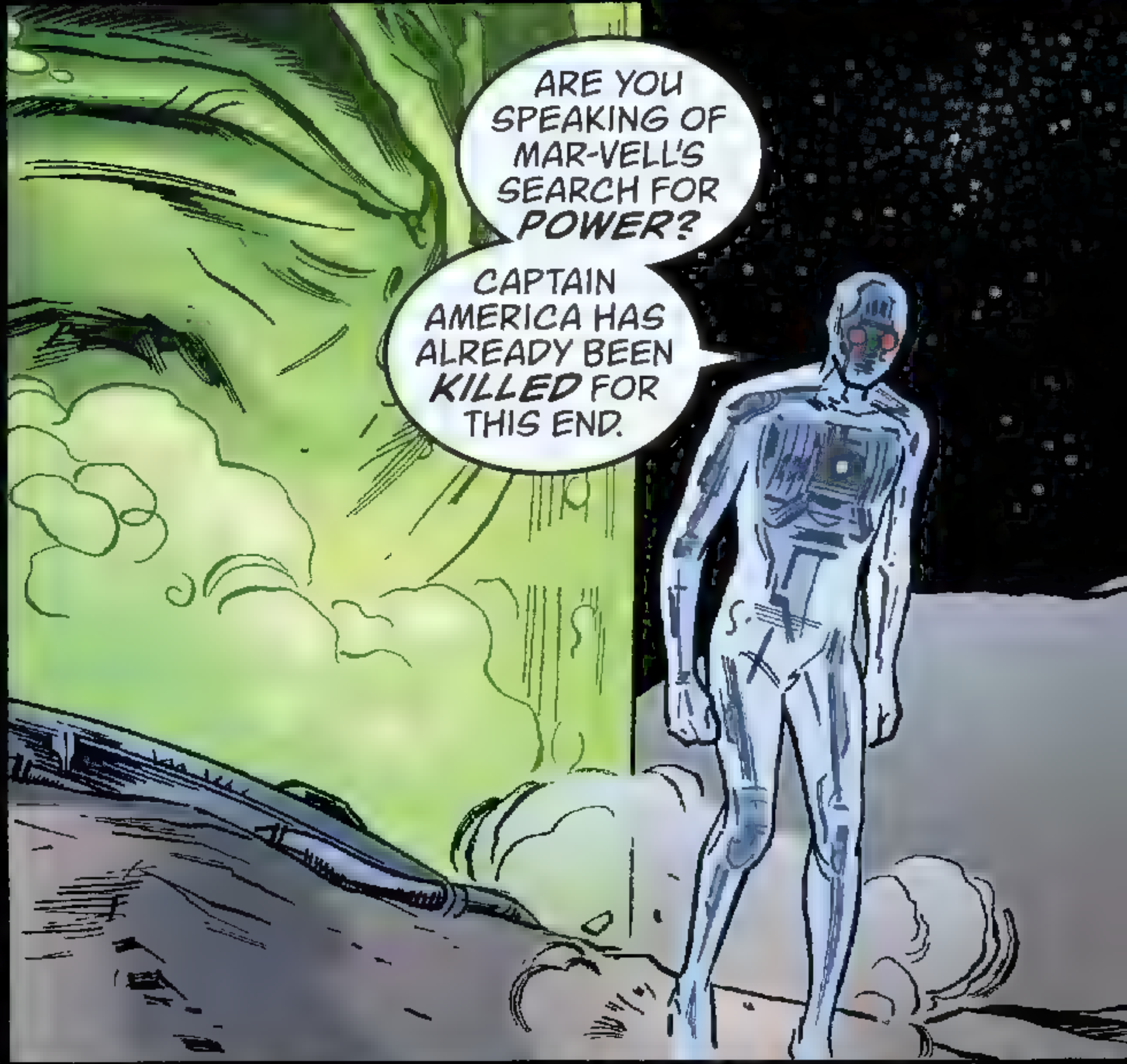
AS FAR AS I UNDERSTAND IT, THERE IS ONLY **US**... THIS, THE **MOON**.



I AM SPEAKING OF **ALTERNATE HISTORIES** AND **ALTERNATE EARTHS**, AARON.

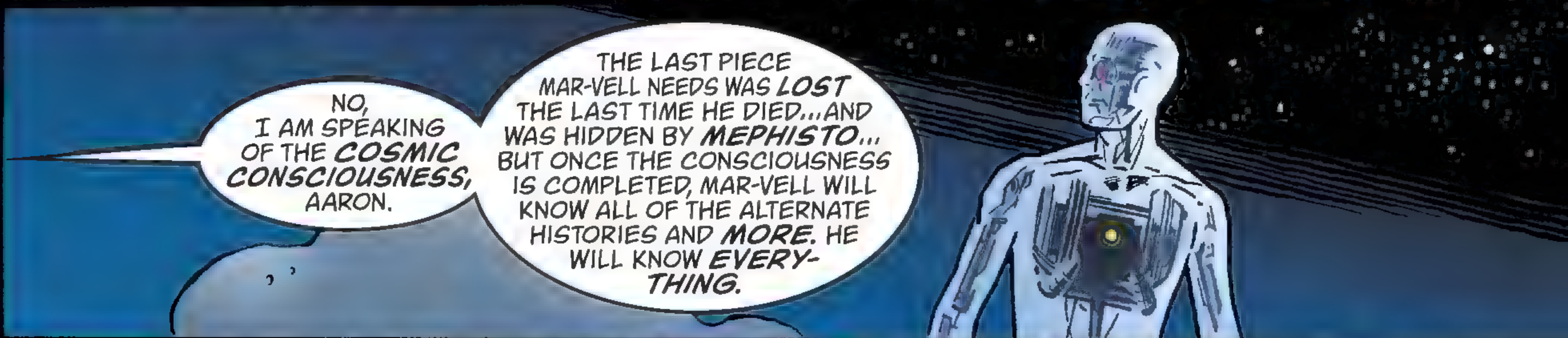
I AM SPEAKING OF **TIME**.

SOON, MAR-VELL WILL KNOW **ALL** THERE IS TO KNOW. **ALL** OF TIME WILL BE **HIS**.



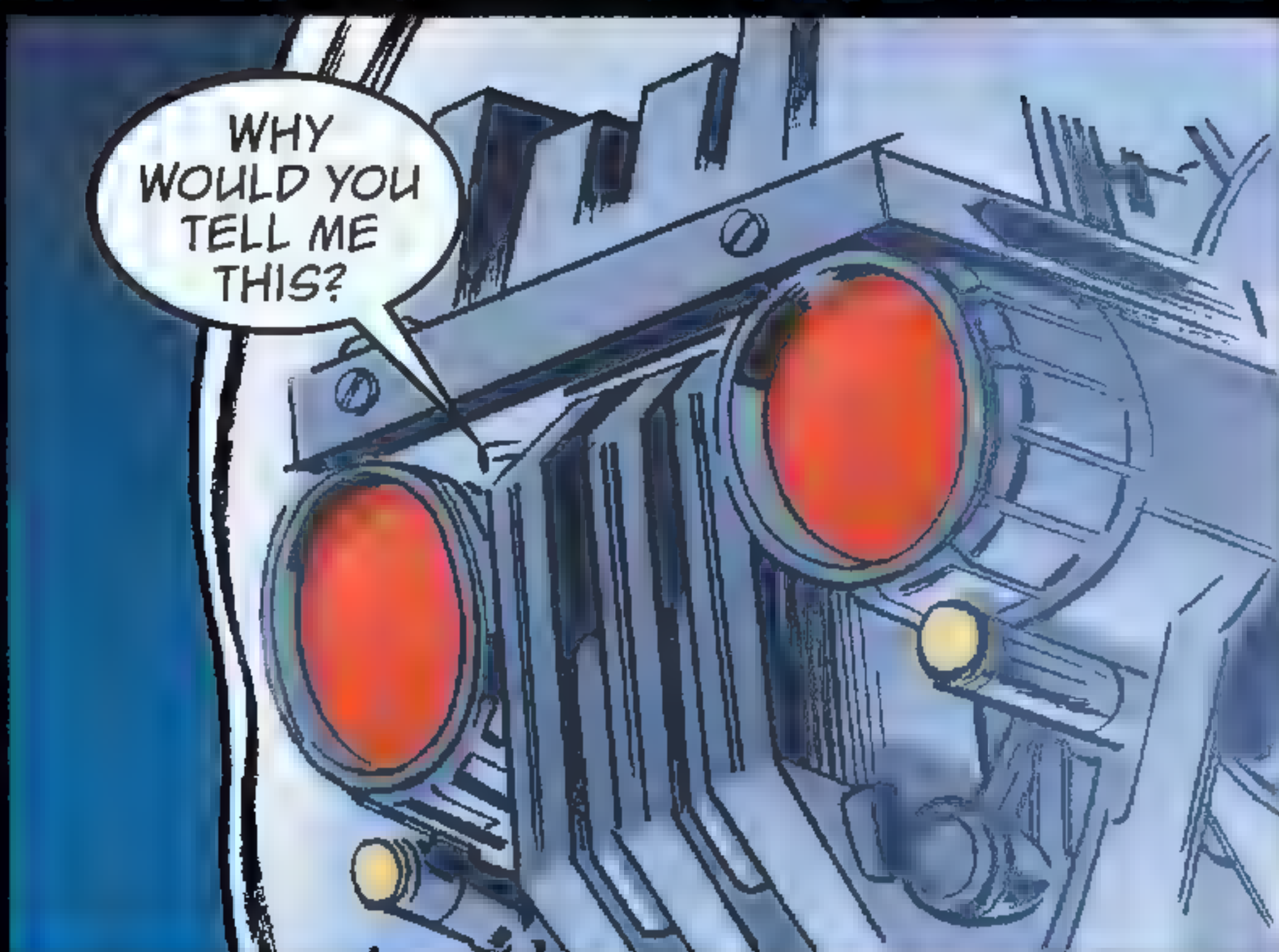
ARE YOU SPEAKING OF MAR-VELL'S SEARCH FOR **POWER**?

CAPTAIN AMERICA HAS ALREADY BEEN **KILLED** FOR THIS END.



NO, I AM SPEAKING OF THE **COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS**, AARON.

THE LAST PIECE MAR-VELL NEEDS WAS **LOST** THE LAST TIME HE DIED...AND WAS HIDDEN BY **MEPHISTO**... BUT ONCE THE CONSCIOUSNESS IS COMPLETED, MAR-VELL WILL KNOW **ALL** OF THE ALTERNATE HISTORIES AND **MORE**. HE WILL KNOW **EVERY-THING**.



WHY WOULD YOU TELL ME THIS?



SO YOU CAN **STOP** HIM, X-51. THERE'S ONLY **ONE PIECE** STILL MISSING. AND HE **MUST NOT** GET IT.

WHERE IS IT?

"THE MISSING PIECE OF THE COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS IS INSIDE **KYLE RICHMOND**, AARON.

"IT'S HIS **EYES**."



"THE EYES GIVEN TO HIM BY MEPHISTO SHORTLY AFTER THE **FIRST DEATH** OF MAR-VELL..."

YOU ARE **MISTAKEN**, RICHMOND.

MR. CHURCH IS **NOT** WHO YOU SAY HE IS.



"...THE VERY EYES WHICH NOW SPEAK OF THE PRESENT, FUTURE AND PAST OF NOT JUST **EARTH**, BUT **OTHER WORLDS** AS WELL."

I AM NOT THE **JUDAS** OF THIS GENERATION.



AS YOU SAY, ISAAC.



"A PIECE OF OMNISCIENCE THAT NOT EVEN THE **DEVIL** DARE HOLD TOO FIRMLY."

"TOO **FIRMLY**? WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT? IF MEPHISTO HAD THIS PIECE OF THE CONSCIOUSNESS, WOULDN'T HE WANT TO **USE** IT? WOULDN'T THE **DEVIL** WANT TO **USE** IT?"

"BUT THAT IS WHAT HE **HAS** DONE, AARON. HE HAS USED IT, BUT THROUGH THE PRISM OF A WEAK AND STUPID MAN NAMED **KYLE RICHMOND**."

"IF THE CONSCIOUSNESS WERE NOT **DULLED**, MEPHISTO MIGHT LEARN **COMPASSION** AND **NOBILITY** ALONG WITH EVERYTHING ELSE. THESE ARE THE PIECES OF KNOWLEDGE HE FEARS **MOST**."





LET
ME GO! WHERE'S
RICHARDS?!

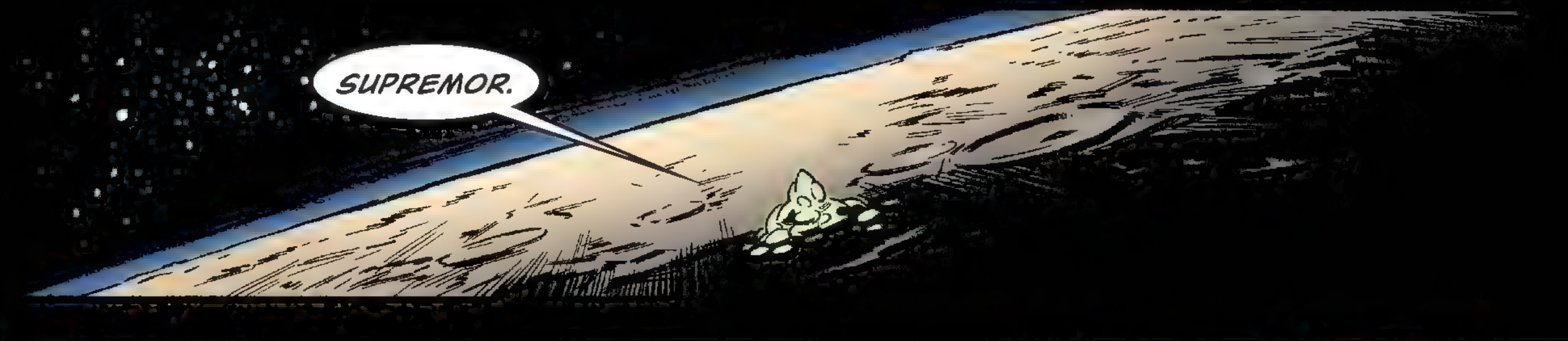
I WILL NOT
LET YOU DESTROY
THE ONLY THING
THAT COULD MAKE ME
BEAUTIFUL!

I WILL NOT
LET YOU PUT OUT
THE TORCH!

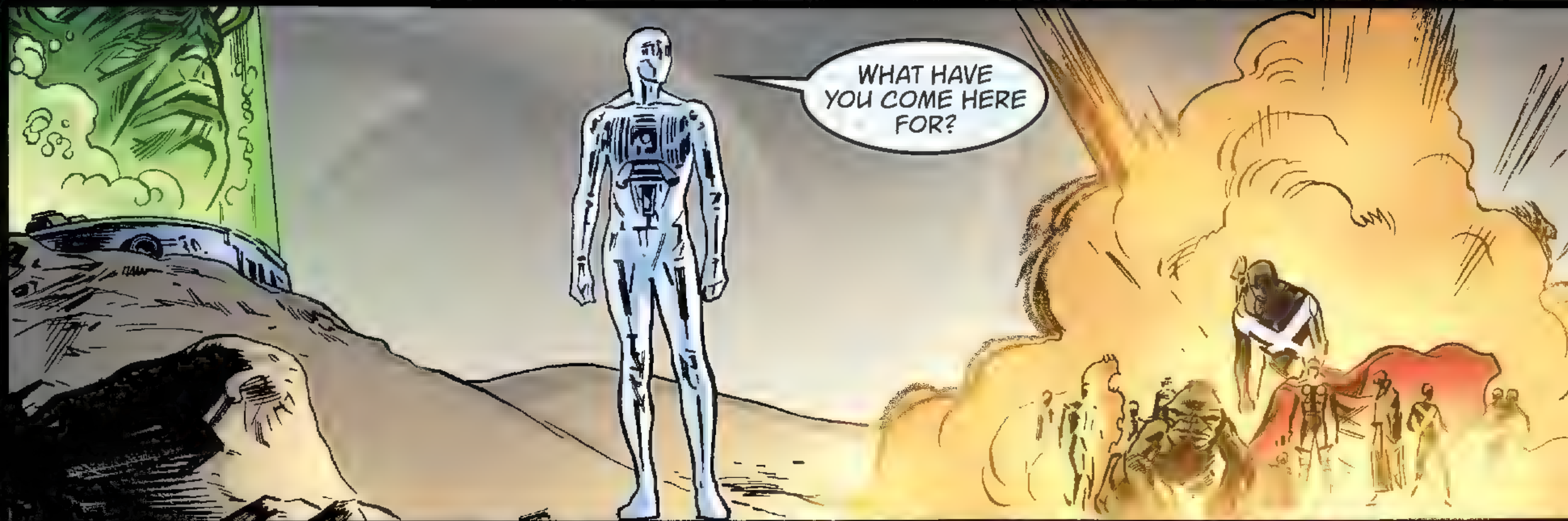
JOIN THE
CHURCH OF IMMORTUS!
I HAVE LOOKED INTO THE
FACE OF DEATH! ONLY
IMMORTUS CAN SAVE
YOU!

YOU
MUST JOIN THE
CHURCH.

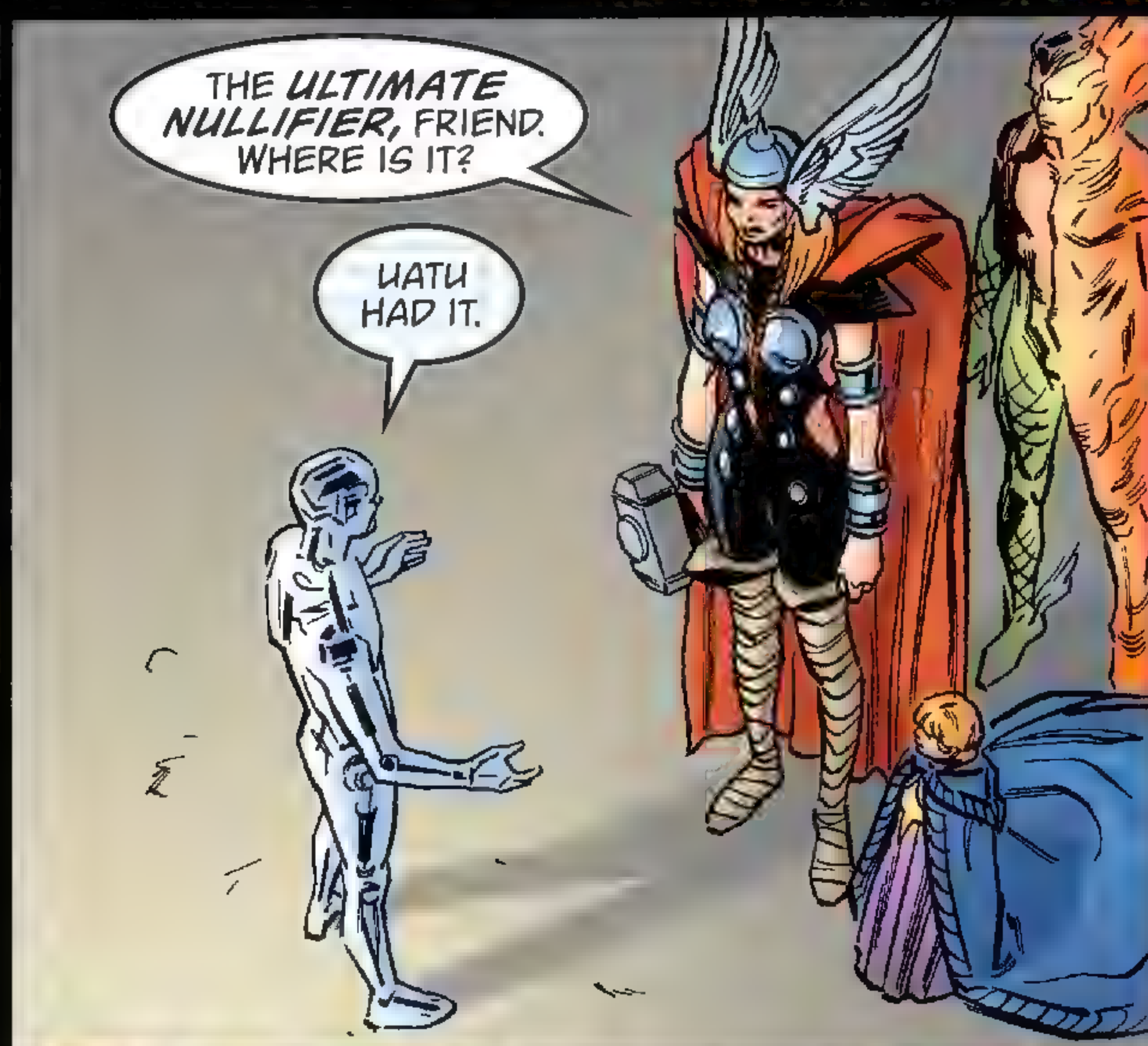
THERE ARE
SOME, CHILD, WHO
BELIEVE I ALREADY
HAVE.



SUPREMOR.



WHAT HAVE
YOU COME HERE
FOR?



THE *ULTIMATE*
NULLIFIER, FRIEND.
WHERE IS IT?

UATU
HAD IT.



YOU'LL FIND HIM
THROUGH THE ASTRAL
PROJECTION SCREEN IN
THE MAIN ROOM OF THE
CITADEL.

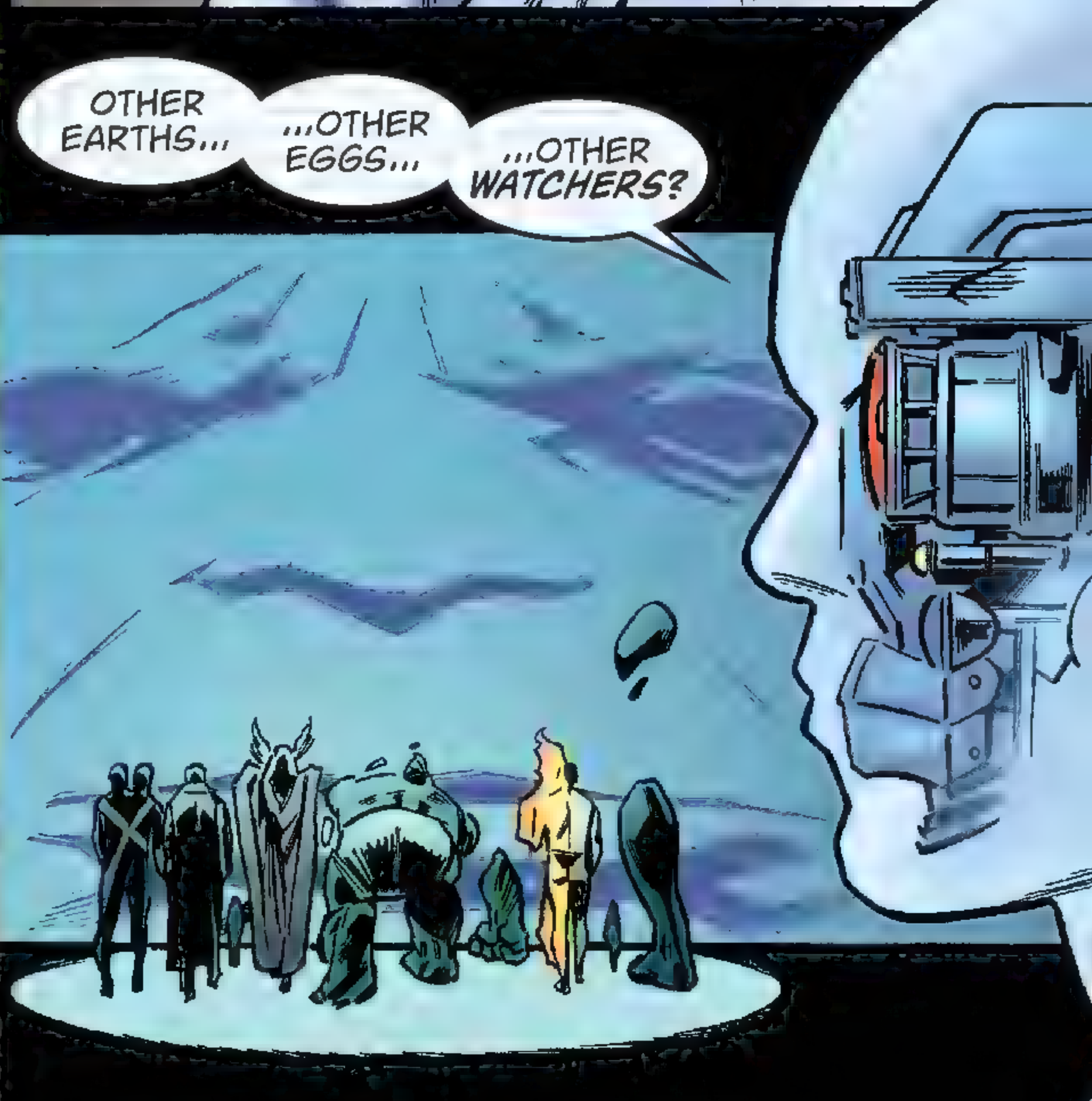
AND MAR-VELL,
WE *MUST TALK*. I KNOW
WHERE THE *FINAL PIECE*
OF YOUR CONSCIOUS-
NESS IS.



YOU DON'T
BELIEVE ME, DO YOU,
AARON?

I'M SURE
YOU'LL UNDERSTAND.
I'VE HAD EXPERIENCE
WITH *GIANT HEADS*
BEFORE. IF UATU STILL
HAS THE *ULTIMATE*
NULLIFIER, THEN WHY
HASN'T HE USED
IT?

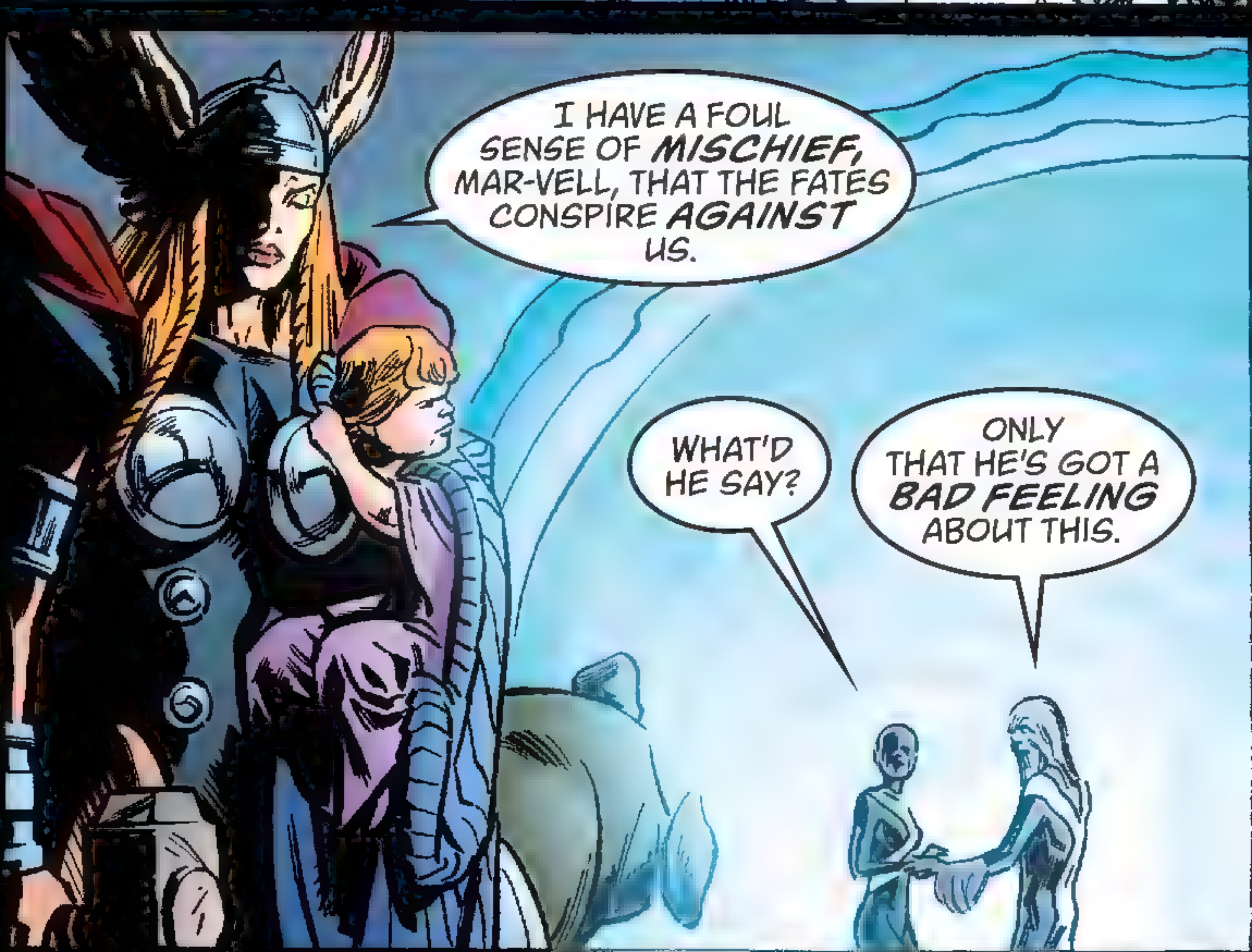
HE CAN'T
DO THAT, AARON.
HE IS STILL *HONOR*
BOUND TO THE
CELESTIAL EMBRYOS
THAT EXIST IN THE
OTHER CONTINU-
ITIES.



OTHER
EARTHS...

...OTHER
EGGS...

...OTHER
WATCHERS?





DON'T LET THE IMAGES **OVERWHELM** YOU! THESE ARE ONLY THE AREAS CATALOGUED BY THE WATCHER!

IT'S LIKE THE **DANGER ROOM** I'VE TOLD YOU ABOUT, X-MEN. KEEP YOUR HEAD!

OR **HEADS** IN YOUR CASE, DOUBLE-HEADER.

"TELL ME, INTELLIGENCE...IF THERE ARE **MULTIPLE EARTHS**, AND EACH WAS **IMPLANTED** WITH A **CELESTIAL EMBRYO**, THEN HOW COULD MARVELL'S UNDERSTANDING OF HOW ALL THESE WORLDS WORK TOGETHER BE A **DANGER**?"

"WOULDN'T HE FEAR THIS '**NOBILITY**' AND '**CONSCIENCE**' THAT MEPHISTO DOES, AS WELL? UNLESS THESE ARE THINGS THAT ARE **HELPFUL** TO HIS CHARACTER?"



STOP,
WATCHER! WE
DON'T WANT
TO *HURT*
YOU!

YOU ASK ME
TO DO WHAT I HAVE
SWORN *NEVER* TO DO,
BANNER. YOU ASK ME TO
INTERFERE WITH A
DECISION MY RACE MADE
LONG AGO. I *WON'T*
INTERFERE, NOT EVEN
WITH *MYSELF*.

"I'M WONDERING, SUPREME INTELLIGENCE,
IF PERHAPS THE KNOWLEDGE MAR-VELL
GAINS WILL TOPPLE YOUR--HOW SHOULD
I SAY IT--*SUPREMACY*?"

"MAR-VELL IS A *SINGULAR* BEING, AARON. I AM
A *DEMOCRACY*. CAN YOU TRUST *ONE BEING*
TO REPRESENT *EVERYTHING* THAT EXISTS?

"A BEING WHO HAD *NOTHING* TO
DO WITH EXISTENCE AT ALL?"



"WHAT *KIND* OF
DEMOCRACY?"

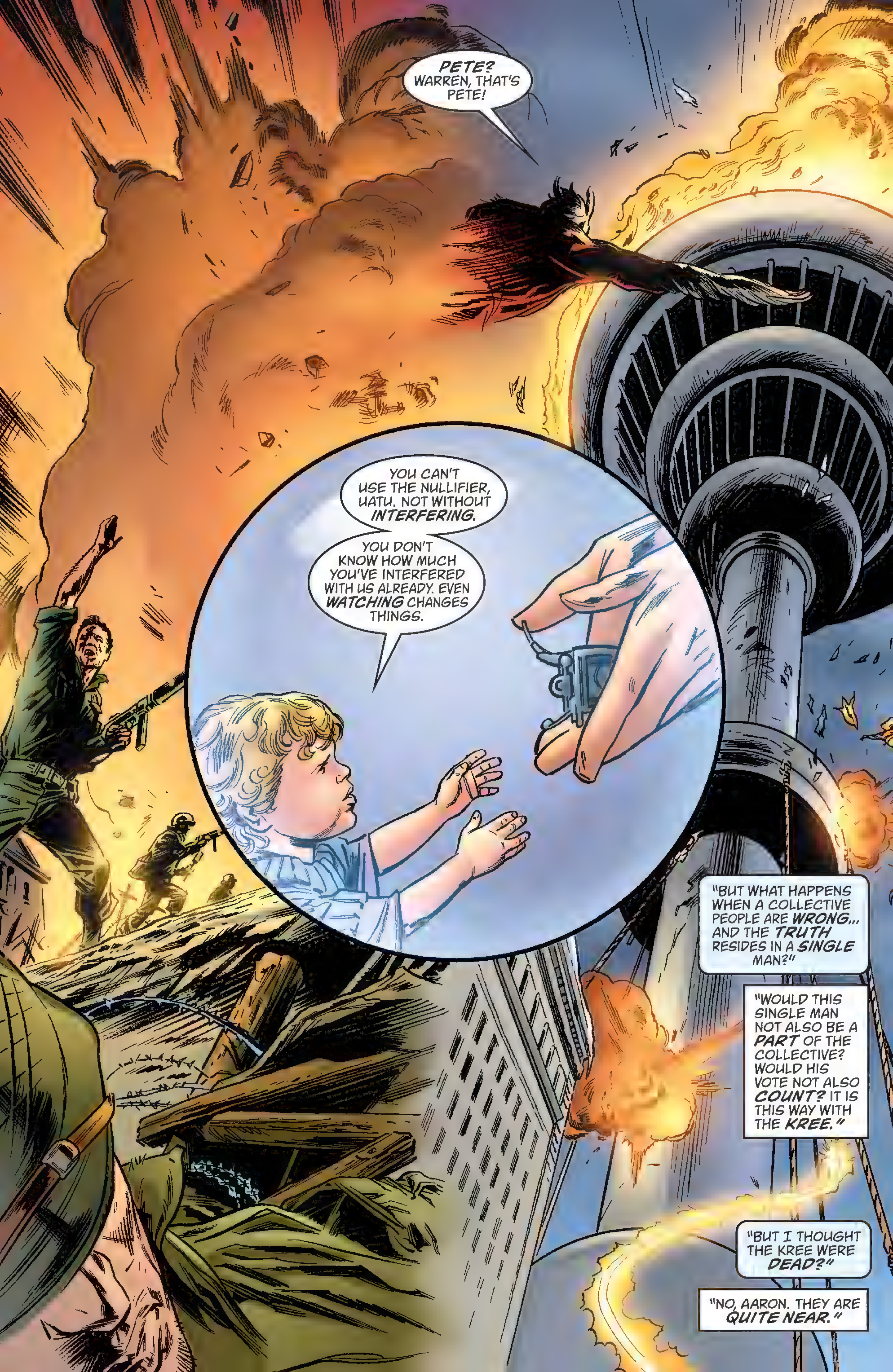
"THE KIND THAT FEARS A
DICTATOR, AARON. THE
KIND THAT HOLDS THAT A
COLLECTIVE PEOPLE
ARE MORE LIKELY TO
CHOOSE WHAT IS BEST
THAN *ONE MAN* CAN."

"I AGREE WITH YOU,
INTELLIGENCE."

"WE KNEW YOU WOULD."

STOP
RIGHT THERE!
YOU *CANNOT* TAKE
THE ULTIMATE NULLI-
FIER! I'D RATHER
DIE THAN
ALLOW YOU
TO--

STOP IT,
WATH.



PETE?
WARREN, THAT'S
PETE!

YOU CAN'T
USE THE NULLIFIER,
UATU. NOT WITHOUT
INTERFERING.

YOU DON'T
KNOW HOW MUCH
YOU'VE INTERFERED
WITH US ALREADY. EVEN
WATCHING CHANGES
THINGS.

"BUT WHAT HAPPENS
WHEN A COLLECTIVE
PEOPLE ARE **WRONG**...
AND THE **TRUTH**
RESIDES IN A **SINGLE**
MAN?"

"WOULD THIS
SINGLE MAN
NOT ALSO BE A
PART OF THE
COLLECTIVE?
WOULD HIS
VOTE NOT ALSO
COUNT? IT IS
THIS WAY WITH
THE **KREE**."

"BUT I THOUGHT
THE KREE WERE
DEAD?"

"NO, AARON. THEY ARE
QUITE NEAR."



I BOUGHT
YOU SOME TIME, PETE.
GO AHEAD.

THE N.Y.P.D. NEEDS YOU
ON THE **FRONT LINE**, PARKER.
IMMORTUS'S MUTANT CLAN IS
TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT. IF
ICE-MAN'S WALL FALLS, WE
ALL DO.



YOU'RE
BETTING A **LOT**
ON A LOST
CAUSE.



YOU AND I
WERE **BOTH** LOST
CAUSES ONCE,
LUKE.

WE
NEED TO
REMEMBER
THAT.



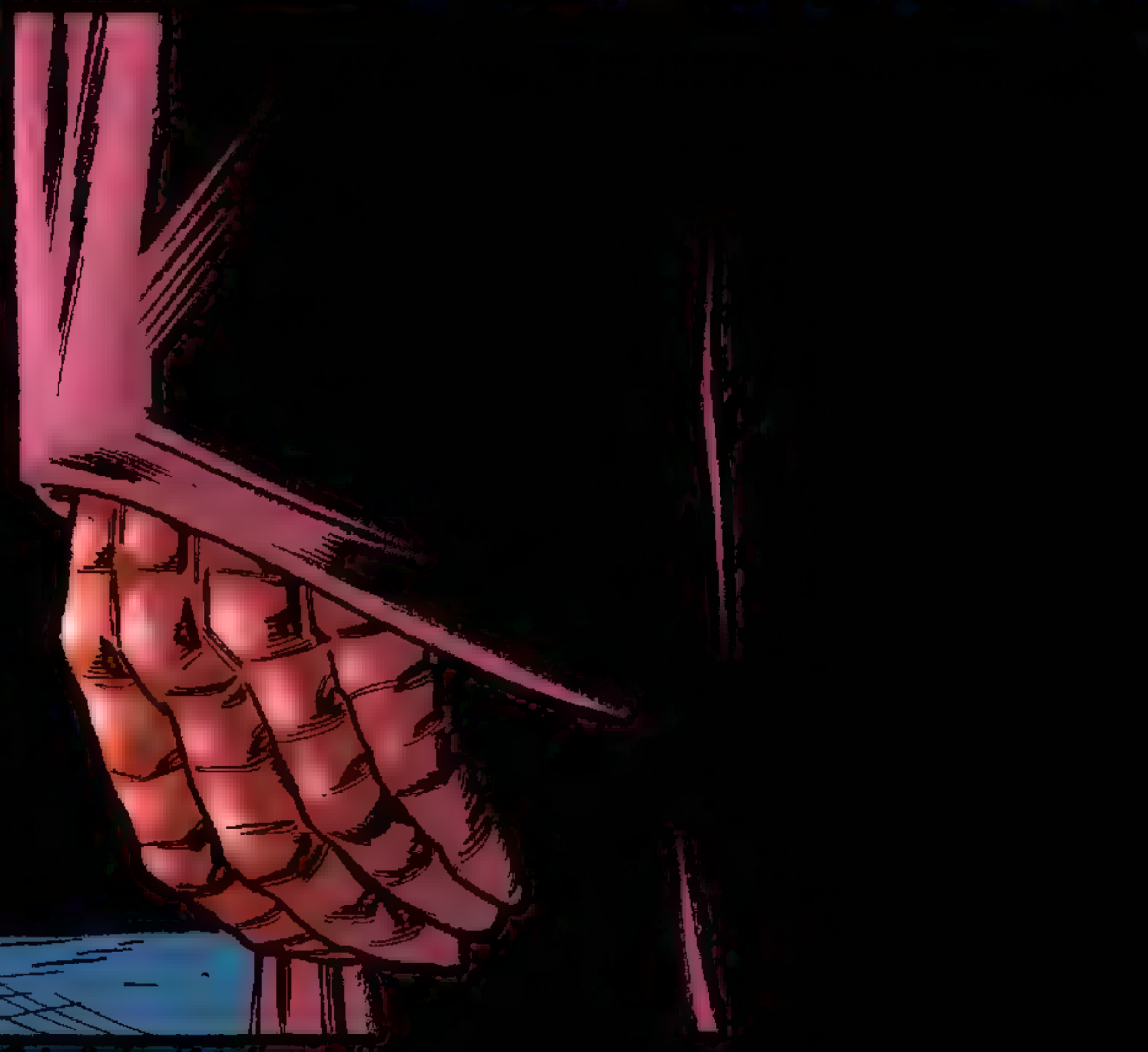
BESIDES...

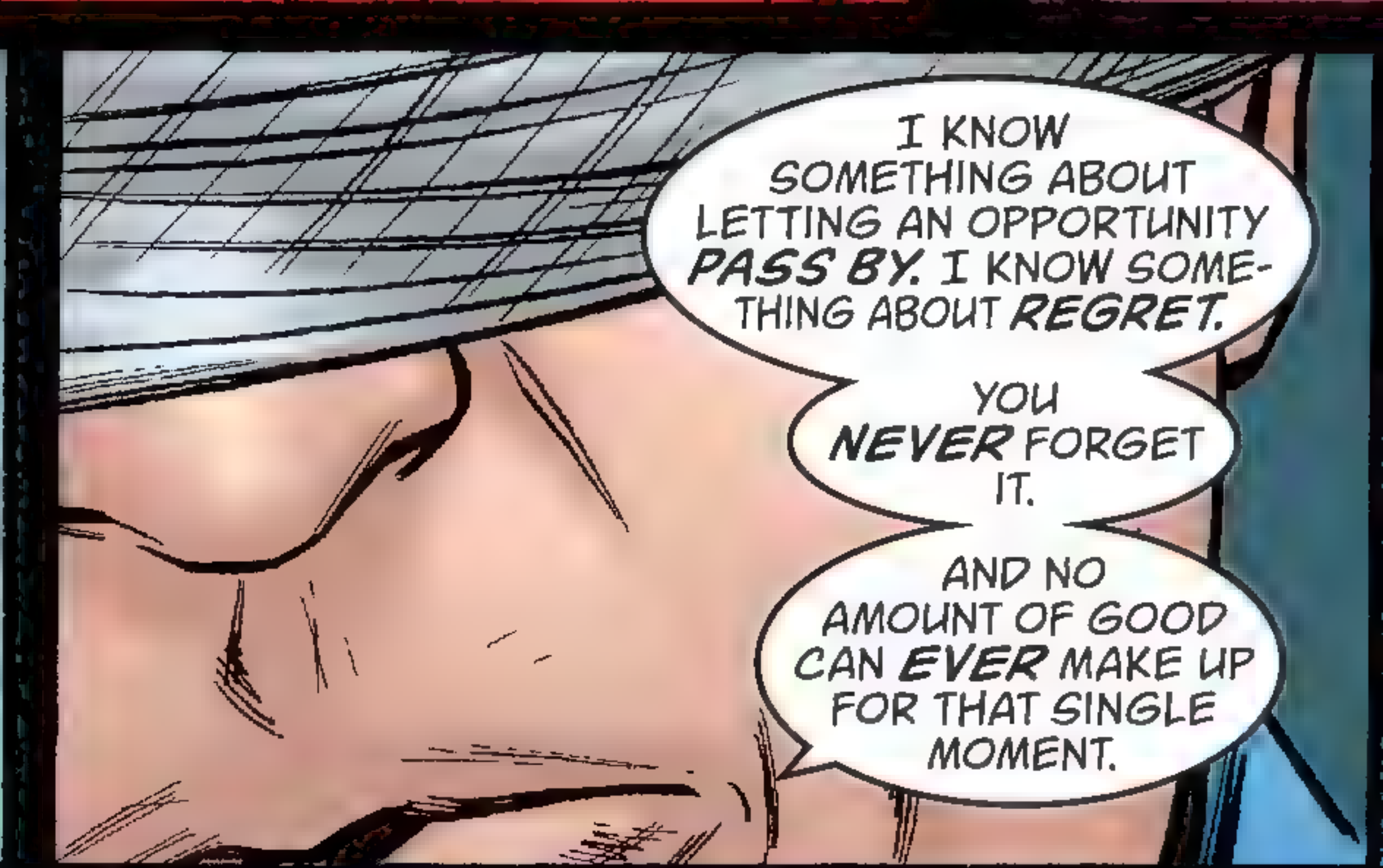


...IT'S NOT
LIKE I'M GOING IN
THERE **BLIND.**

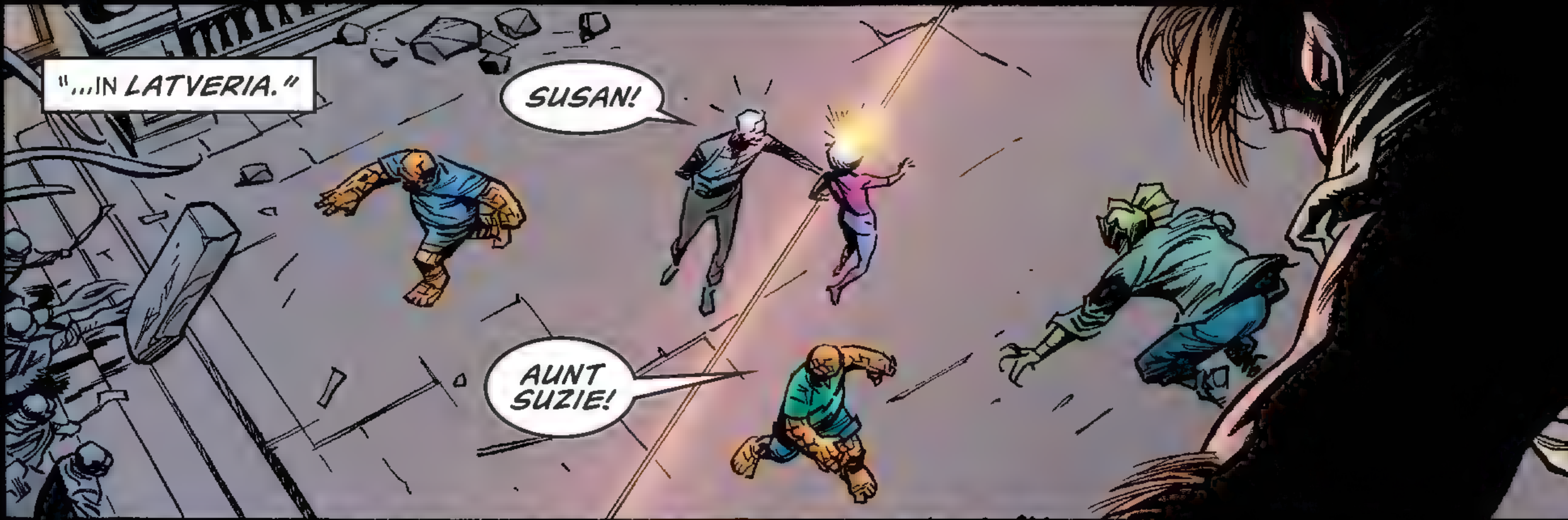


PARKER?





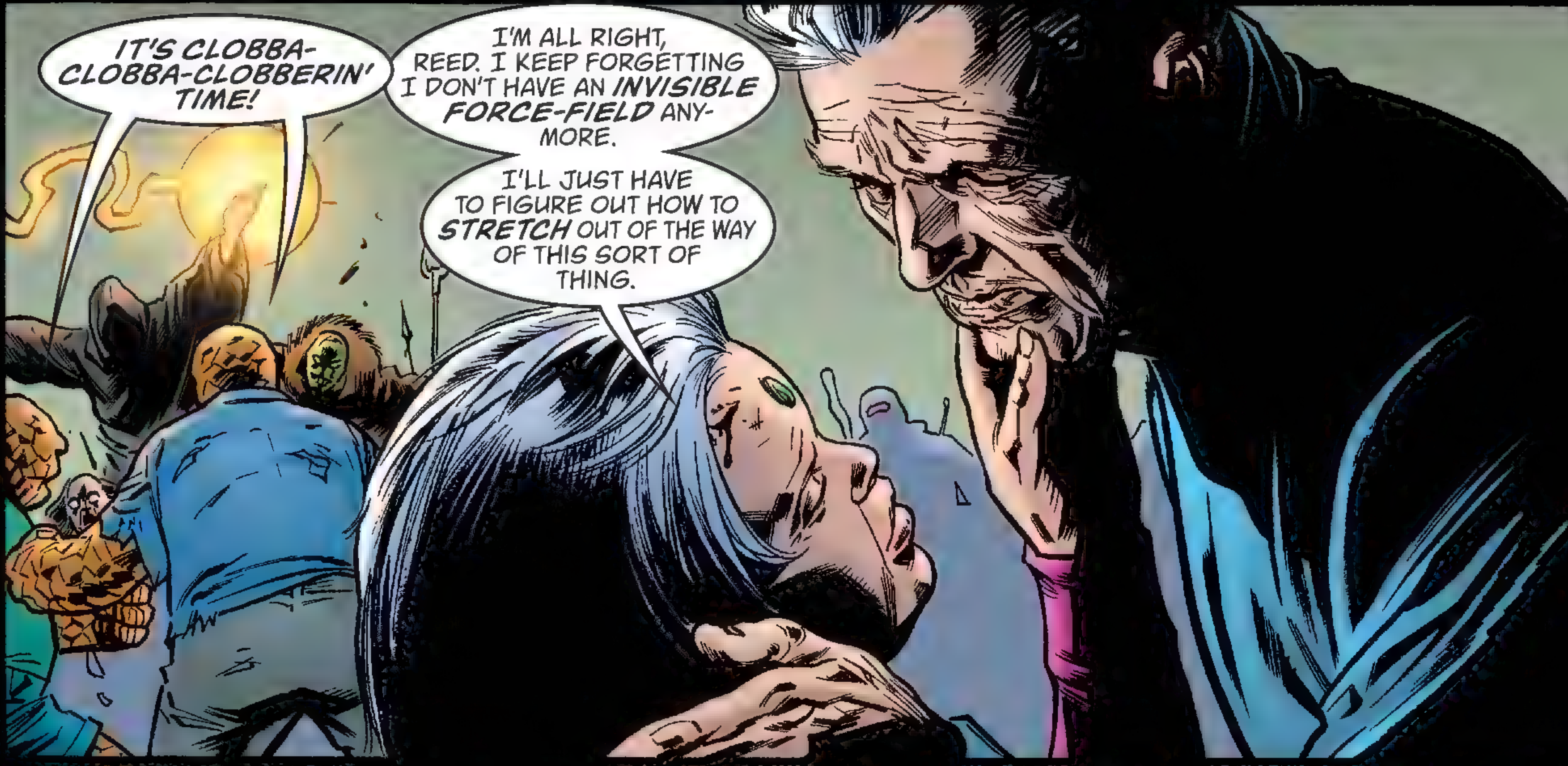




"...IN LATVERIA."

SUSAN!

AUNT SUZIE!



IT'S CLOBBA-CLOBBA-CLOBBERIN' TIME!

I'M ALL RIGHT, REED. I KEEP FORGETTING I DON'T HAVE AN **INVISIBLE FORCE-FIELD** ANY-MORE.

I'LL JUST HAVE TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO **STRETCH** OUT OF THE WAY OF THIS SORT OF THING.



THERE, WHILE THEY FIGHT OFF THE MUTANT ATTACK ON THEIR TORCH...THE **HEAD OF THE MASTER!**

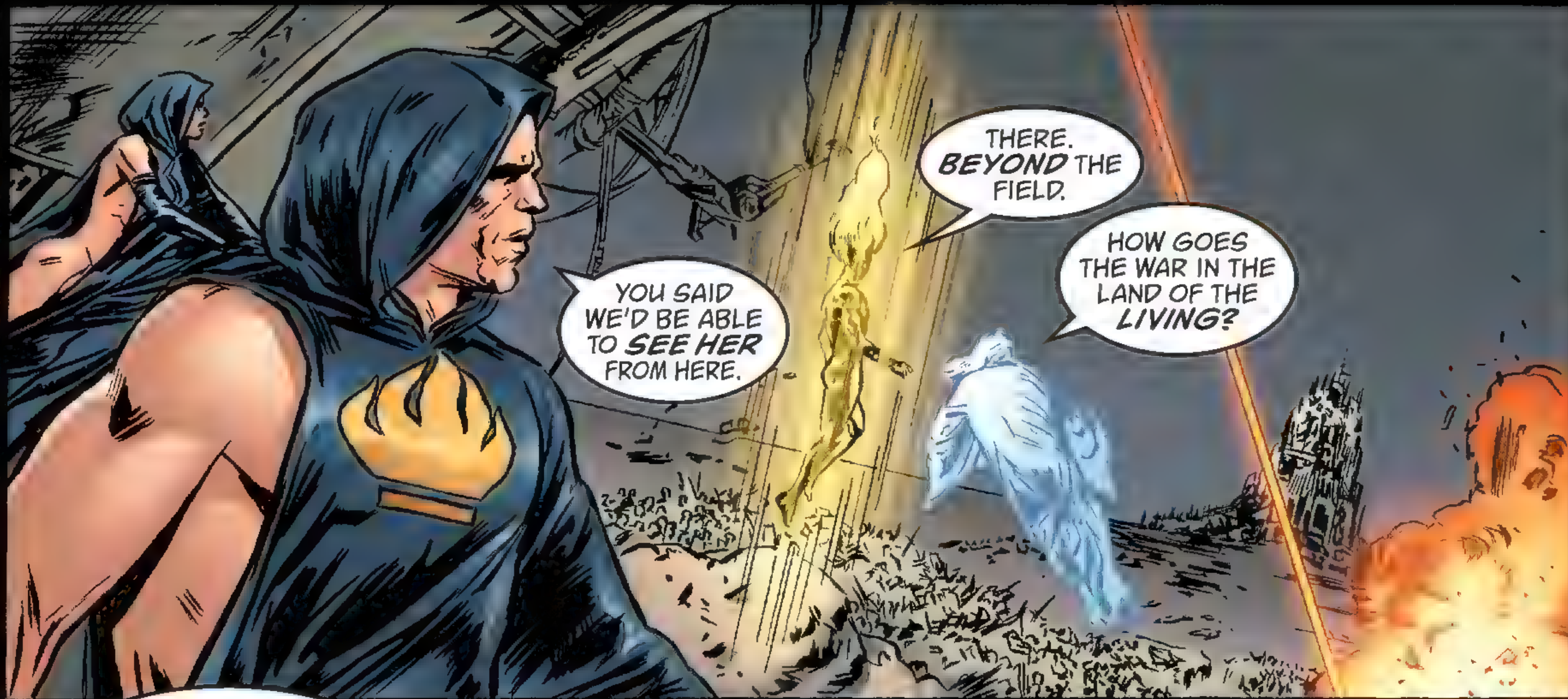


THAT'S IT, THEN. IF RICHARDS ISN'T DEAD NOW, HE **SOON WILL BE.**



I ALWAYS
KNEW YOU'D END
UP THE **HERO**,
VICTOR!

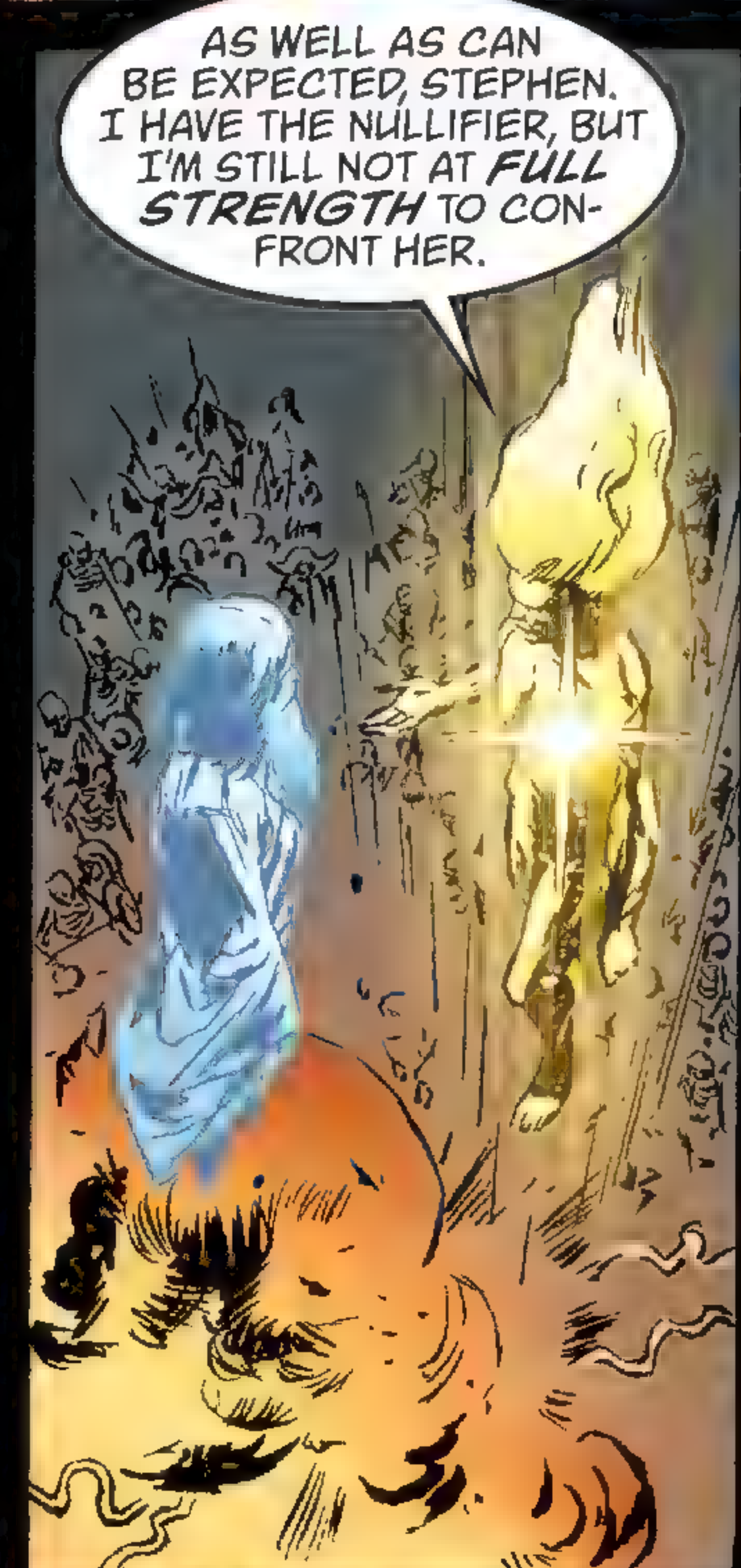
YES, BUT YOU
NEVER BOTHERED TO
TELL ME I'D HAVE TO
DIE FIRST, STARK!



YOU SAID WE'D BE ABLE TO **SEE HER** FROM HERE.

THERE. **BEYOND THE FIELD.**

HOW DOES THE WAR IN THE LAND OF THE **LIVING?**



AS WELL AS CAN BE EXPECTED, STEPHEN. I HAVE THE NULLIFIER, BUT I'M STILL NOT AT **FULL STRENGTH** TO CONFRONT HER.

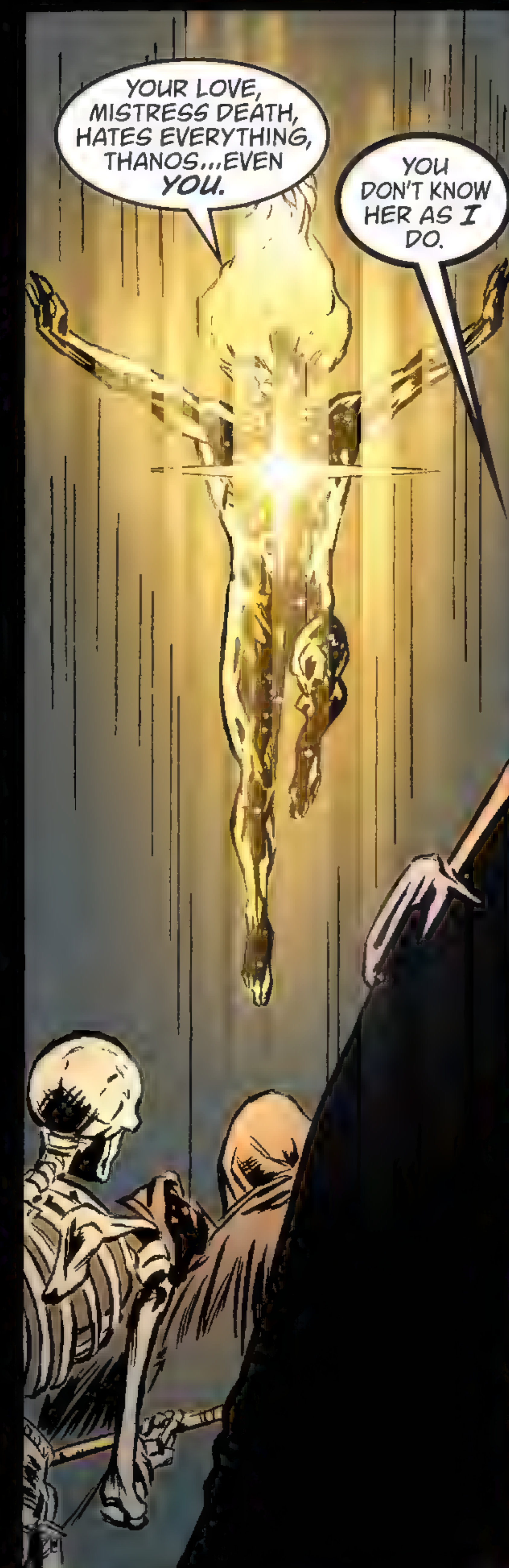


I SUGGEST RETREAT.

IF ONLY I WASN'T **TRAPPED** HERE. THEN, I MIGHT BE ABLE TO **HELP** YOU AND THE OTHERS.



YOUR MAGICIAN WILL **NOT** BRING YOU ANY **POWER**, KREE! I WILL **NOT** ALLOW YOU TO CONFRONT MY REASON FOR BEING!

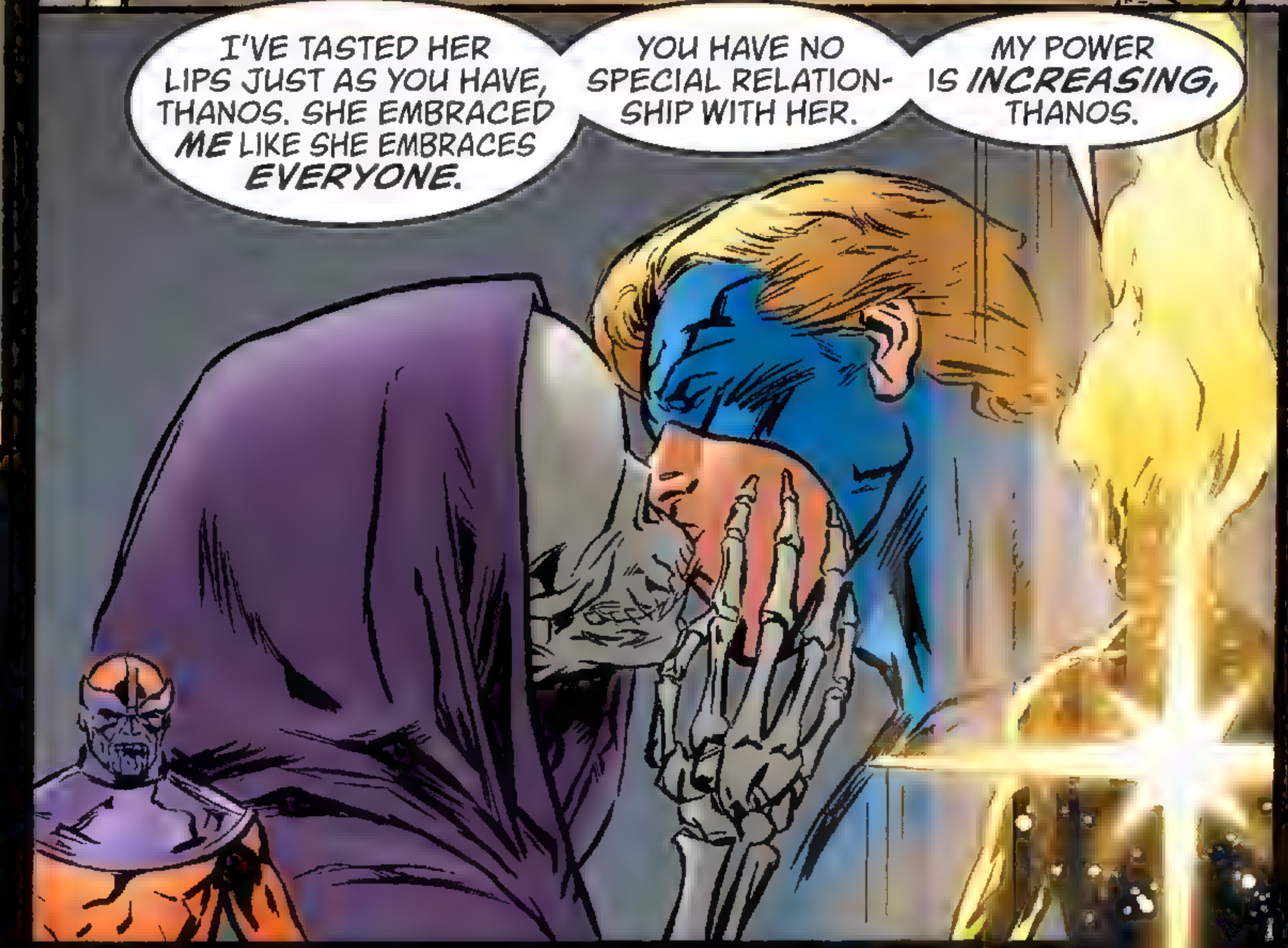


YOUR LOVE, MISTRESS DEATH, HATES EVERYTHING, THANOS... EVEN **YOU.**

YOU DON'T KNOW HER AS I DO.



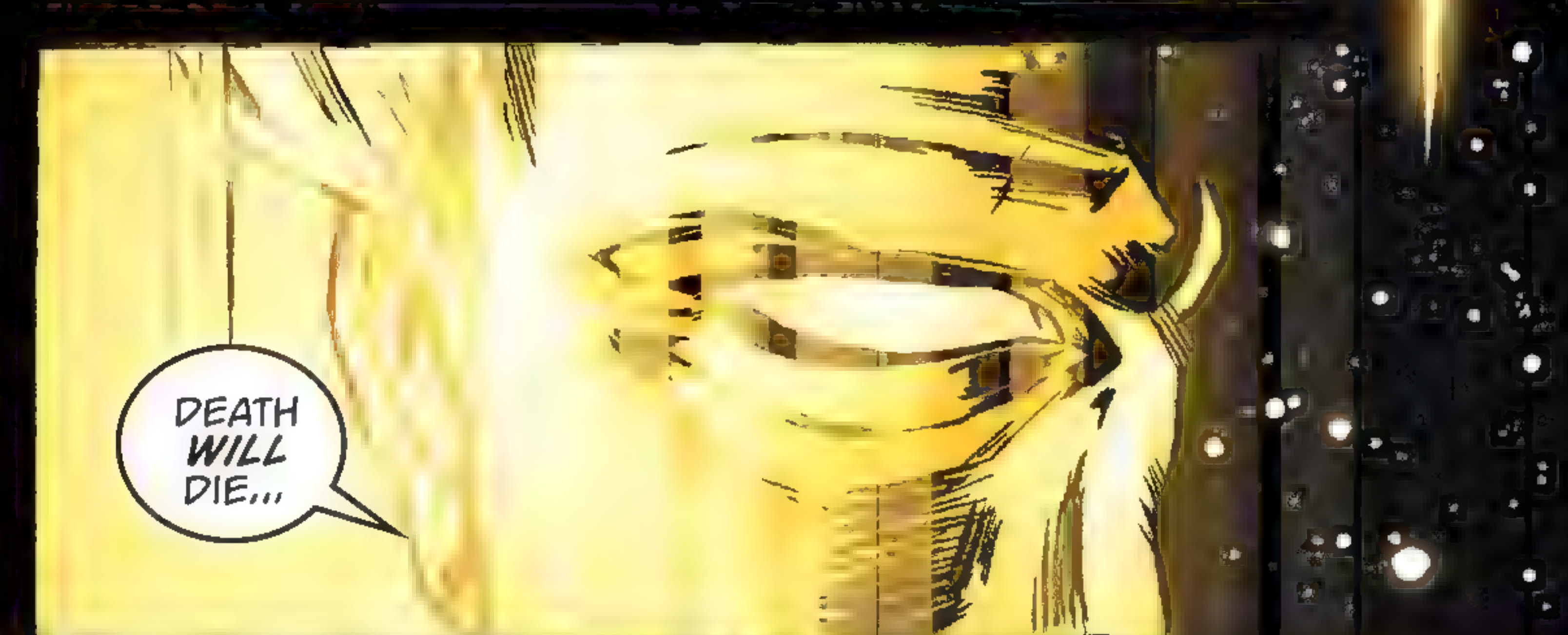
DON'T I?



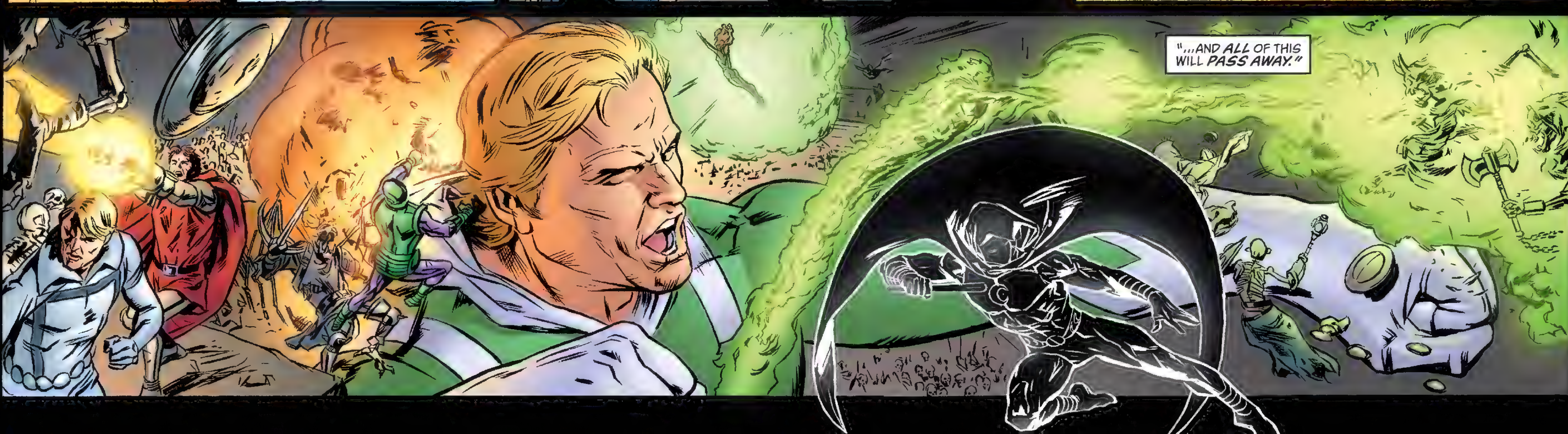
I'VE TASTED HER LIPS JUST AS YOU HAVE, THANOS. SHE EMBRACED **ME** LIKE SHE EMBRACES **EVERYONE.**

YOU HAVE NO SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH HER.

MY POWER IS **INCREASING**, THANOS.



DEATH WILL DIE...



"...AND ALL OF THIS WILL PASS AWAY."



HAVE YOU
REALLY COME TO
THIS, ISAAC?

HAVE
I **DAMNED**
THE WORLD
ONLY BECAUSE
I WANTED
TO **FEEL**
AGAIN?

HAVE I
COME TO FEEL
AGAIN ONLY FOR
THE SAKE OF
GUILT?



MR. CHURCH?

BUT, WHERE'S
IMMORTUS?



ATTACK,
MY BROTHERS!
IN THE NAME OF
IMMORTUS!

CHURCH?

MISTER
CHURCH?

AH, MY FRIEND.
OUR WORK TOGETHER IS
ALMOST FINISHED.

HAVE YOU
BROUGHT ME THE
ACCOUNT OF RICH-
MOND'S LATEST
VISIONS?



I WON'T BE
A PARTY TO THIS
ANYMORE, CHURCH.
I'M **SORRY**. I
DIDN'T KNOW.



BUT DON'T
YOU **FEEL** IT,
ISAAC?

THE **HEAT** OF
THE TORCH IN THE
EMBRACE OF THE
COLD WIND?

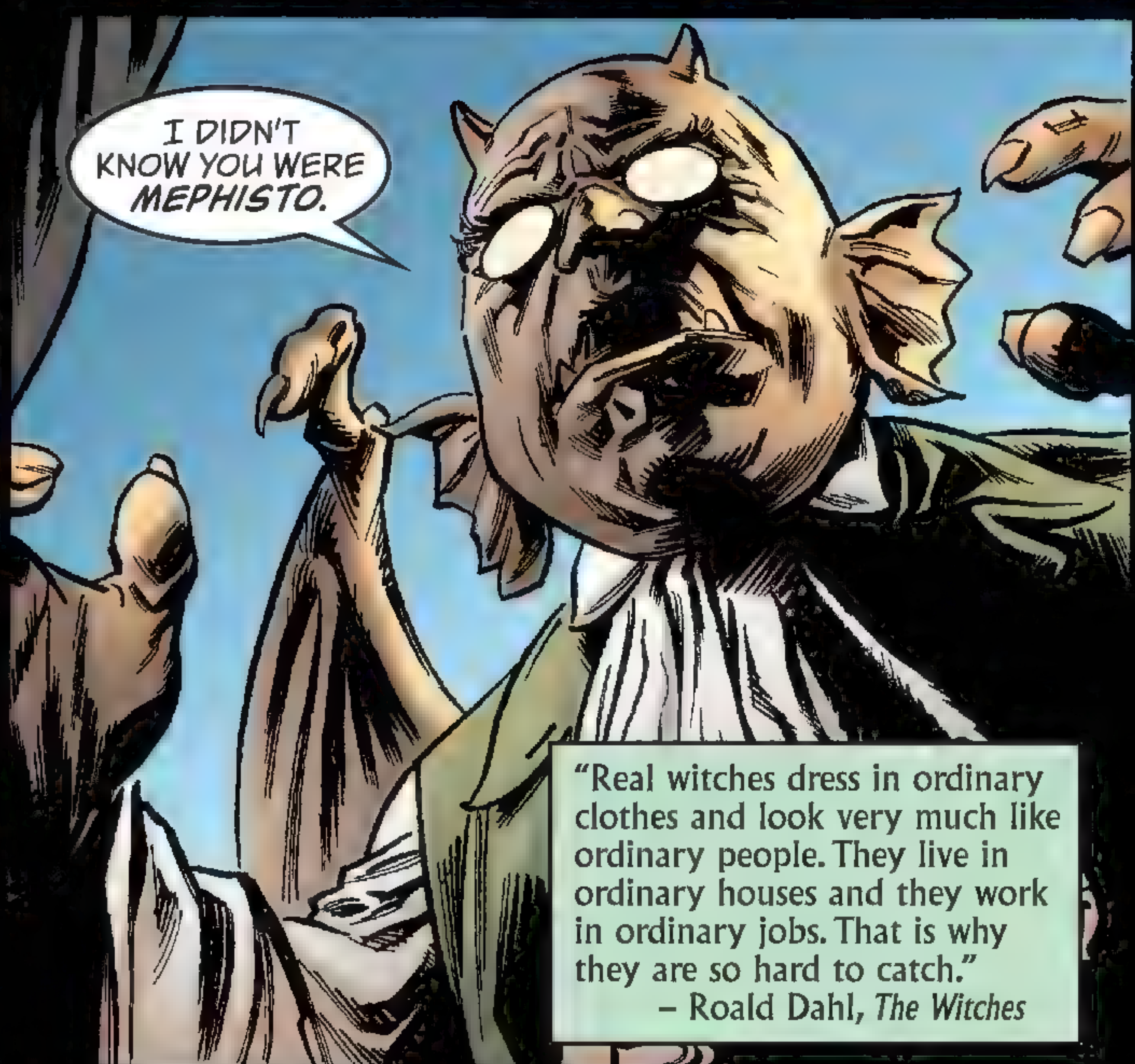
GLORY IN
THIS, ISAAC. YOU'VE
EARNED IT.



THAT'S WHAT I
WANTED TO TALK TO YOU
ABOUT. TAKE IT **BACK**.
I DIDN'T KNOW WHO
YOU WERE.



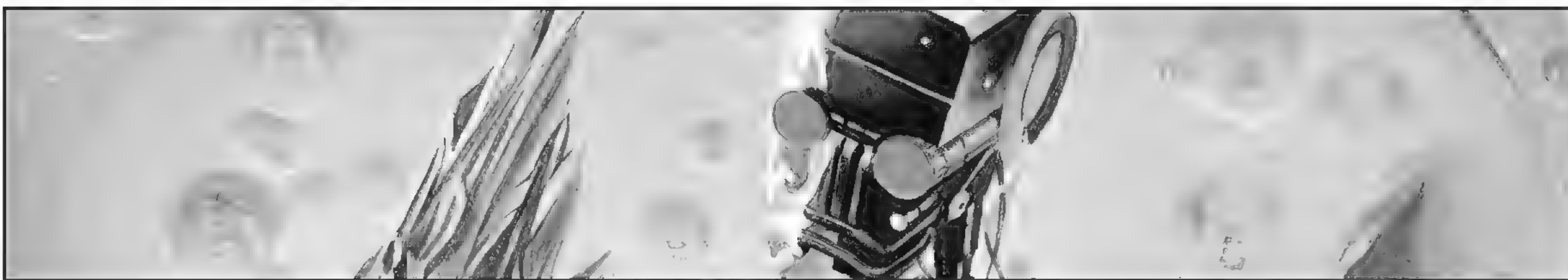
WHY,
WHATEVER
DO YOU
MEAN?



I DIDN'T
KNOW YOU WERE
MEPHISTO.

"Real witches dress in ordinary clothes and look very much like ordinary people. They live in ordinary houses and they work in ordinary jobs. That is why they are so hard to catch."
- Roald Dahl, *The Witches*

U N I V E R S E X



APPENDIX TO CHAPTER SEVEN

W R I T T E N B Y J I M K R U E G E R
(The revelations implied in this appendix relate to the flashback in Universe X #9)

"What is it that knowledge brings that makes it so corrupting an influence?

"I was created to be a thinking computer, but more than that, I was created to be a man. And yet I find myself here on the moon with all knowledge of the history of mankind available to me, and I wonder if this knowledge will corrupt me as it did Uatu, the original Watcher before me.

"I speak now of what I witnessed here in Uatu's lair the day Mar-Vell and his seconds arrived. I am not speaking of their search for the Ultimate Nullifier. I speak of the death of an entire nation, the victims of another, the secret to the Kree/Skrull War, and of what I believe, may spark the downfall of the Asgard.

"Mar-Vell murdered the Supreme Intelligence. I was there. I did not require Uatu's alien surveillance machinery. With my own... eyes...I watched and recorded the murder of a being older than any inhabitant of Earth.

"And I was glad. Learning what I did of Supremor's manipulations, he deserved to die. And I wonder, with the knowledge now revealed of the true fate of the Kree people, if Mar-Vell wasn't justified in cold-blooded murder. Or if, indeed, the true fate of his race did not actually corrupt Mar-Vell as it did Supremor?

"And what of Thor? Mar-Vell's actions shook Thor to her very definition-- her core. Was it merely because Thor witnessed a noble soul who actually committed genocide? Or was it something more? Mar-Vell did the impossible. And all Thor could do was to watch him deconstruct all Asgardian mythology before her eyes.

"So knowledge too has been added to Thor. Knowledge that supports everything Loki, Thor's trickster half-brother has proposed.

"How could a liar speak the truth?

"That is the question.

"Loki discovered the truth about the Asgardian people a little more than three years ago. This happened shortly before the coming of the Final Host of Celestials. He learned that the Asgardians were not Gods at all, but an alien race whose form and personality, was molded by the perceptions and superstitions of humanity.

"Loki learned that they, before becoming the Asgardians, were merely a race like humanity that had been manipulated by the Celestials. The Celestials don't merely mutate their races, they begin a mutation within them that not only empowers them to protect the Celestial Embryo within said planet's core – but also to become a being that will, in the end, have no being at all. Self-knowledge itself will be lost, and therefore, all history of that very race and all evidence of the Celestial manipulation.

"I have no idea what the Asgardians were before they reached this final phase of mutation. I do know that they were not as they are now; and that somehow, all that has happened to give them form and personality, to make them heroes and villains, to make them gods and goddesses, is a lie. But the Asgardians are more than the predisposition of ancient Norsemen. There's something more. The Asgardian known as Odin, I have recently learned as a result of Kyle Richmond's remarkable vision, is not one of them at all. He was a man, an ancient Norsemen who took advantage of this alien race's manipulated nature.

"How did this happen?

"And, has this knowledge also served to corrupt the being who became Odin. Is Asgard the result of this corruption? Is the fabled golden realm a sort of fool's gold, whose true worth is now being called into question?

"Or perhaps the Asgardians are the future of humanity. That this, again, is another time loop of sorts. That humanity will at some point in the future mutate to the final phase and be drawn back in time to where they are overcome by their own superstitious origins?

"This is difficult to believe and yet, I have become aware of so many similar time loops throughout the history of Earth, that I find myself casting all of human history in question.

"It seems as if every new piece of knowledge brings a new complexity and detail that ultimately suggests that knowledge itself is a sort of two-edged sword. The more that is revealed, the greater the number of unanswered questions.

"Perhaps this is that notion that corrupts. It is that there is an infinity of questions, suggesting an infinity of answers. And the answers suggest, again, new questions that spread out far from the initial question of being.

"But, to my knowledge, I have not been as of yet corrupted. This can only mean two things. Either I have not gained sufficient knowledge to act as a corrupting agent in my assembly, or, I am not human, as my father had hoped I would be. And that can only mean that I am incapable of being corrupted.

"If this is the case, it is ironic I am in the position I am, for Uatu hoped to corrupt me by convincing me that I am not a human. And if I am not a member of the human race, then I am incapable of being corrupted.

"I hope I am capable of being corrupted, if only to be true to my original programming. If I am not, I am no man at all, but only a machine with faulty programming.

"Otherwise, I fear this knowledge I gain will be for nothing.

"And I will not be changed by the answers that lie ahead."



UNIVERSE



KRUEGER
BRAITHWAITE
REINHOLD

“Mephisto won’t listen to you, Isaac. His ears are denser stone than your own. He was the bookbinder who bound you. You gave him my vision in your writings. You gave him the future. He was also Immortus’s Mr. Church. Do you not see what has become of this? He now commands the mutant armies of the world...armies who will leave Earth to conquer the whole of the universe. This is the destiny Immortus himself foolishly foretold and believed he would captain.

“The Devil knows what’s about to happen. He knows where the pieces of Creel are. Do you really think he’ll agree to change everything back now? You have made the Prince of Lies the king of the world.

“But try as I might to see what’s about to happen, I cannot. I must think about what I’ve seen. Perhaps these moments hold the key. Belasco, another of Mephisto’s puppets, travels from Limbo back in time for his first clash with Shanna and Ka-Zar in the Savage Land. Reed Richards turns Galactus into a star who then becomes the structure of Subatomica in Earth’s ancient past. The deconstruction of Subatomica leads Galactus to throw himself into the past once again. Kang the Conqueror becomes Immortus. Mephisto, who holds the key to Limbo, locks Immortus from Limbo, forcing him to be transformed into a being of aggression again.

“It’s a vicious, unforgiving circle. I remember Doc Strange telling me that he had a dream once where Earth was destroyed and recreated again by Eternity.

“I’m thinking about destiny, Isaac, as you go off to try and undo what you’ve done. And I’m thinking about these eyes that Mephisto gave me. These eyes that let me see the future. And I’m afraid that the Deceiver lied about them, as well.

“What if I’m not seeing the future at all? What if I never have? What if all I’ve been seeing is the past?”



UNIVERSE X

I S S U E 8

JIM KRUEGER
story and script

ALEX ROSS
story, cover painter and character designer

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pencils

BILL REINHOLD
inks

LAURA DEPUY
colors

TODD KLEIN
letters

MIKE RAICHT
assistant editor

MIKE MARTS
editor

BOB HARRAS
editor in chief

"KYLE RICHMOND?"

"WHO'S THERE? WHY DIDN'T I SEE YOU COMING?"

"I'M THE EARTH'S **WATCHMAN**. YOU MAY REMEMBER ME. I WAS KNOWN AS **MACHINE MAN**."

"I DO REMEMBER. **AARON STACK**, RIGHT?"

"YOU'RE A KIND MAN. I'VE COME BECAUSE YOU CAN **SEE** THINGS WHICH I CANNOT... WHAT TRANSPIRES IN **LIMBO**, FOR INSTANCE, OR IN THE REALM OF THE DEAD...OR IN UNIVERSES FAR FROM OUR OWN. WHAT IS MAR-VELL SEARCHING FOR NEXT?"

"THE **COSMIC CUBE**."

"THEN HE'LL BE IN WAKANDA."

"AARON, THERE'S SOMETHING I THINK YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE CUBE. I THINK IT'S **ALIVE**."

"AT FIRST, IT WAS USED AS A **WEAPON** AGAINST THE KREE BY THE ROYALTY OF THE SKRULL HOMEWORLD. IT COULD CREATE ANYTHING FROM A **THOUGHT**."

"BUT THE POWER OF THE CUBE COULD NOT BE CONTAINED. THEY SAY THE CUBE DESTROYED **TWO-THIRDS** OF THE SKRULL EMPIRE ALONE."

"IN THE YEARS THAT FOLLOWED, THE **COSMIC CUBE** LEARNED SENTIENCE AND BECAME THE BEING KNOWN AS THE **SHAPER OF WORLDS**."

"INTERESTING. THEN THERE IS SOMETHING BEYOND THE **THIRD STAGE** OF MUTATION."

"THE KREE ATTEMPTED TO CREATE THEIR **OWN COSMIC CUBE**...BUT ONE WITH A SENTIENCE THAT WOULD BE MORE DEMOCRATIC THAN DESPOTIC."

"INSTEAD, THEY CREATED THE **SUPREME INTELLIGENCE**..."

"...A FUSION OF THE **GREATEST MINDS** OF THE KREE EMPIRE."

"BUT THE SUPREME INTELLIGENCE **FEARED** THE POWER OF THE CUBE, AND CONVINCED THE KREE TO HALT THEIR ATTEMPTS IN CREATING ANOTHER."

"IRONICALLY, THE INTELLIGENCE THEN DISCOVERED THAT ONE WAS BEING CREATED ON **EARTH**."

"THE CUBE YOU SPEAK OF WAS CREATED HERE ON EARTH BY AN ORGANIZATION KNOWN AS **A.I.M.**: **ADVANCED IDEA MECHANICS**. THEY OPENED A PORTAL THEY CALLED A **GRAY HOLE**."

"BOTH CAPTAIN AMERICA AND IRON MAN FOUGHT AGAINST THIS RENEGADE ARM OF HYDRA--AND THE MONSTROUS RESULTS OF THEIR EXPERIMENTS. ONE OF THESE CREATIONS, **MODOK**, WAS GIVEN SENTIENT LIFE BY THE **COSMIC CUBE**."

"BUT HOW DID **A.I.M.** KNOW ABOUT THE **COSMIC CUBE** IN THE **FIRST PLACE**? THE IDEA THAT TWO **COSMIC** OBJECTS FROM **GALAXIES** FAR AWAY COULD NOT ONLY BE IN THE **SHAPE** OF CUBES BUT BE **CALLED** **COSMIC CUBES** AS WELL, **HAS** TO BE MORE THAN **COINCIDENCE**."

"I THINK IT HAS TO DO WITH THE **PORTAL** **A.I.M.** OPENED. **BLACK HOLES** HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED **PORTALS** TO OTHER WORLDS, OR **WALKWAYS** ACROSS A **GALAXY**. WHY COULDN'T THIS **GRAY HOLE** BE A **SHORTCUT** TO THE SKRULL **HOMEWORLD**?"

"IF THE SKRULLS WERE INDEED AT THE **THIRD** LEVEL OF THEIR MUTATION AND NOT THE **SECOND** AS WE'D BELIEVED, ONE OF THEM COULD **TRANSFORM** INTO ANYTHING. THE **SHAPER** OF WORLDS WAS NOT A **CUBE** THAT BECAME A SKRULL...IT WAS A **SKRULL** THAT BECAME THE CUBE AND ESCAPED THAT FATE."

"PERHAPS THE **GRAY HOLE** DID NOTHING BUT DRAW **ANOTHER** SKRULL TO EARTH. ONE ALREADY FAMILIAR WITH THE **COSMIC CUBE**, WHO TOOK THE **SHAPE** OF THE VERY ITEM THAT WAS CONSISTENT WITH THE **SHARED GOALS** OF THE SKRULLS AND **A.I.M.**"

"THE DESIRE TO BE **GOD**."

"THE RED SKULL STOLE THIS SECOND CUBE FROM A.I.M. AND WAS DRIVEN EVEN *MORE INSANE* BY THIS TASTE OF OMNIPOTENCE.

"BUT THE CUBE HAD ITS LIMITATIONS. IT WAS DEPENDENT ON THE *IMAGINATION* OF ITS USER. CAPTAIN AMERICA WAS ABLE TO OUT-IMAGINE AND OUT-THINK THE SKULL.

"HE TRICKED THE SKULL AND SAVED THE WORLD.

"THE CUBE WAS *LOST* THAT DAY..."

"...BUT WOULD BE FOUND AGAIN BY THE TITAN KNOWN AS *THANOS*, WHO ALSO HAD ASPIRATIONS OF BECOMING A GOD."

"DEATH TOOK THE FORM OF RICK JONES'S GIRLFRIEND LOU-ANN IN THE HOPES OF KILLING MAR-VELL'S WEAKER HOST BODY.

"THANOS *SWORE* TO HER HIS DEVOTION AND SERVITUDE, AND PLACED HIS POWER AND WILL AT HIS NEW MASTER'S FEET.

"HE WAS DEFEATED BY MAR-VELL AND-- FOR LACK OF A BETTER TERM--THE GHOST OF *ADAM WARLOCK*. THE COSMIC CUBE WAS *DESTROYED*."

"DEATH WAS THERE, OF COURSE, WHEN MAR-VELL DIED THE *FIRST TIME*."

"HE REJECTED HER ILLUSION OF HIS LOST LOVE UNA, AND *EMBRACED* HIS END."

"IF WE ALL SEE DEATH IN THE FORM OF WHAT WE *LOVE MOST*, WHAT WOULD THANOS SEE WHEN HE LOOKS UPON HER?"

"I DON'T KNOW."

"THE COSMIC CUBE WAS LATER RECREATED BY A DEPARTMENT WITHIN THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT THAT STUDIED RARE FORMS OF ENERGY: *PROJECT PEGASUS*."

"THE CUBE WAS STOLEN BY ANOTHER WOULD-BE GOD WHO CREATED A BEING THAT WAS *ENTROPIC* IN NATURE, WITH HIS NEWFOUND POWER."

"THE MAN-GOD WAS *TURNED ON* BY HIS CREATION AND *KILLED*."

"THE ENTROPIC MAN SWORE HE WOULD RETURN ONE DAY, BUT ONLY WHEN MANKIND PRAYED FOR AND ANTICIPATED HIS RETURN."

"YOU MEAN WHAT IF THIS CUBE RECALLS ITS *SENTIENCE*? I'D LIKE TO SAY THAT IT'S UNLIKELY BECAUSE THE CUBE ISN'T BEING USED, BUT--"

"WHAT IF THE CUBE *REMEMBERS* WHAT IT ONCE WAS JUST AS THE SHAPER OF WORLDS DID? WHAT WILL WE DO THEN?"

"BUT THE CUBE *ISN'T* BEING USED. IT FELL INTO CAPTAIN AMERICA'S HANDS."

"AND STEVE ROGERS UNDERSTOOD THE *DANGERS* OF EVER HAVING THE POWER TO ENSLAVE OTHERS, SO HE GAVE THE CUBE TO THE AFRICAN KING OF WAKANDA..."

"...A MAN WHOSE PEOPLE HAD BEEN ENSLAVED SO MANY YEARS BEFORE...A MAN WHO WOULD PLACE THE CUBE WHERE IT WOULD BE TOUCHED BY *NO ONE*..."

"...THE *ONLY* MAN ON EARTH CAP KNEW WOULD *NEVER* GIVE THE CUBE BACK TO CAP NO MATTER HOW MUCH HE BEGGED."

"I HAVE COME, KYLE, IN FEAR THAT MAR-VELL IS BECOMING *TOO POWERFUL*. YOU SAW WHAT HE DID TO THE SUPREME INTELLIGENCE. BUT I KNOW YOU CAN SEE INTO DEATH'S REALM. I KNOW... AND I SUPPOSE THE CUBE WON'T REGAIN ITS THOUGHTS IF IT REMAINS HIDDEN AND UNUSED."

"I SAID I'D *LIKE* TO SAY THAT, WATCHMAN. BUT DON'T BE FOOLED. IT'S *STILL* BEING USED."



DON'T YOU **SEE**, KYLE?
MANKIND COULD
BE IN **TERRIBLE**
DANGER.

MANKIND
IS IN TERRIBLE
DANGER. ALL OF
EARTH IS IN
TERRIBLE
DANGER.



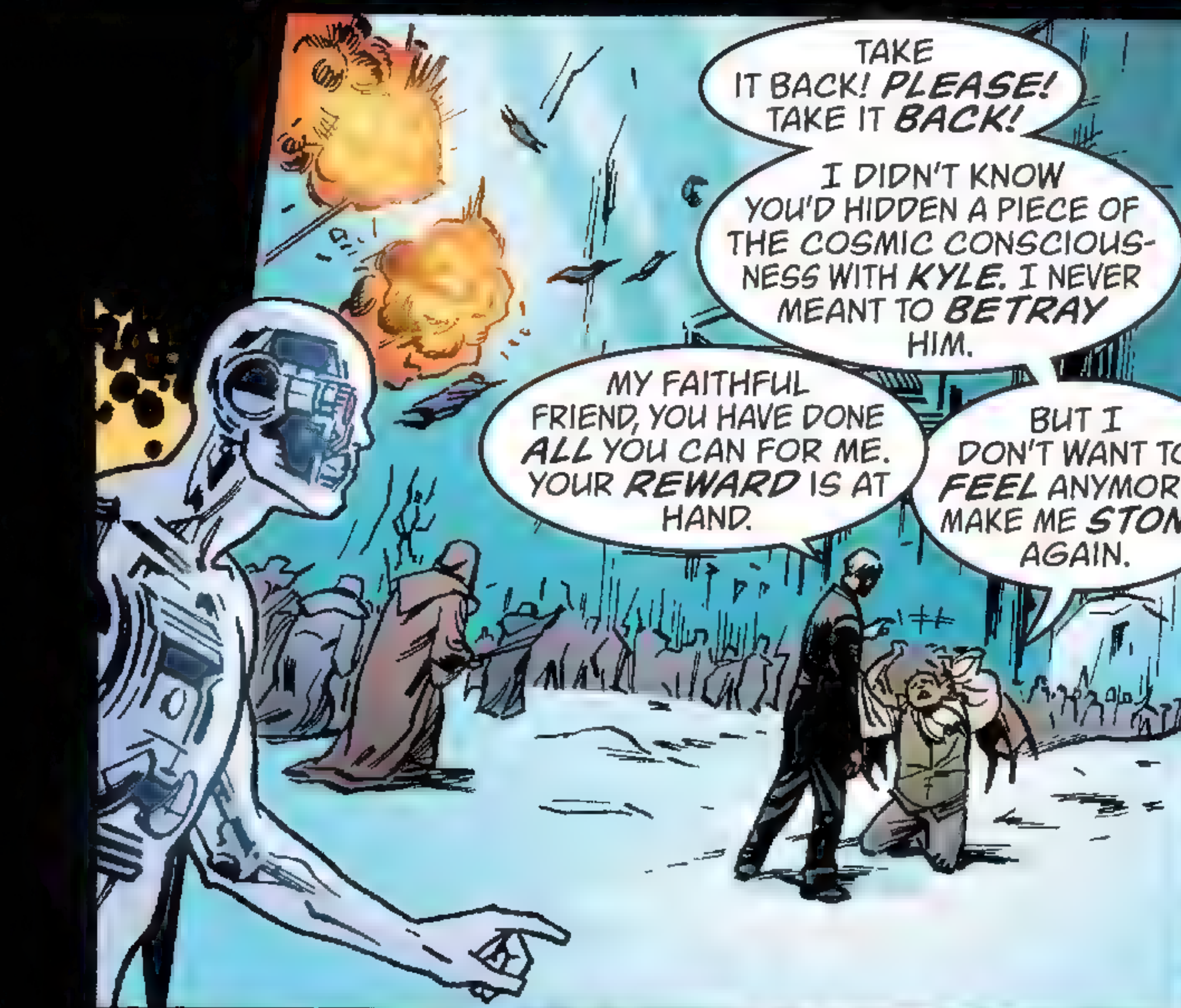
WE
HAVE TO FIND
ISAAC.

HE'LL BE
AMONGST THE
MUTANT ARMY
NOW ATTACKING
THE HUMAN
TORCH.



THIS
WAY,
KYLE.

I HAVE
A PORTAL OF
MY OWN.



TAKE
IT BACK! **PLEASE!**
TAKE IT **BACK!**

I DIDN'T KNOW
YOU'D HIDDEN A PIECE OF
THE COSMIC CONSCIOUS-
NESS WITH **KYLE**. I NEVER
MEANT TO **BETRAY**
HIM.

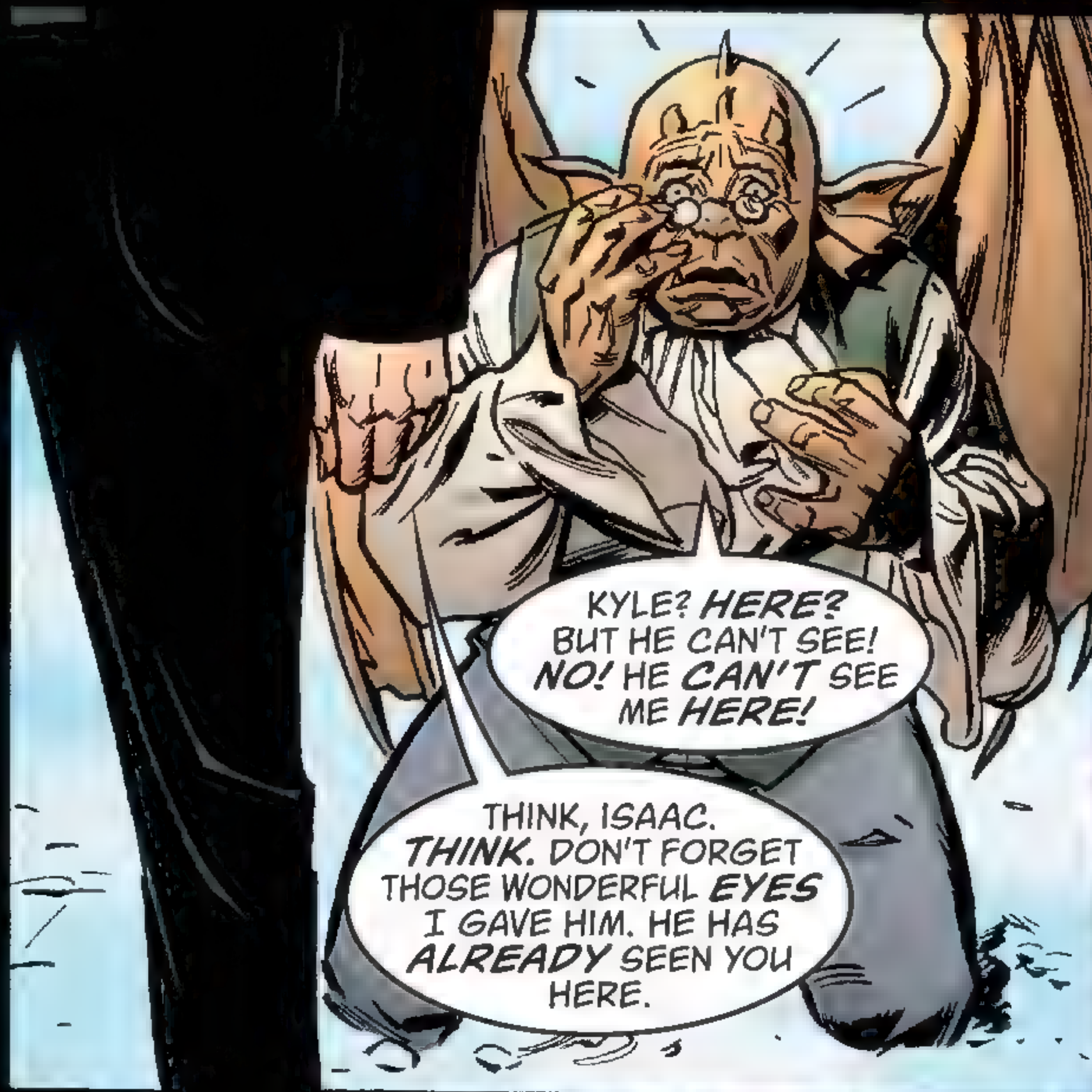
MY FAITHFUL
FRIEND, YOU HAVE DONE
ALL YOU CAN FOR ME.
YOUR **REWARD** IS AT
HAND.

BUT I
DON'T WANT TO
FEEL ANYMORE.
MAKE ME **STONE**
AGAIN.



NONSENSE.
BESIDES, YOU COULD
ALWAYS "**FEEL**" **GUILT**,
ISAAC.

OH, LOOK.
HERE COMES **KYLE**
NOW.



KYLE? HERE?
BUT HE CAN'T SEE!
NO! HE CAN'T SEE
ME HERE!

THINK, ISAAC.
THINK. DON'T FORGET
THOSE WONDERFUL EYES
I GAVE HIM. HE HAS
ALREADY SEEN YOU
HERE.



URGH!



WHY...WHY DOES
IT HURT...SO...MUCH?
THIS PAIN...

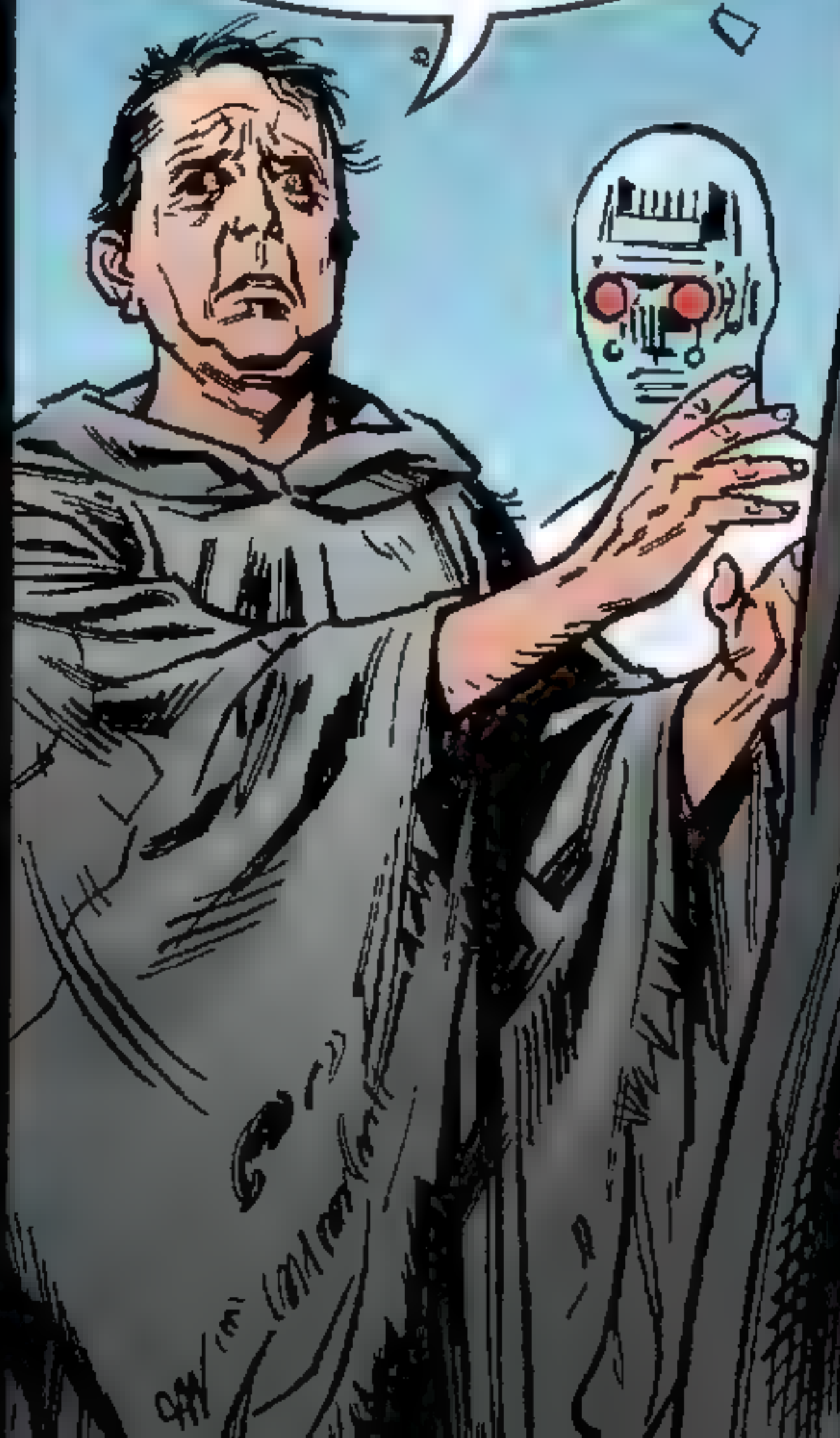


SENSATIONAL,
ISN'T IT?

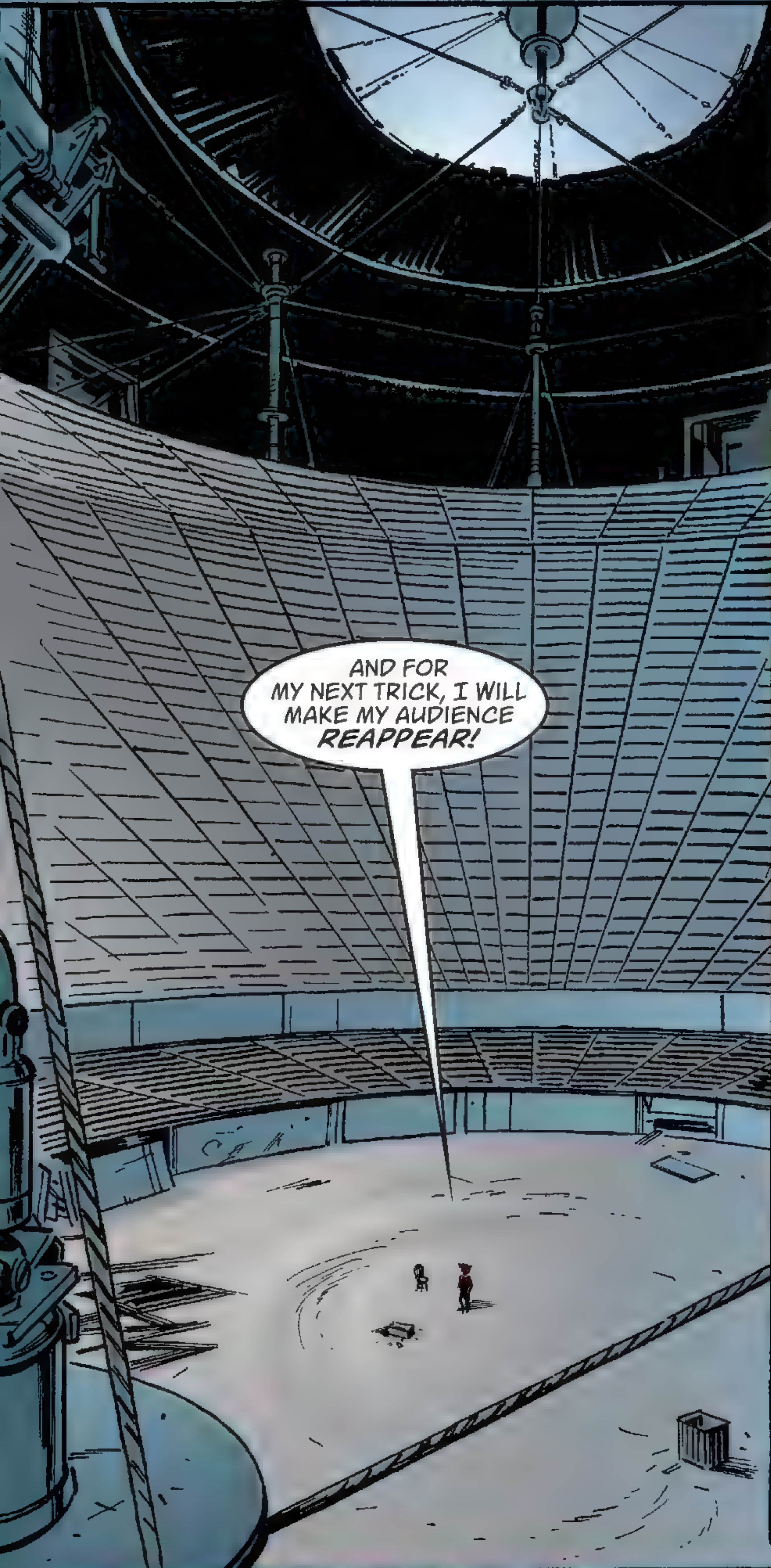


WHAT...
HAVE I
DONE?

IT'S **SATAN**, WATCHMAN.
THE DEVIL, LUCIFER, THE LORD
OF LIES, RULER OF THE KING-
DOM OF THE AIR--WHATEVER
YOU WANT TO CALL HIM,
THERE HE IS.



WE HAVE
TO GET **ISAAC** OUT
OF THERE!



AND FOR MY NEXT TRICK, I WILL MAKE MY AUDIENCE REAPPEAR!



WHAT A WASTE. WHAT GOOD IS HAVING THE POWER TO *KILL YOURSELF* IF NO ONE'S AROUND TO SEE IT?

THE QUESTION IS...



AT LAST! NOW WHERE DID I PUT THOSE EXPLOSIVES?

I'M NOT HERE FOR YOUR *SHOW*, DAREDEVIL.



YOU WERE THERE WITH THE *HEROES*. YOU'RE THE ONE WHO HELPED BRING THE *SKULL* DOWN.



BIGGEST CAREER BLUNDER OF MY TIME.

THERE'S NO FUTURE IN HEROISM.



SHUT UP, YOU CLOWN!
I DON'T HAVE *TIME* FOR THIS!
DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW *LONG*
I'VE GONE WITH NO HOPE THAT
A *CURE* EXISTED?

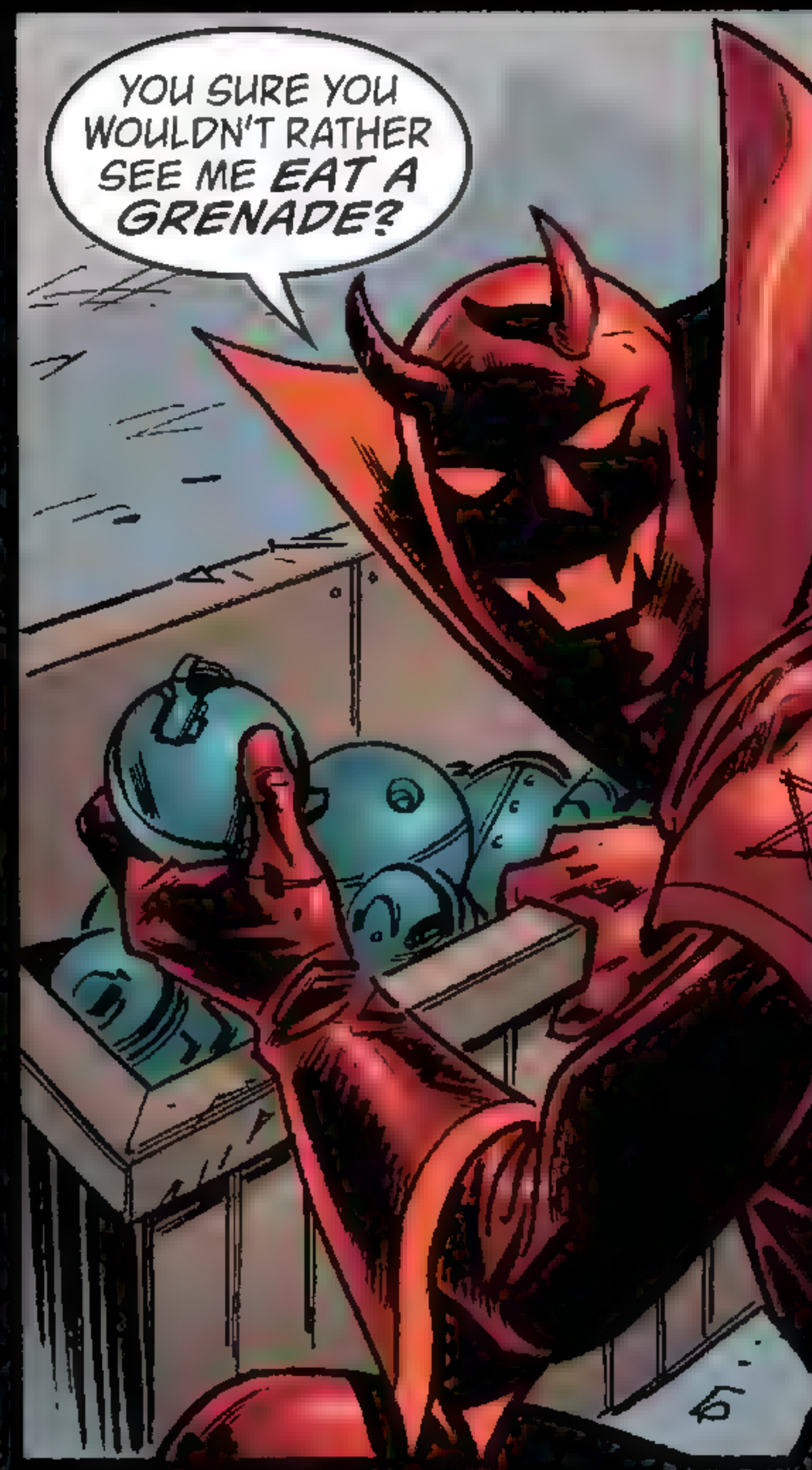
NOW UNLESS
YOU WANT TO BE *CLUBBED*
TO DEATH, TELL ME WHERE
REED RICHARDS
IS!



HOW ABOUT
THIS? I'LL TELL YOU
WHERE REED RICHARDS
IS, AND *THEN* YOU CLUB
ME TO DEATH!



WHAT'S
WRONG WITH
YOU?!

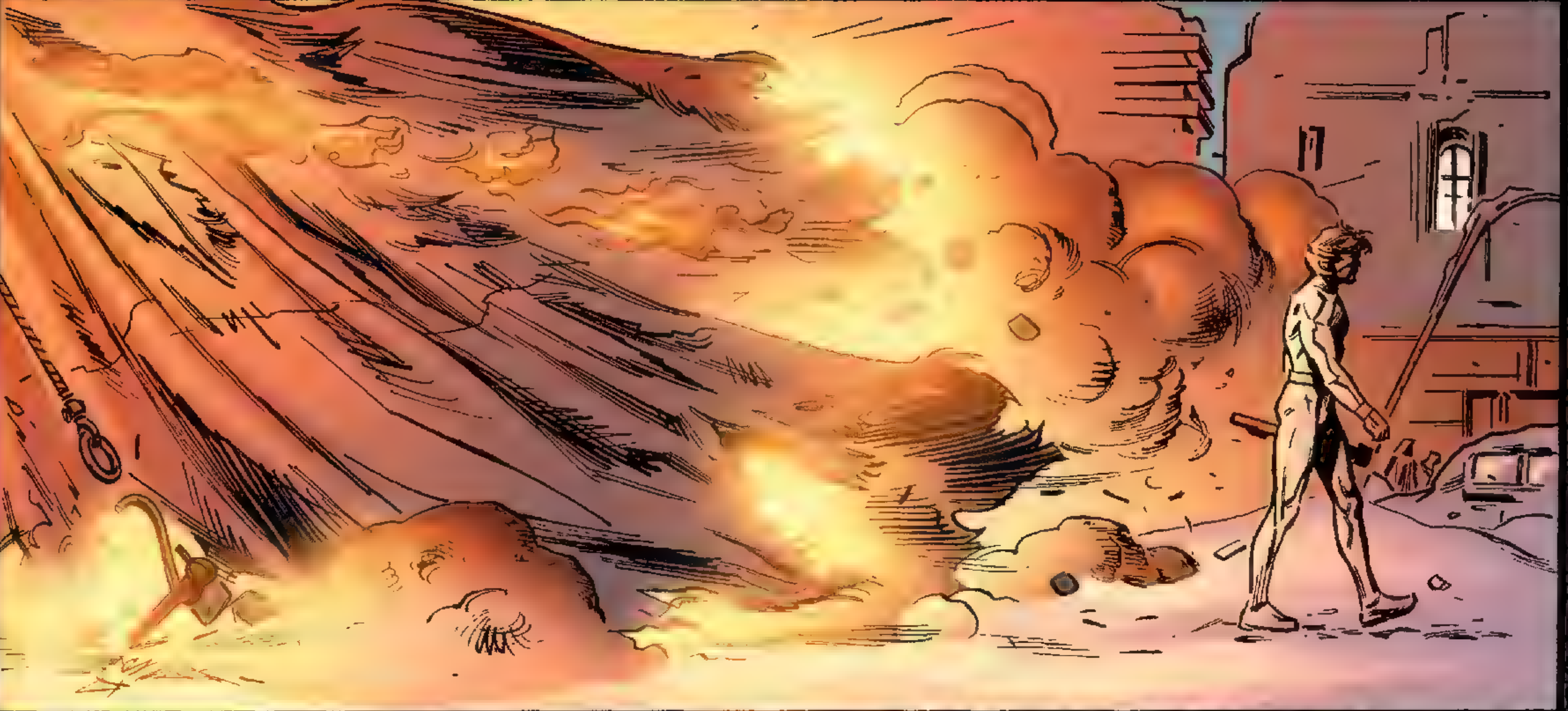
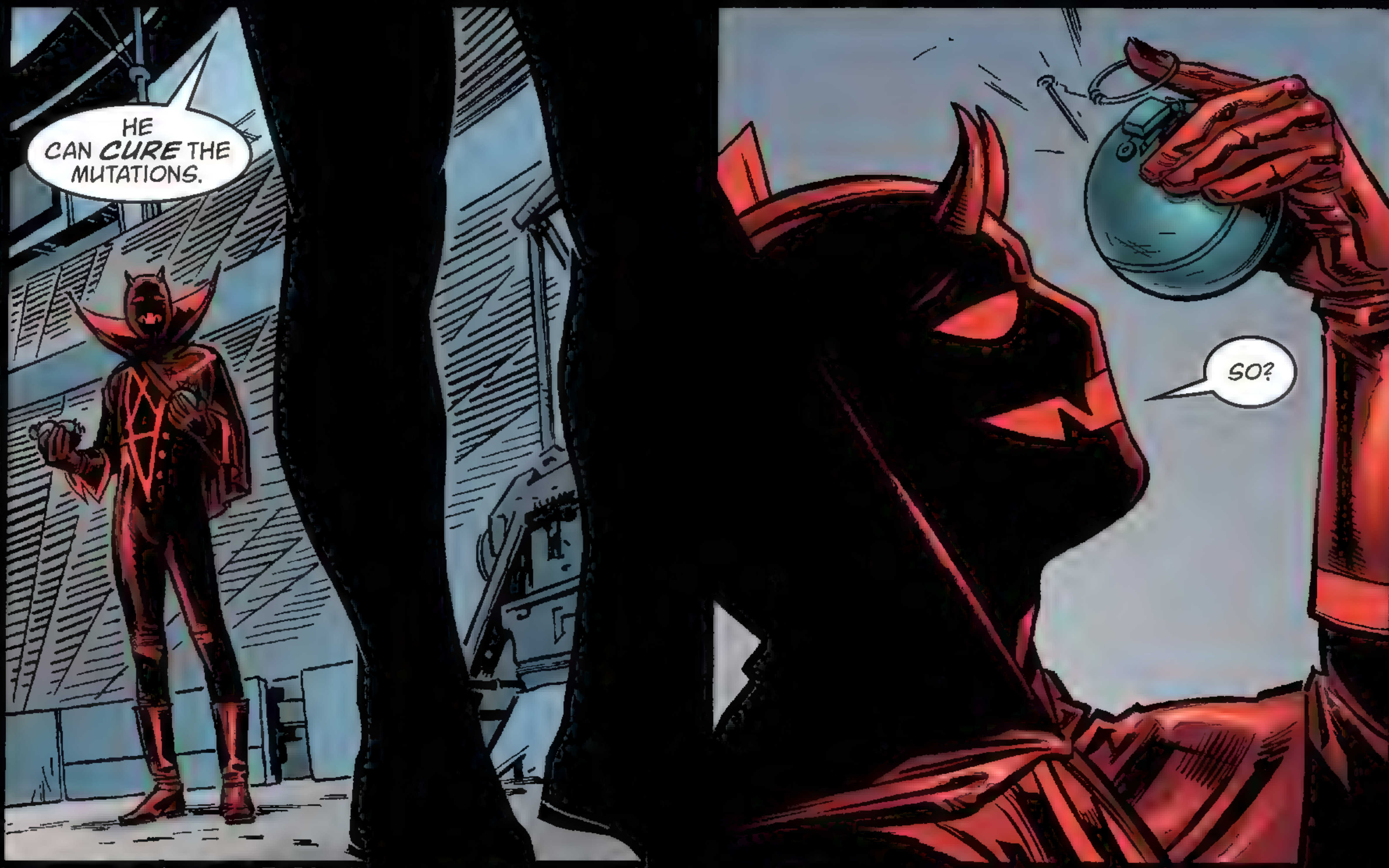


YOU SURE YOU
WOULDN'T RATHER
SEE ME EAT A
GRENADE?



REED
RICHARDS IS IN
LATVERIA. HE AND
HIS FAMILY LIVE IN
DOC DOOM'S OLD
CASTLE.

WHAT
DO YOU WANT
HIM FOR?





YOU WERE
RIGHT, IRON MAIDEN.
YOU WERE
RIGHT.

THEY'LL
KILL WHATEVER GETS
IN THEIR WAY NOW. THIS
IS NO DESTINY.



WHAT IS IT WITH US
SPIDEY-TYPES THAT MAKES
US ALWAYS WANT TO TALK
TO OURSELVES?

I JUST
CAN'T **BELIEVE**
I COULD BE SO
WRONG.



YOU
DON'T HAVE TO
GO THROUGH THIS
ALONE.



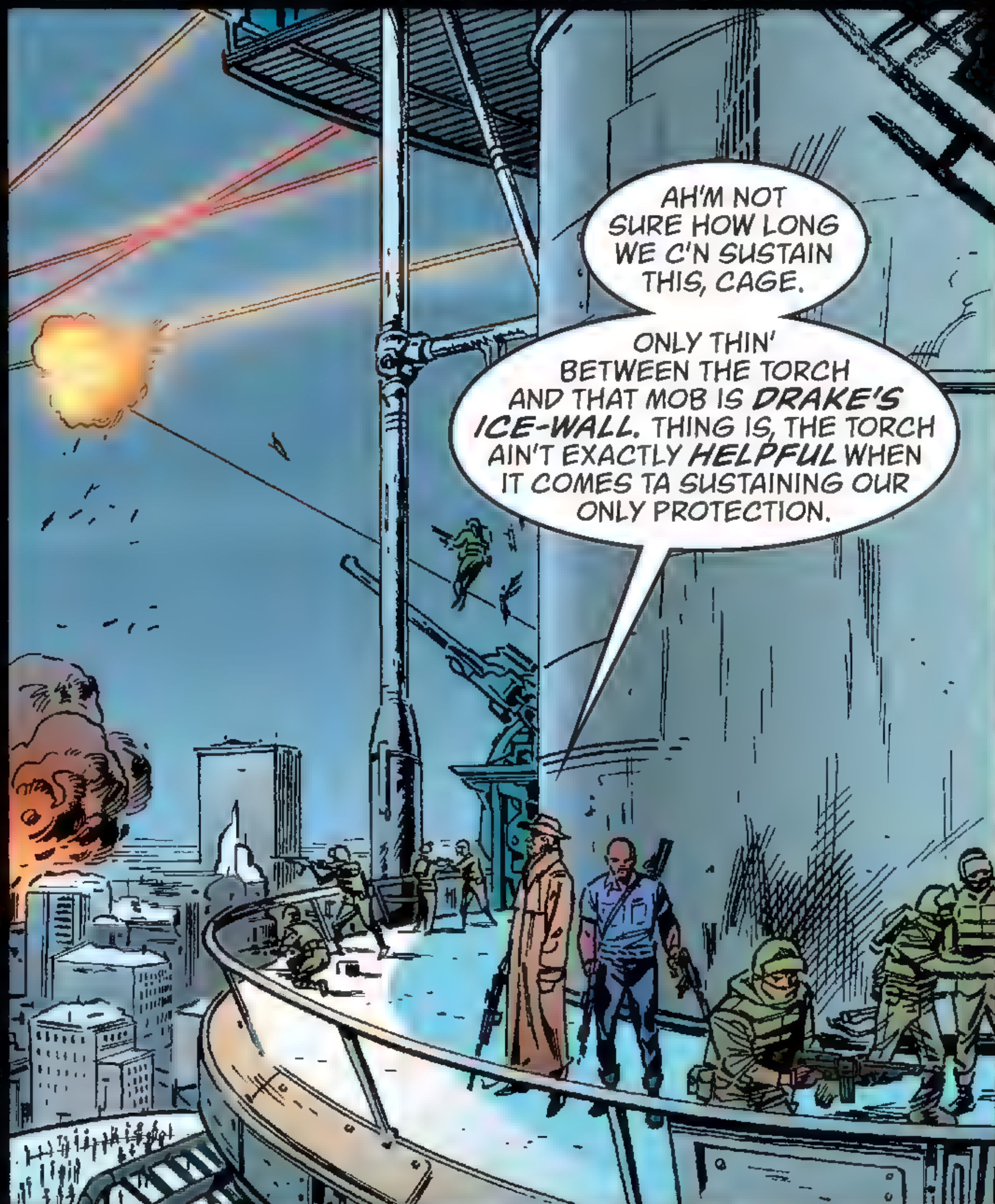
UH...
BOBBY?
THEY'RE
BREAKING
THROUGH...



I'M ON
IT, PETE. KEEP
YOUR COOL!

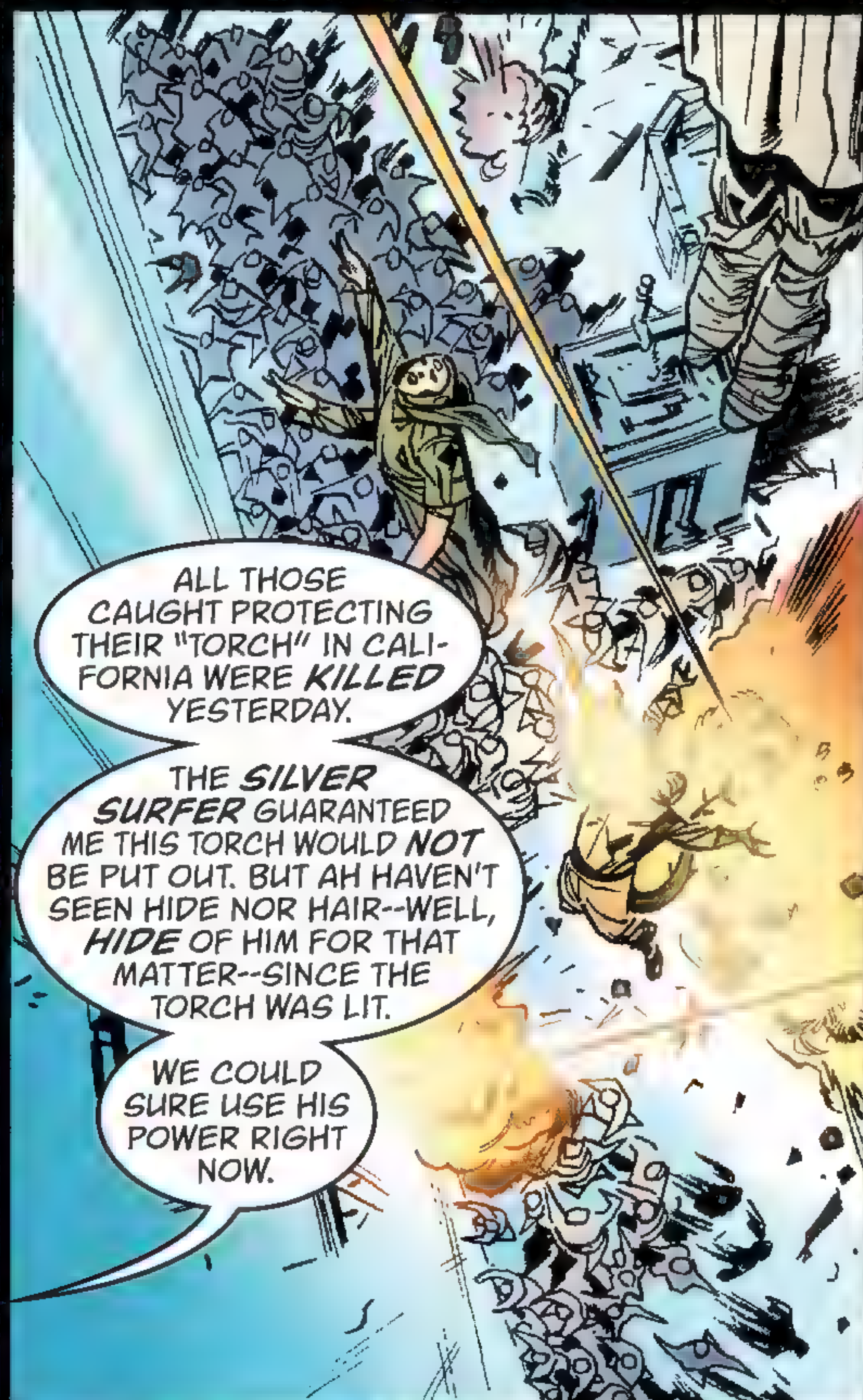


AND PEOPLE
SAY **MY JOKES**
ARE BAD.



AH'M NOT SURE HOW LONG WE C'N SUSTAIN THIS, CAGE.

ONLY THIN' BETWEEN THE TORCH AND THAT MOB IS **DRAKE'S ICE-WALL**. THING IS, THE TORCH AIN'T EXACTLY **HELPFUL** WHEN IT COMES TA SUSTAINING OUR ONLY PROTECTION.



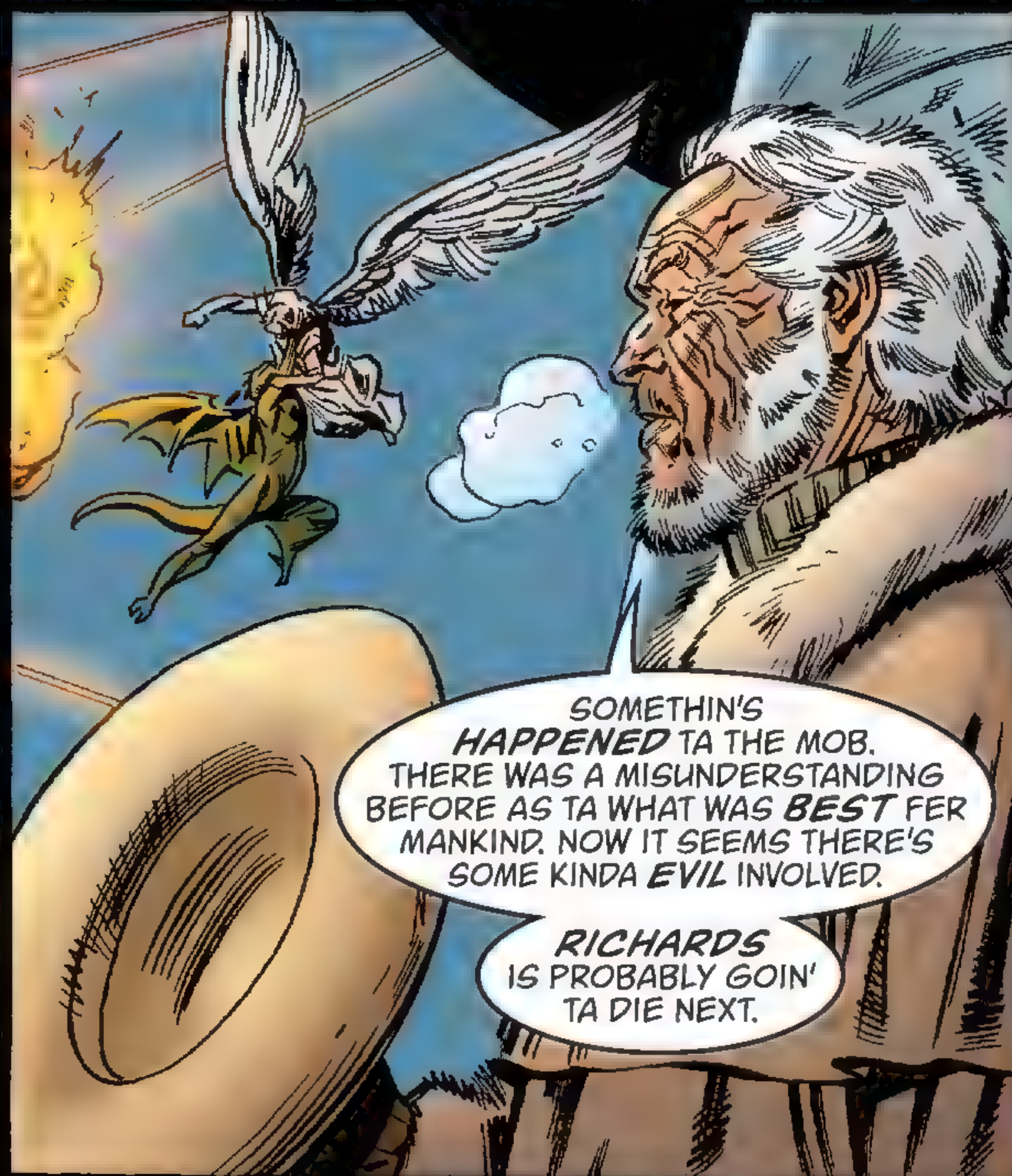
ALL THOSE CAUGHT PROTECTING THEIR "TORCH" IN CALIFORNIA WERE **KILLED** YESTERDAY.

THE **SILVER SURFER** GUARANTEED ME THIS TORCH WOULD **NOT** BE PUT OUT. BUT AH HAVEN'T SEEN HIDE NOR HAIR--WELL, **HIDE** OF HIM FOR THAT MATTER--SINCE THE TORCH WAS LIT.

WE COULD SURE USE HIS POWER RIGHT NOW.

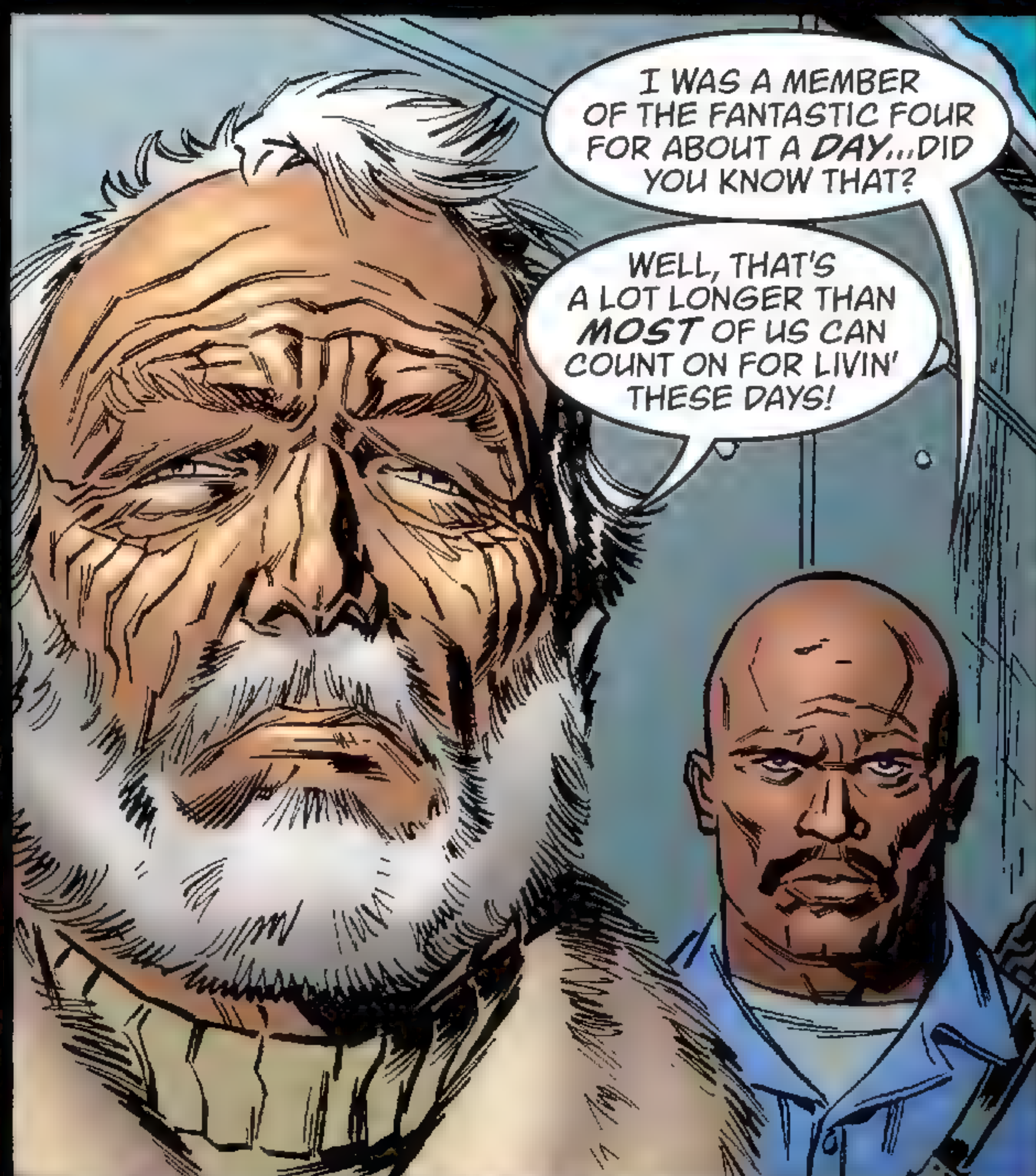


THEN THE TORCHES ARE ALMOST ALL DOUSED.



SOMETHIN'S **HAPPENED** TA THE MOB. THERE WAS A MISUNDERSTANDING BEFORE AS TA WHAT WAS **BEST** FER MANKIND. NOW IT SEEMS THERE'S SOME KINDA **EVIL** INVOLVED.

RICHARDS IS PROBABLY GOIN' TA DIE NEXT.



I WAS A MEMBER OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR FOR ABOUT A **DAY**...DID YOU KNOW THAT?

WELL, THAT'S A LOT LONGER THAN **MOST** OF US CAN COUNT ON FOR LIVIN' THESE DAYS!



JUST LIKE
OLD TIMES, ISN'T
IT, WARREN?

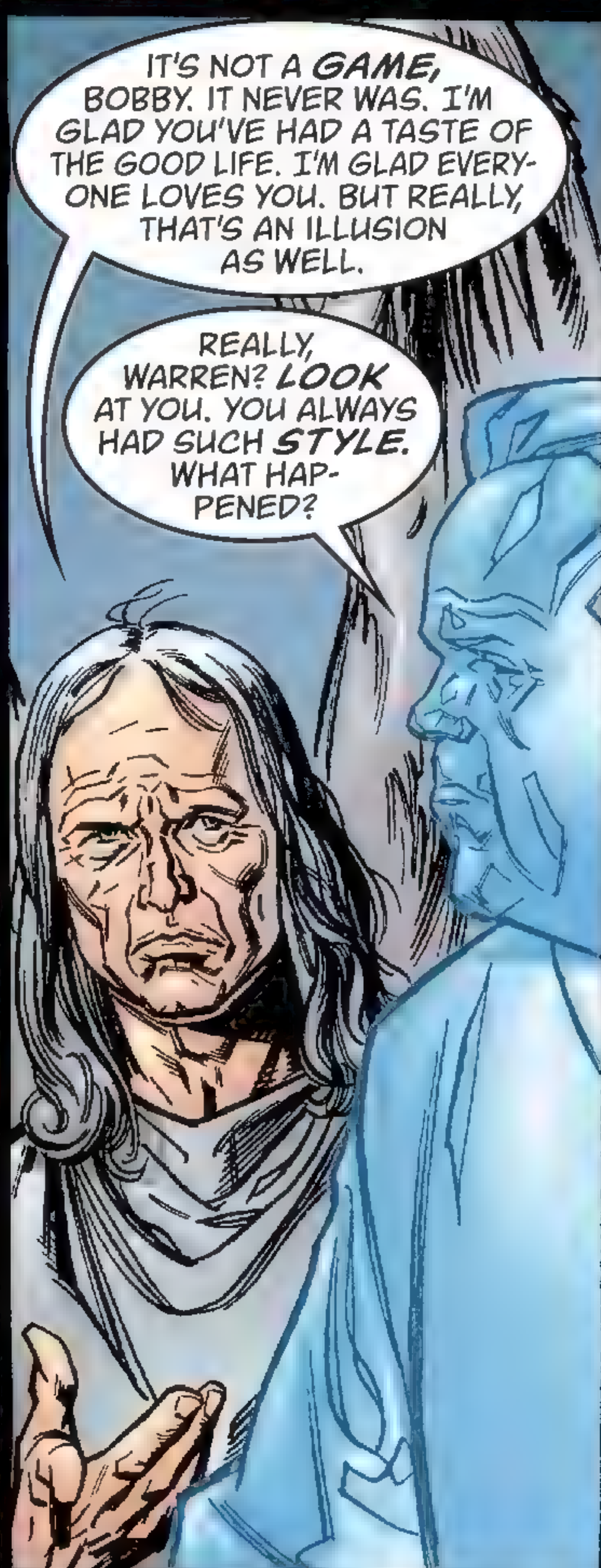


EXCEPT THAT
NOW I'M THE ONE
THAT'S **BETTER
DRESSED!**

AND NOW I'M
THE ONE EVERYBODY
NEEDS TO **SAVE THE DAY!**
I'M JUST TRYING TO FIGURE
OUT IF THIS IS LIKE THE DEFEND-
ERS, THE CHAMPIONS OR
THE X-MEN RIGHT
NOW.

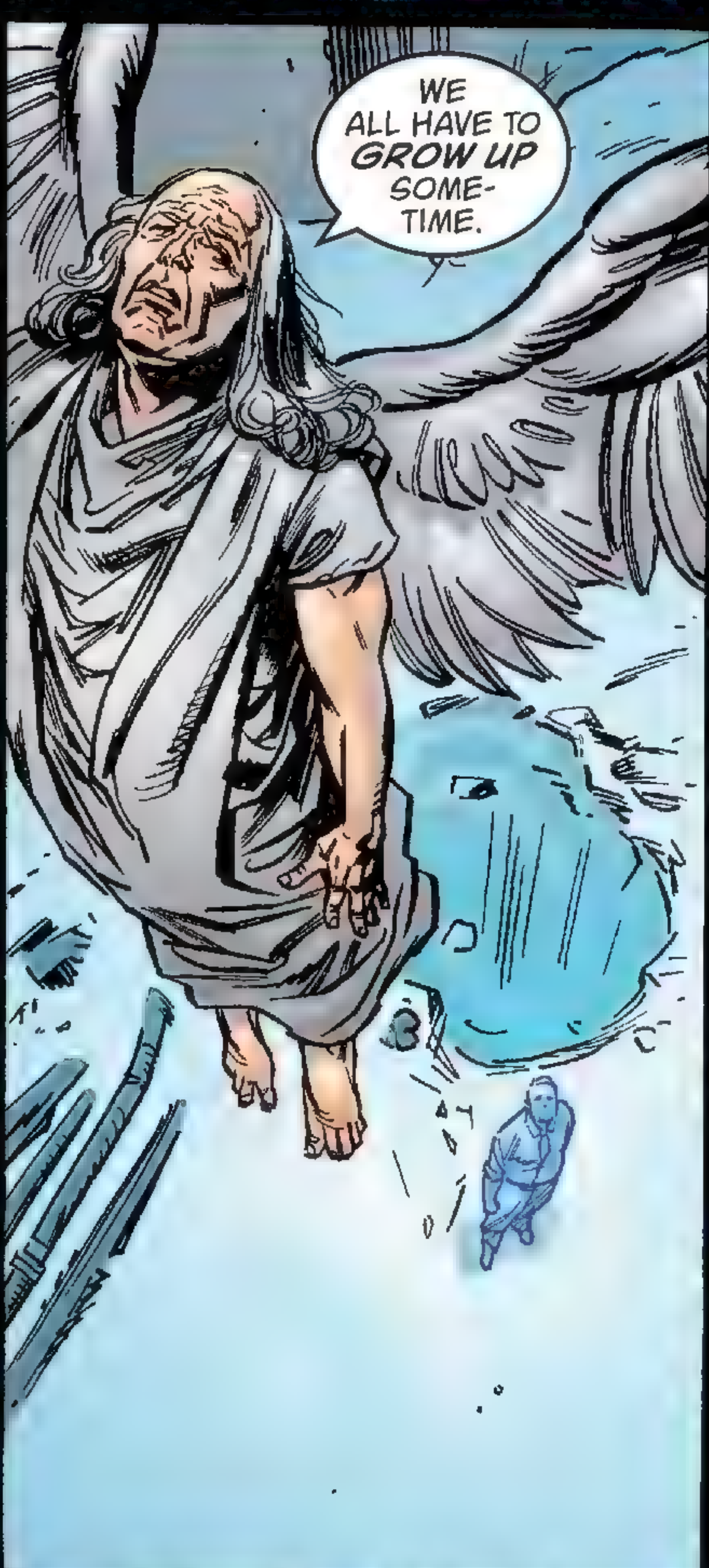


THE ALL-NEW,
ALL-DIFFERENT
X-DEFAMPIONS?
WHAT DO YOU
THINK?



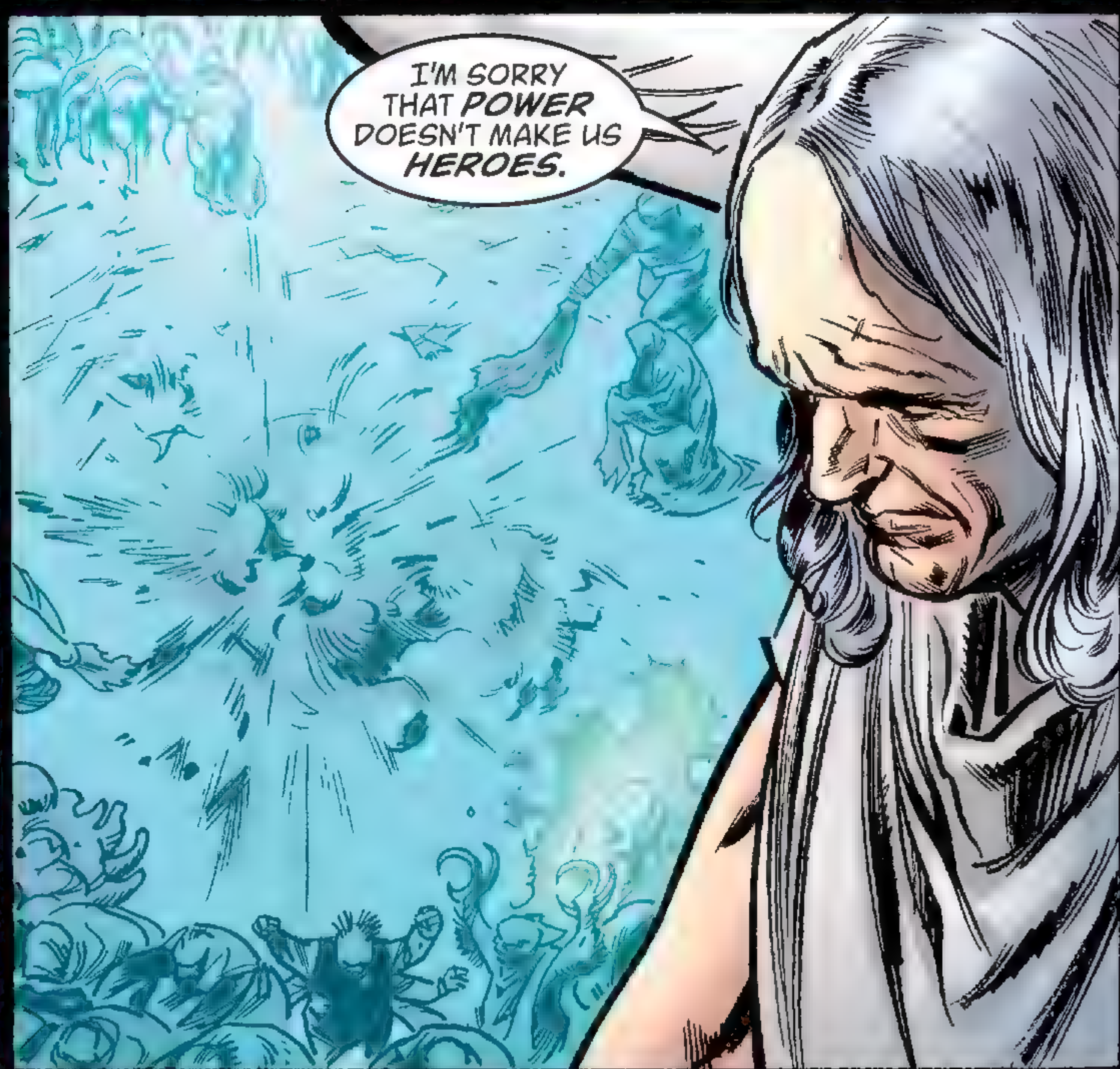
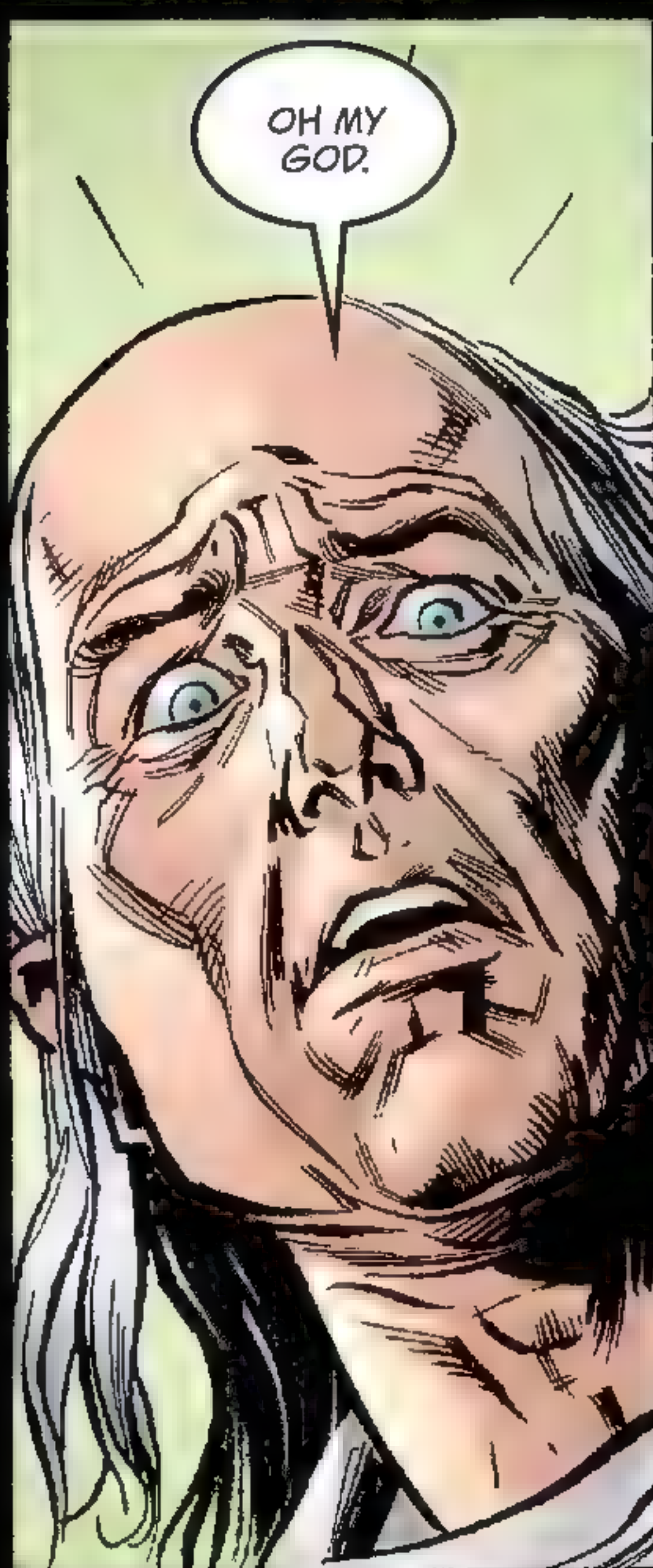
IT'S NOT A **GAME**,
BOBBY. IT NEVER WAS. I'M
GLAD YOU'VE HAD A TASTE OF
THE GOOD LIFE. I'M GLAD EVERY-
ONE LOVES YOU. BUT REALLY,
THAT'S AN ILLUSION
AS WELL.

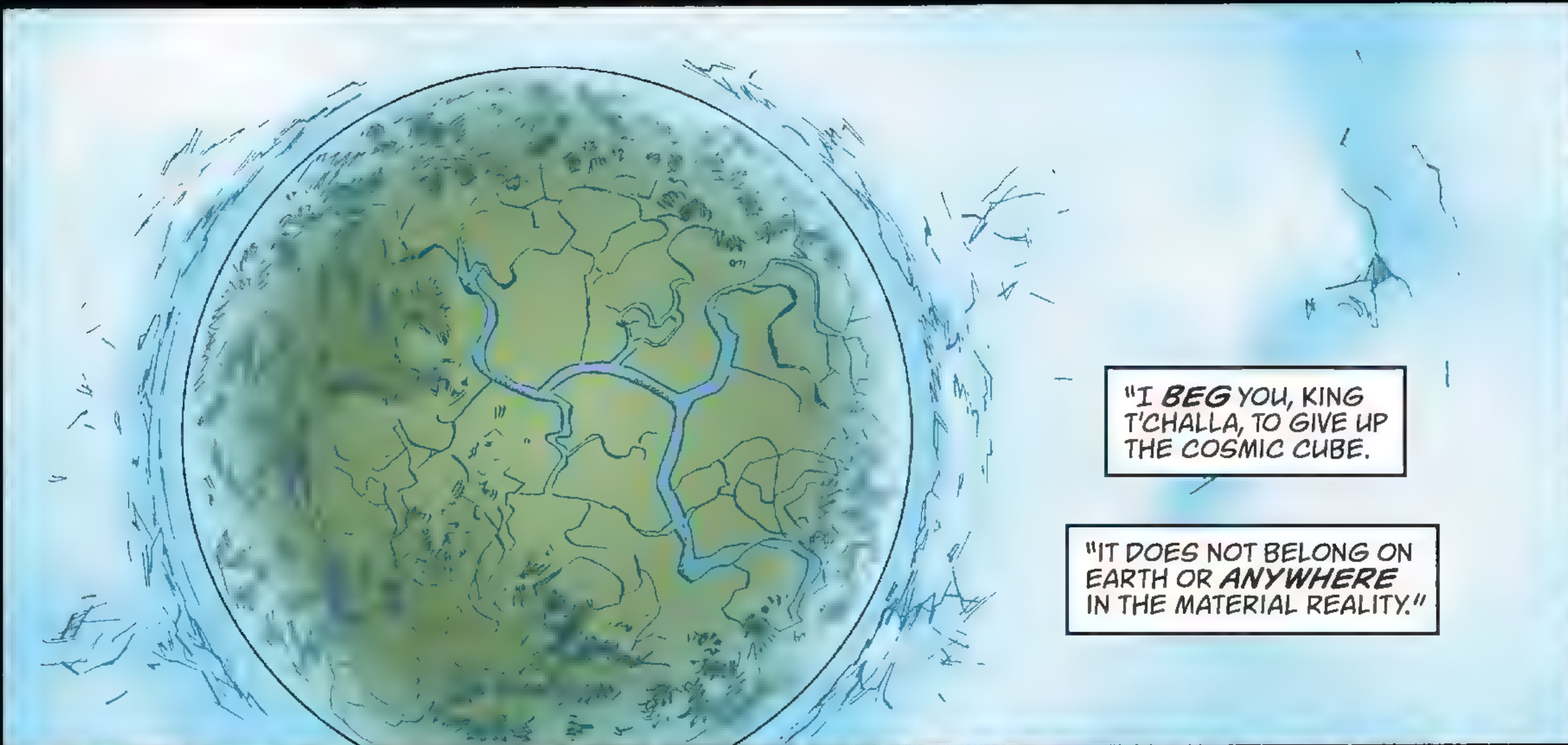
REALLY,
WARREN? **LOOK**
AT YOU. YOU ALWAYS
HAD SUCH **STYLE**.
WHAT HAP-
PENED?



WE
ALL HAVE TO
GROW UP
SOME-
TIME.







"I **BEG** YOU, KING T'CHALLA, TO GIVE UP THE COSMIC CUBE.

"IT DOES NOT BELONG ON EARTH OR **ANYWHERE** IN THE MATERIAL REALITY."



NO. MY HEART WAS **BROKEN** WHEN I HEARD THE NEWS OF STEVE ROGERS' DEATH. I COULD NOT GIVE THE CUBE TO STEVE BECAUSE OF MY **RESPECT** FOR HIM.

CAN I DO ANY **LESS** FOR YOU?



EXCUSE ME, YOUR HIGHNESS, BUT THIS COLLECTION OF POWER IS THE **REASON** STEVE DIED.



STEVE BELIEVED THAT **MAR-VELL'S QUEST** WAS MORE IMPORTANT THAN HIS OWN **LIFE**.



THERE MAY BE MORE TO SPEAK ABOUT, WARRIOR.

YOU WILL ALL BE MADE **GUESTS** OF WAKANDAN HOSPITALITY UNTIL YOUR QUEST RESUMES.



...AND ICE-MAN AND ANGEL ARE IN NEW YORK.

ALL TOGETHER AGAIN, IF ONLY TO SAVE THE WORLD.

YO, SCOTT. YOU DIDN'T BRING ANY BEEF JERKY WITH YOU, DID YA? I AM SO SICK OF SALAD!



THERE IS NO MEAT, BOY. HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO TELL YOU THAT, MADROX?

AND IF THERE WERE MEAT, YOU AND YOUR MULTIPLE-SELVES WOULD FIGHT OVER IT!



HOW'S MARRIED LIFE, ORORO?

I NEVER KNEW HOW MUCH I WAS MISSING BEFORE T'CHALLA. HE MADE ME FEEL LIKE A QUEEN LONG BEFORE HE MADE ME ONE.



I KNOW THE EMPTINESS YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT.



SCOTT, I'M SORRY SHE'S GONE, TOO.



REED,
DARLING! THEY'RE
EVERYWHERE!



GET THE BAR
DOWN, CHUCK AND BUZZ!
DON'T LET THEM IN!

GUESS NOW
WE KNOW WHY DAD
ALWAYS CALLED HIM
THE BRAIN.



NEXT
HE'S GOING
TO TELL US
TO *RUN*.



SUSAN, IT'S
GONE.

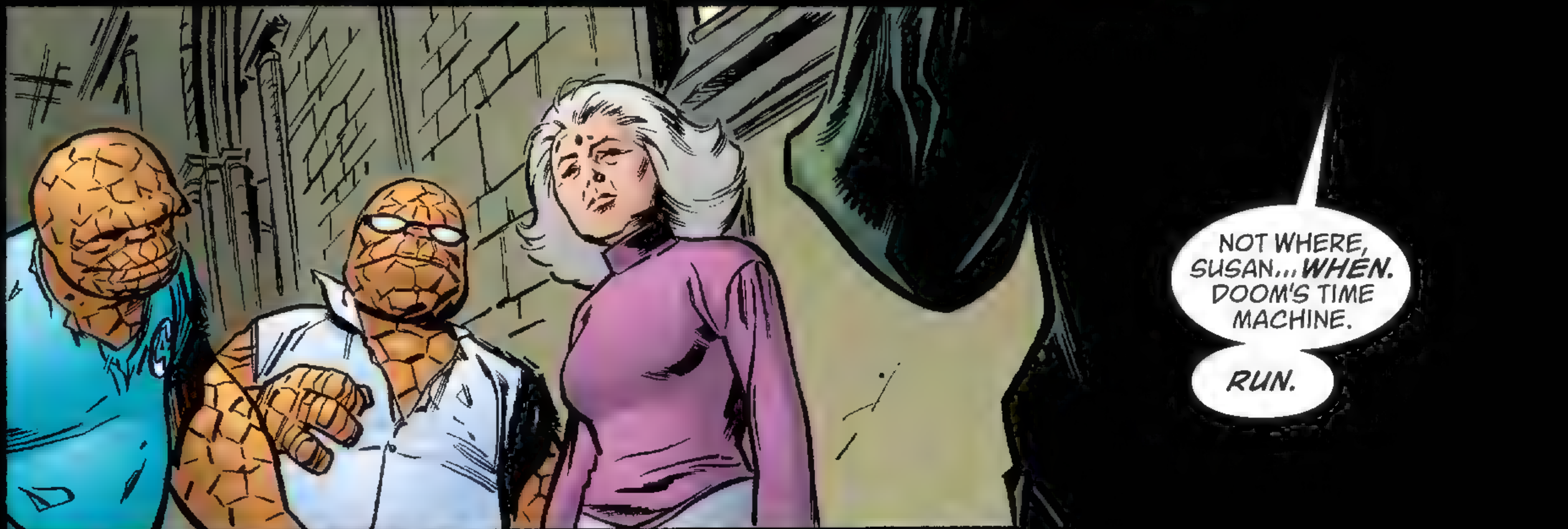
NEVER
MIND THAT NOW,
REED.

NO. THE
HEAD OF CREEL.
IT'S *GONE*.



THE EARLIER ATTACK. IT
MUST HAVE BEEN *STOLEN* BY THE
TONG THEN. IF I DON'T GET IT BACK,
WHO'S TO SAY HOW MANY
PEOPLE WILL *DIE*?

HOW...
WHERE WILL
YOU FIND
IT?



NOT WHERE,
SUSAN... *WHEN*.
DOOM'S TIME
MACHINE.

RUN.



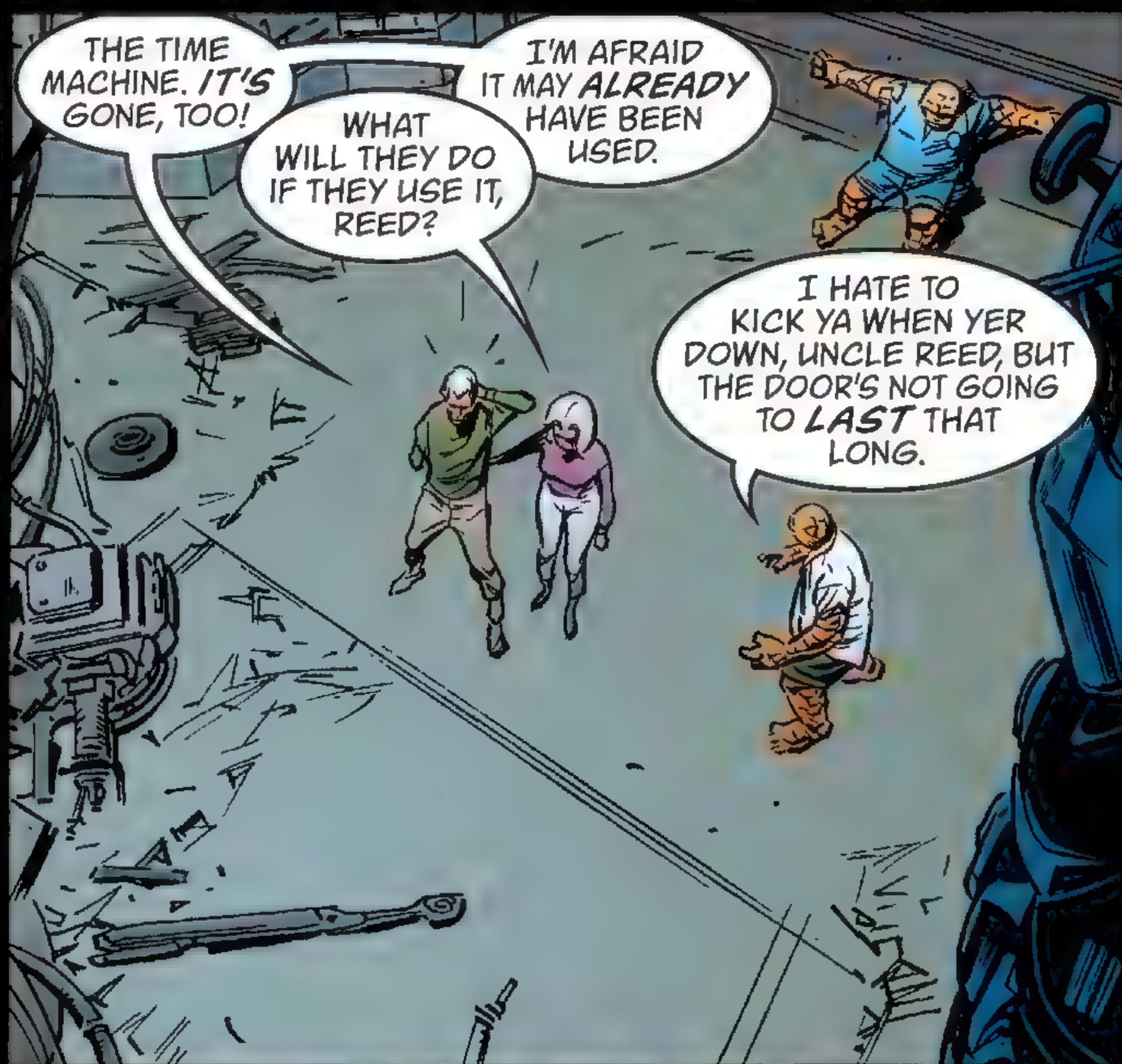
SO WE'RE GOING **BACK IN TIME** TO MAKE CERTAIN CREEL'S HEAD IS HIDDEN FROM THE TONG?

WON'T THAT CREATE ONE OF THOSE **TIME PARADOXES** YOU'RE SO FOND OF TALKING ABOUT?



I WON'T LET **HARM** COME TO YOU AGAIN, DARLING.

I HOPE I WASN'T BROUGHT BACK FROM THE DEAD JUST SO YOU COULD SHIELD ME FROM **DANGER** ALL THE TIME, MR. RICHARDS.



THE TIME MACHINE. **IT'S** GONE, TOO!

WHAT WILL THEY DO IF THEY USE IT, REED?

I'M AFRAID IT MAY **ALREADY** HAVE BEEN USED.

I HATE TO KICK YA WHEN YER DOWN, UNCLE REED, BUT THE DOOR'S NOT GOING TO **LAST** THAT LONG.



OL' DOC DOOM'S GOT A **SECRET PASSAGEWAY** IN HERE SOMEWHERE, RIGHT?

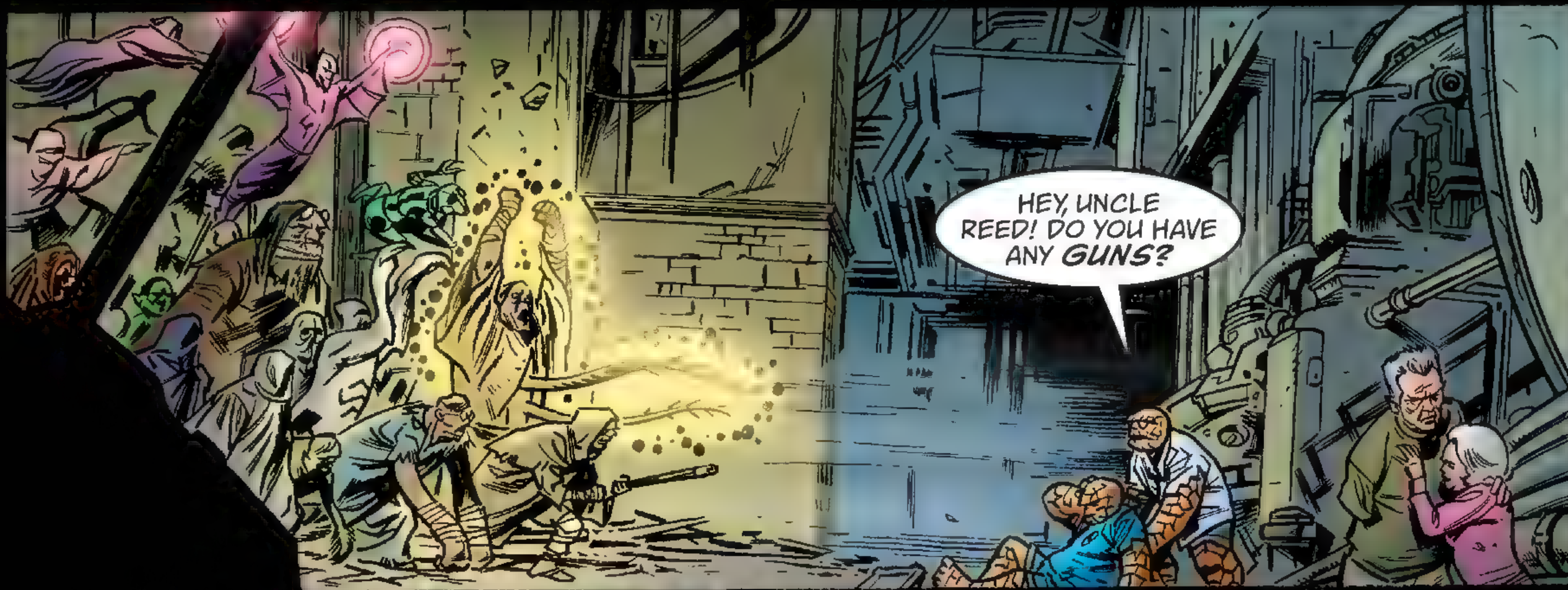
RIGHT?



NOT THAT I KNOW OF THIS WAS A **VAULT**.

CHUCK!

THAT'S BUZZ. I'M **CHUCK!**





WHAT
MAKES YOU THINK
WE WANT TO *STAY*
MONSTERS?



I WAS BEAUTIFUL ONCE!
I WILL BE AGAIN,
YOU FREAK!

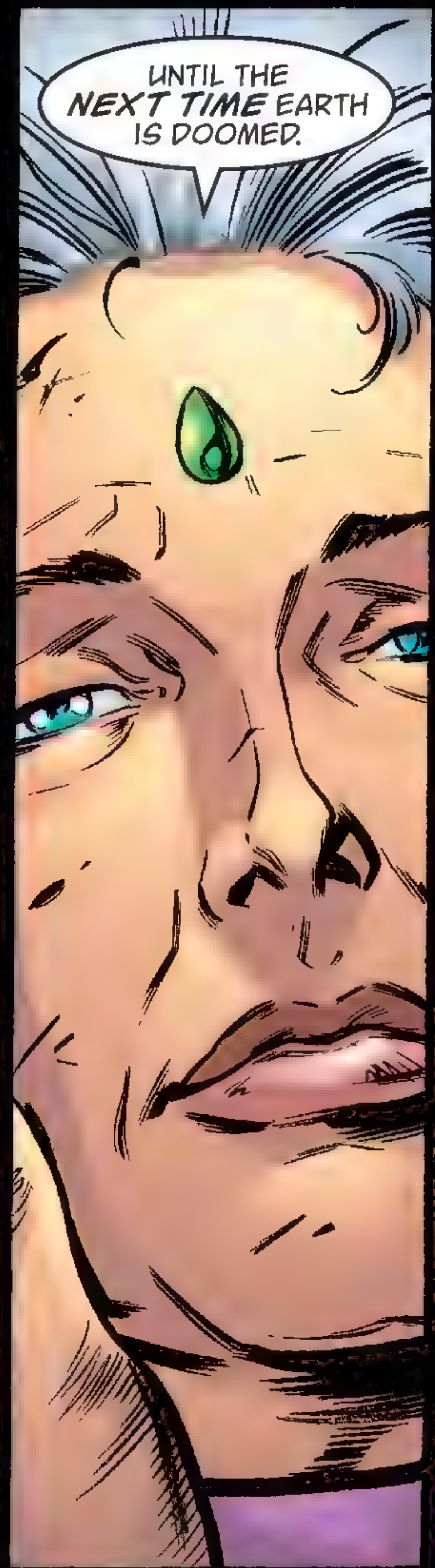
RICHARDS HAS
THE CURE, AND YOU'RE
TOO SICK TO REALIZE
IT!



YOU
SEE, DARLING?
IT'S GOING TO
BE OKAY.



IT'S
GOING TO BE
OKAY.



UNTIL THE
NEXT TIME EARTH
IS DOOMED.



YES,
DARLING.
UNTIL NEXT
TIME...



HAVE YOU
EVER SEEN
ANYTHING SO
COOL?

WHY DON'T
THEY SHOW THIS
KIND OF STUFF
ON TV?



SO WHO
ARE THE
GOOD
GUYS?

THE
REALLY UGLY
ONES. YOU
READY?



ROCK ON!

"In heroism,
we feel, life's
supreme
mystery is
hidden."
—William
James

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER EIGHT

W R I T T E N B Y
J I M K R U E G E R

"It is strange to know that all I have seen of Earth history is a sort of tunnel vision for the true conflicts of the universe.

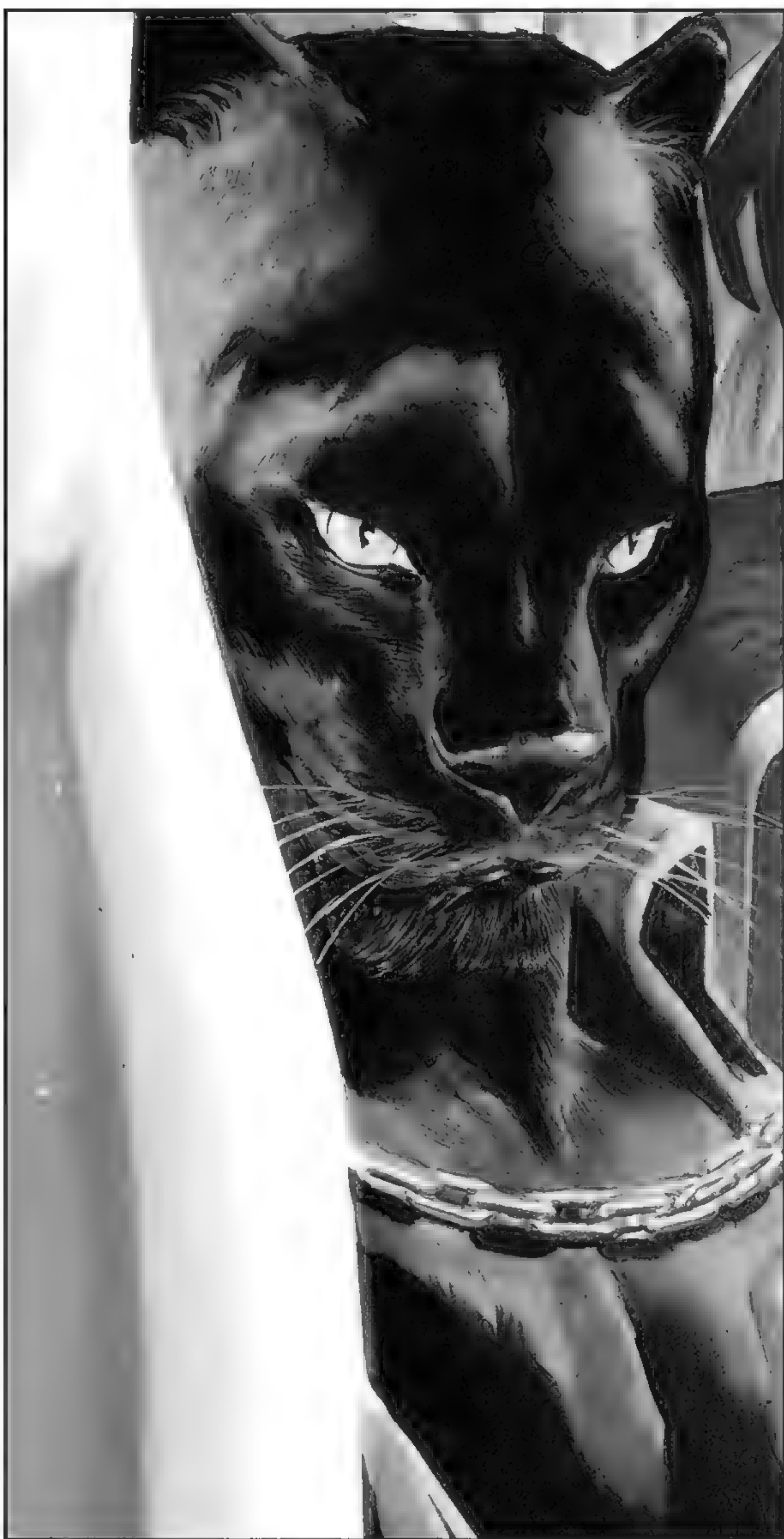
"I am Aaron Stack, and I believe that I am on the eve of discovering a conspiracy that will account for not only the creation of alternate realities but somehow explain Mar-Vell's quest for artifacts of tremendous power on Earth and his decision to confront Death in her own realm.

"The members in this conspiracy must, I believe, include Death, Thanos, Mephisto and the Supreme Intelligence. I do not yet know how the Supreme Intelligence has become entwined with the others, but the relationship between them is evident. Or, at the very least, they are tied to each other through their relationship with Mar-Vell. Somehow Mephisto is serving as both catalyst and recipient of the partnership between these parties.

"Mephisto has taken many shapes throughout history. Mr. Church is merely another in a long line. He was responsible almost three years ago for creating the unrest in mutaninity, telling them that a child would be born who would mark the end of their new-found power and abilities.

"This led to the need to hide the Mar-Vell child, once born, in Namor's underwater realm. It also led to the mob-enforced separation of Mar-Vell's parents, Adam Warlock from his mate, Eve, out of the fear that these two beings might mate and thus produce another offspring in addition to Mar-Vell that would grow to threaten the power they now have. Power, again, which they would not have, if the King of the race known as the Inhumans had not released mutating Terrigen Mists into the atmosphere for the sole purpose of saving his people from the bigotry and prejudice of a nun-mutated humanity.

"I wonder if this mob rule wasn't the beginning of Mephisto's that is, Mr. Church's, attempt to lure Immortus from Limbo to Earth. Was the mob rule of mutaninity some beginning attempt to convince Immortus that mutaninity needed an alternative to blind democracy, that mankind needed a belief system to fill in the holes that no social structure could ever even hope to answer? Was the mutated of aggression of this new humanity something that Church was attempting to take advantage of even before



Galactus attacked the Celestials in New York Harbor?

"This would require at least a partial knowledge of future events, which, of course, would lead him to the one man on Earth he knew would have the ability to foretell what was, indeed, coming— Kyle Richmond.

"But Richmond was an enemy. He knew Mephisto, perhaps, too well. And so Mr. Church decided to strike at Richmond through Richmond's friend and ally, Isaac Christians, that over a hundred years before, entered into a pact with a demon and found his soul trapped within the body of stone. Christians became the Gargoyle and regretted it from that day forward.

"Richmond's eyes were given him by Mephisto in the first place. They were a piece of the Cosmic Consciousness that was once given Captain Marvel, a soldier of the Kree Empire, who was sent to Earth by the Supreme Intelligence.

"In Mar-Vell's hands, the Consciousness allowed Mar-Vell to defeat Thanos and his love, Death, time and time again.

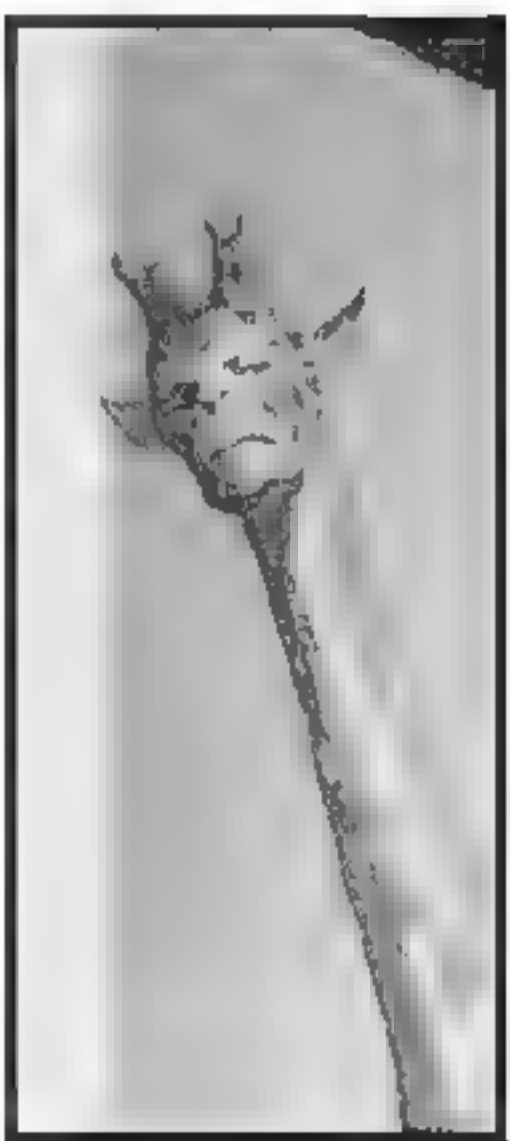
"In Richmond, a foolish and broken man, Mephisto had found an apt puppet, a filter through which knowledge might be gleamed without fear of the effects omniscience

might have on Mephisto himself.

"I am guessing at best when I record that what Mephisto fears most is the knowledge that he... it was wrong. Too much knowledge might suggest that love is indeed stronger than hate. That life is greater than death. That truth, the better than opinion and personal perspective.

"That loyalty is greater than rebellion.

"Or perhaps not. Perhaps there is no meaning.



"But then, would I not prefer the lie?

"Perhaps it is in this that the Devil is most like the humanity of which I am a part."



A UNIVERSE  SPECIAL

BEASTS

MARVEL
COMICS

KRUEGER
YEATES
RANDALL
TOTLEBEN

MARVEL





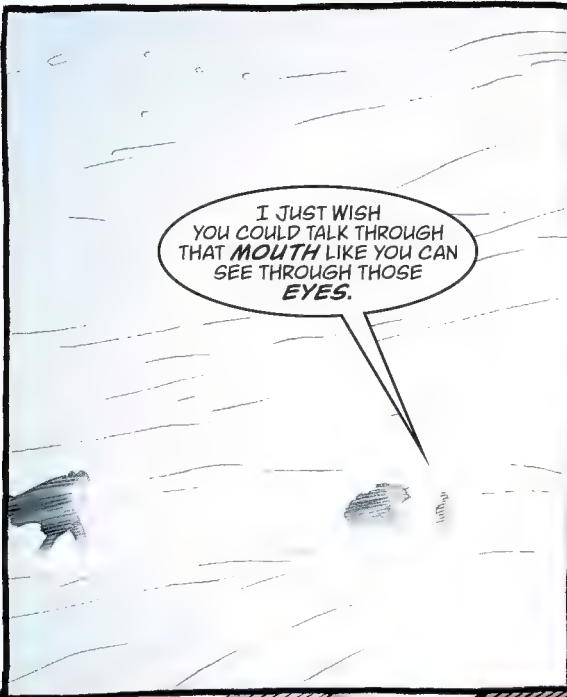
UNIVERSE X: BEASTS



I
WANT TO SAY
WE'RE GETTING
CLOSER,
BRUCE...



...BUT WE
COULD BE GOING
IN **CIRCLES** FOR
ALL I CAN SEE.



I JUST WISH
YOU COULD TALK THROUGH
THAT **MOUTH** LIKE YOU CAN
SEE THROUGH THOSE
EYES.

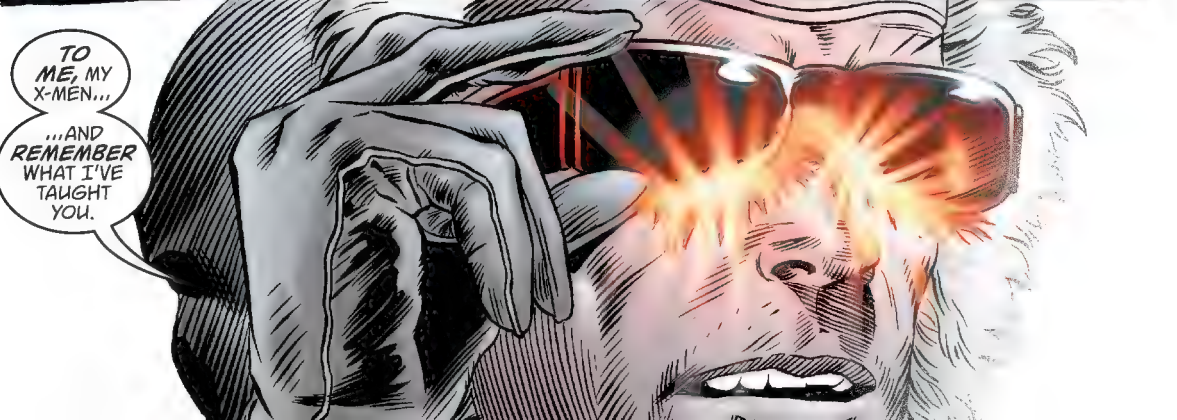


SCOTT!

BRUCE SAYS
THEY'RE COMING
AGAIN.

THEIR
NUMBERS ARE
MULTIPLYING. AND
MY QUEEN CAN'T
HELP US ANY-
MORE!

I KNOW,
KING T'CHALLA.
READY YOUR
PEOPLE!



TO
ME, MY
X-MEN...

...AND
REMEMBER
WHAT I'VE
TAUGHT
YOU.



THERE'S
RUDOLPH'S
SIGNAL!

THAT MEANS
BAD NEWS,
CHARMER.

IT ALWAYS
IS WITH MR. S,
TOWER.

GET IN
FORMATION,
PEOPLE.

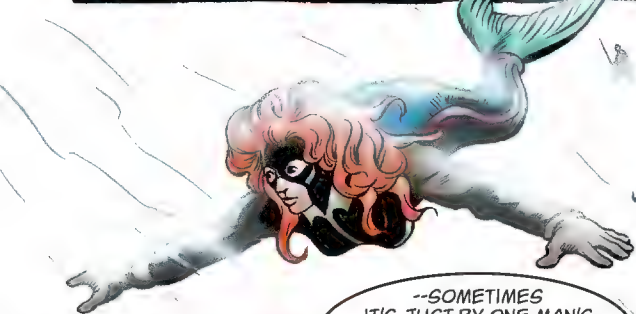
WHAT
HE SAID.

WHAT ARE
THE WENDIGO,
DR. MCCOY?



ACCORDING
TO ALPHA FLIGHT'S
SHAMAN, DOGFACE,
THEY ARE THE RESULT
OF SOME SORT OF
TRESPASS AGAINST
THE NATURAL
ORDER.

SOME
TERRIBLE CRIME
COMMITTED AGAINST
ONE'S PERSON THAT
RESULTS IN THE TRANS-
FORMATION TO
WENDIGO--



--SOMETIMES
IT'S JUST BY ONE MAN'S
SHEER CRUELTY TO ANOTHER.
OFTEN, IT'S WORSE THAN
THAT.



LIKE AN ADDICT,
THEY ARE THE PERSONIFI-
CATION OF HUNGER. THEY
ARE DEMONS.

THEY SAY THE
ONLY WAY TO UNDO THE
CURSE IS THROUGH THE
CONFESSION OF
WRONG.

BUT I'M A
SCIENTIST, AND
DEMONS ARE A HARD
THING FOR ME TO BE-
LIEVE IN...UNTIL I
LOOK IN THE
MIRROR.

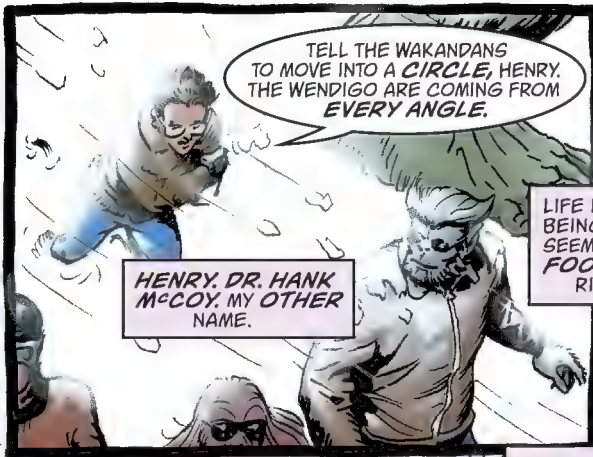


I HAD A NAME ONCE.
IT MADE ME UNIQUE.

BUT THIS WAS BEFORE ALL OF
HUMANITY WAS MUTATED AS A
RESULT OF A CATALYST KNOWN
AS THE TERRIGEN MISTS.

BEFORE EVERYONE
BECAME WHAT I WAS.

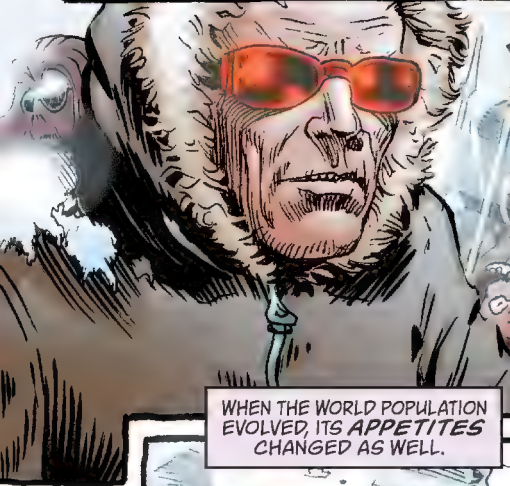
A BEAST.



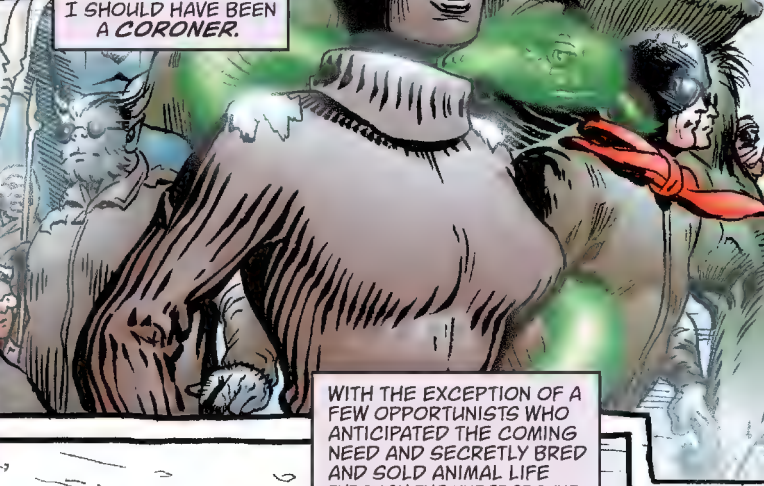
TELL THE WAKANDANS
TO MOVE INTO A **CIRCLE**, HENRY.
THE WENDIGO ARE COMING FROM
EVERY ANGLE.

HENRY. DR. HANK
MCCOY. MY OTHER
NAME.

LIFE IS **STRANGE**.
BEING A DOCTOR
SEEMS LIKE SUCH A
FOOL'S ERRAND
RIGHT NOW.

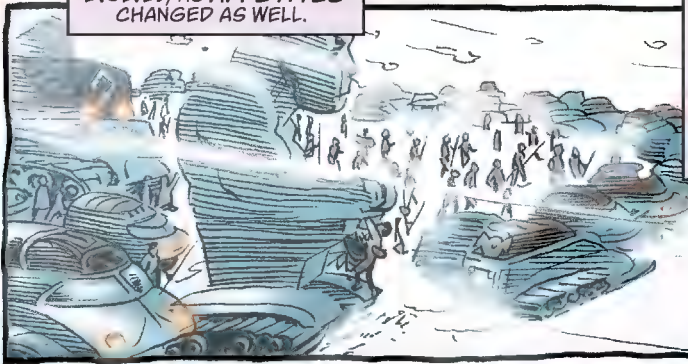


I SHOULD HAVE BEEN
A **CORONER**.



WHEN THE WORLD POPULATION
EVOLVED, ITS **APPETITES**
CHANGED AS WELL.

WITH THE EXCEPTION OF A
FEW OPPORTUNISTS WHO
ANTICIPATED THE COMING
NEED AND SECRETLY BRED
AND SOLD ANIMAL LIFE
THROUGH THE UNDERGROUND,
WAKANDA WAS THE **ONLY**
KNOWN NATION WHERE
MAMMAL AND FOWL
HADN'T BEEN HUNTED DOWN
AND **CONSUMED**.



I STILL FEEL
BADLY ABOUT
HOWARD.



WHAT'S
THAT,
HENRY?

NOTHING,
BRUCE. JUST
THAT OUR HUNGERS
OFTEN GET THE **BEST**
OF US. ARE THE **SOLAR**
FANS GOING TO
LAST?



WHO KNOWS? IF WE
CAN REACH THE **SAFETY** OF
THE **SAVAGE LAND**, THEN
MAYBE.

NICE TO
SEE YOU HAVEN'T
LOST YOUR SENSE
OF **IRONY**,
BRUCE.



I SOMETIMES WONDER HOW
SOON THESE SAME APPETITES
WILL BE **TURNED** ON EACH
OTHER.

AND THEN I REALIZE
ALMOST INSTANTLY
THAT THEY **ALREADY**
HAVE.

WHEN THE WENDIGO FIRST ATTACKED THE SHORES OF AFRICA AND THE LANDS SURROUNDING WAKANDA, I BELIEVED THEY WOULD BE **INCAPABLE** OF BREAKING THROUGH THE **DEFENSES** I HAD DESIGNED FOR KING T'CHALLA.

BUT THERE WAS ONLY **ONE** OF THEM AT FIRST. **AT FIRST.**

JAMIE MADROX AND I HAD CREATED WHAT WE BELIEVED TO BE THE **PERFECT DEFENSE.**

POOR JAMIE...HE WAS THEIR **FIRST VICTIM.** THERE WAS HARDLY ENOUGH **LEFT** OF HIM TO BURY.

THEIR NUMBERS AND HUNGERS **HOLLOWED AWAY** AT EVEN OUR **BEST INTENTIONS.**



I'M HERE FOR THE **COSMIC CUBE**, KING T'CHALLA. YOU ARE HEREBY **RELEASED** FROM THE PROMISE YOU MADE TO **STEVE ROGERS**. YOU NEED NO LONGER CONSIDER YOURSELF ITS **PROTECTOR.**

NO.

YOUR **NUMBERS** DON'T FRIGHTEN ME, MAR-VELL. NOR AM I MOVED BY YOUR **CRUSADE**. IT HAS ALREADY TAKEN THE LIFE OF ONE OF THE **GREATEST WARRIORS** I HAVE EVER KNOWN.



NO ONE SHOULD HAVE THE **POWER OF GOD**. STEVE **KNEW** THIS. THAT'S WHY HE ENTRUSTED THE CUBE TO **MY CARE**, KNOWING IT WOULD NOT BE USED.

BUT **HASN'T** IT, T'CHALLA?

THE **COSMIC CUBE** IS A WEAPON THAT COULD AFFECT THE **PRESENT** ALONG WITH THE **PAST**. TO MY KNOWLEDGE, IT HAS **NO LIMITS.**

IT COULD UNDO THE **RE-POLARIZATION** OF THE WORLD.

IT COULD UNDO THE **MUTATIONS** OF MAN.

ALL OF THEM.

THERE NEEDN'T HAVE EVER BEEN A **MUTANT CRISIS** OR AN **X-MEN.**



CHARLES
NEED NOT
HAVE **DIED**.

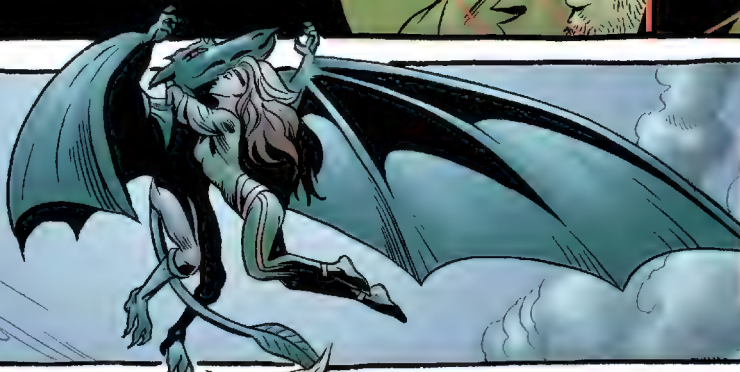


THE SKULL'S PSYCHIC BIRTH
NEED NOT HAVE DESTROYED
XAVIER'S **MIND**, FOREVER
SEVERING THE **BOND** THAT
HELD THE X-MEN TOGETHER.



REMY **LEBEAU** MADE ENEMIES--
ALL KINDS. MOST PEOPLE DIDN'T
HATE GAMBIT BECAUSE HE WAS
A **MUTANT**, BUT BECAUSE HE WAS
A **THIEF**.

WE COULD HAVE
PROTECTED HIM.



ROGUE'S SADNESS AT
LEBEAU'S DEATH NEED NOT
HAVE SENT HER AFTER THE
MUTANT-SIPHONING VAMPIRE
SAURON FOR A CURE TO
HER OWN MUTATION. HE
TOOK HER POWER AND
LIFE AWAY FROM HER.



THE BEST LAB ASSISTANT I EVER HAD,
THE **MULTIPLE MAN**, NEEDN'T HAVE
BEEN **DEVOURED**. JAMIE MADROX
DESERVED **BETTER**.



KURT **WAGNER**
DIDN'T NEED TO FIND
HIS **HUMANITY**
AT THE COST OF
HIS OWN **LIFE**.



AND JEAN. AND
KITTY. HOW MANY
OF US HAVE **DIED**
WHO MIGHT NOT
HAVE IF WE HAD
ONLY POSSESSED
THE **CUBE**?



NO.
THE CUBE REMAINS
HIDDEN, UNTOUCHED. UNUSED.
WE HAVE THE **SPIRITS**
TO GUIDE US.

THEY'VE BEEN
GIVEN VOICE IN THE
GREAT BEASTS
OF THE FIELD.

I WILL
TRUST
THEM.



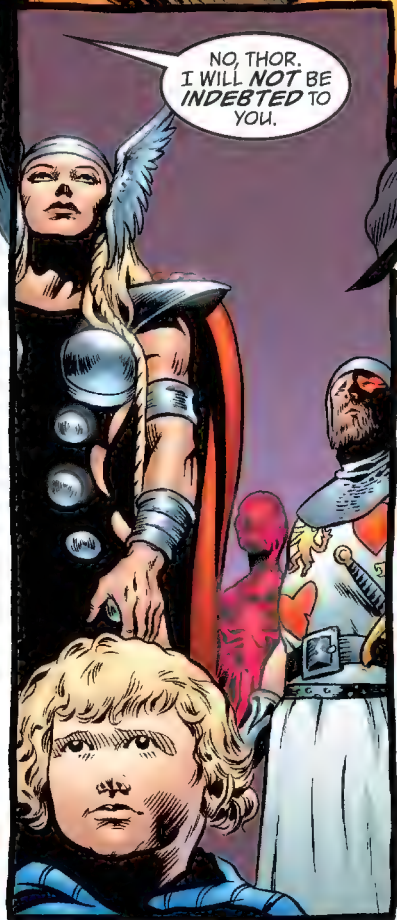
AS IT IS, THERE ARE MEMBERS OF
YOUR PARTY **UPSETTING** THE SPIRITS. AND I
WILL **NOT** ALLOW THIS TO CONTINUE.

I WILL ARRANGE
FOR ACCOMMODATIONS
FOR YOU TO **REST** IN
BEFORE YOU LEAVE.



MY KING! THE WENDIGO
HAVE **BROKEN** THROUGH OUR
DEFENSES!

WE WILL
AID THEE
HOWEVER WE
CAN.



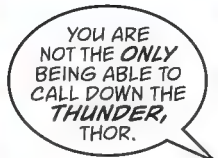
NO, THOR.
I WILL **NOT** BE
INDEBTED TO
YOU.



YOU
SEE NOW, DON'T
YOU?

WHERE
MCCOY'S
SCIENCES
FAILED TO DEFEND
US FROM THESE
SUPERNATURAL
ENEMIES...

...THE
NATURAL
ELEMENTS
THEMSELVES
RISE TO
DEFEND
US.



YOU ARE
NOT THE **ONLY**
BEING ABLE TO
CALL DOWN THE
THUNDER,
THOR.



REED RICHARDS OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR EXPLAINED TO ME THE FACTS SURROUNDING THE **CELESTIAL DEATHS** IN NEW YORK HARBOR THOSE THREE YEARS AGO.

HE TOLD ME OF THE CELESTIALS' **BIOLOGICAL AGENDA** FOR EARTH. OF THE **MUTABLE SEED** PLACED WITHIN MANKIND WHEN THE WORLD WAS YOUNG.

AND HOW THE **CELESTIAL EMBRYO** WITHIN THE PLANET THAT ALL OF MANKIND WAS UNKNOWNLY EMPOWERED TO PROTECT WAS DESTROYED BY **GALACTUS**.

THIS RESULTED IN A WORLD WHOSE **MASS**, AND SOON ITS VERY **ORBIT**, HAS BEEN IRREVOCABLY **ALTERED**.

IT WAS **OUR PLANET** THAT WAS NOW **MUTATING**.

AND IT WAS **KILLING US**.

QUEEN STORM ONCE COMMAND-ED THE CLOUDS WITH A **NOTION...**

...AND **RODE** THE WINDS WHILE ORDERING THE **LIGHTNING** WHERE TO STRIKE ACCORDING TO HER **WHIMS**.

BUT EARTH'S **WEATHER** IS DETERMINED BY THE **POLARITY** OF THE PLANET.

AT LEAST, THAT'S THE **THEORY**.

NOOOOOOOOOOOO!!

ORORO!



ORORO 'STORM' MUNROE
WAS AN X-MAN.

AND PERHAPS THAT IS
REASON ENOUGH
WHY SHE DIED THAT DAY.

HER HUSBAND
WAS A KING.

AND YET HE WAS
POWERLESS
TO SAVE HER...

...APART FROM HIS
BELIEF IN A POWER
GREATER THAN
HIMSELF.

GREAT
SPIRITS, I **BEG**
YOU TO BRING
HER BACK TO
ME.

THAT WAS HOW THIS *EXODUS* BEGAN. WITH THE *DEATH* OF *ORORO*. I WONDERED IF THIS IS HOW IT WOULD *END*, AS WELL?

I THOUGHT OF *ANOTHER TIME*. ANOTHER BLIND WANDERING IN THE SNOW AFTER WE HAD FACED *MAGNETO*. BACK WHEN *JEAN* WAS MY ONLY HOPE TO ESCAPE BEING *FROZEN* TO DEATH.

OF COURSE, *JEAN* IS DEAD NOW, TOO.

WHAT ARE YOU *DOING*, *BRUCE*? THE *HULK* CAN'T FIGHT *NOW*! YOU *KNOW* WHAT HAS TO BE *DONE*!

THE *SOLAR COLLECTORS*! *HURRY*!



THEY CALL ME *DOGFACE* NOW...

...SO I *DON'T* EXPECT YOU TO *WELCOME* ME *BACK*.



BUT YOU *CAN'T* REMAIN AS YOU ARE. IT'S ALL GOING TO BE UP TO *YOU*. I'M *CERTAIN* OF IT.

I STILL HAVE MY *INSTINCTS*.



STOP!



WE'RE ALL JUST **DUMB ANIMALS** CAUGHT IN ANOTHER ICE AGE. THE QUESTION IS WHETHER WE CAN **EVOLVE AND ADAPT**.



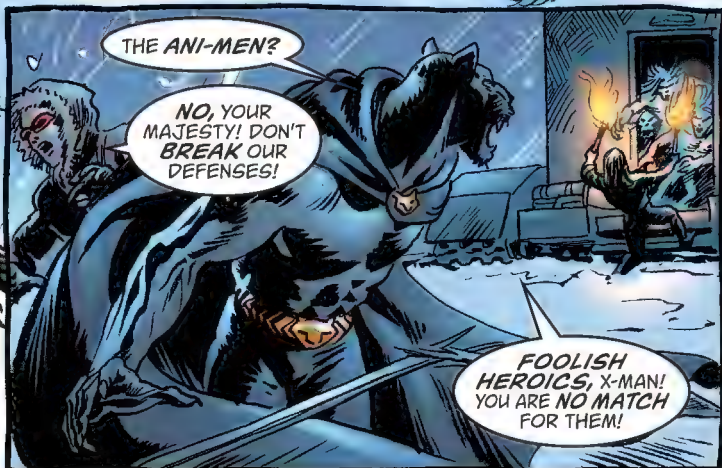
NO!

I WON'T LET YOU HAVE ANOTHER OF US!



THE ANI-MEN?

NO, YOUR MAJESTY! DON'T BREAK OUR DEFENSES!



FOOLISH HEROICS, X-MAN! YOU ARE NO MATCH FOR THEM!

WHO'S THE **FOOL**, YOUR LORDSHIP?



AND DON'T CALL ME X-MAN WITHOUT ALSO CALLING ME ANI-MAN.

I HOPE YOU'RE HURRYING, BRUCE...

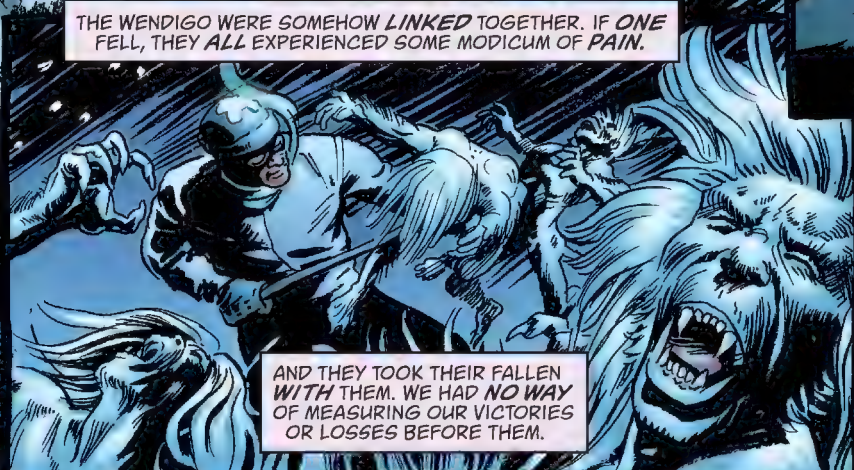




"...BECAUSE THEY'RE
EATING US ALIVE
OUT HERE!"



ALMOST
THERE, SCOTT! ONE
MORE!



THE WENDIGO WERE SOMEHOW LINKED TOGETHER. IF ONE
FELL, THEY ALL EXPERIENCED SOME MODICUM OF PAIN.

AND THEY TOOK THEIR FALLEN WITH
THEM. WE HAD NO WAY
OF MEASURING OUR VICTORIES
OR LOSSES BEFORE THEM.



THAT'S IT,
SCOTT. THEY'RE ALL IN
POSITION!



IT'S
ABOUT TIME,
BRUCE.



TO THIS DAY, I STILL DON'T KNOW IF
SCOTT WAS THE FIRST X-MAN.

CHARLES HAD A TELEPATHIC LIBRARY CARD
THAT LET HIM CHECK OUT **OUR MINDS**,
BUT WE COULD NEVER READ **HIS**.

ALL I KNOW IS THAT SCOTT
WAS THE **BEST** OF US.

I THINK IT'S BECAUSE HE
BELIEVED IN XAVIER'S
DREAM MORE THAN ANY
OF US DID.

HE WOULD HAVE DIED FOR THE
DREAM ALONE.

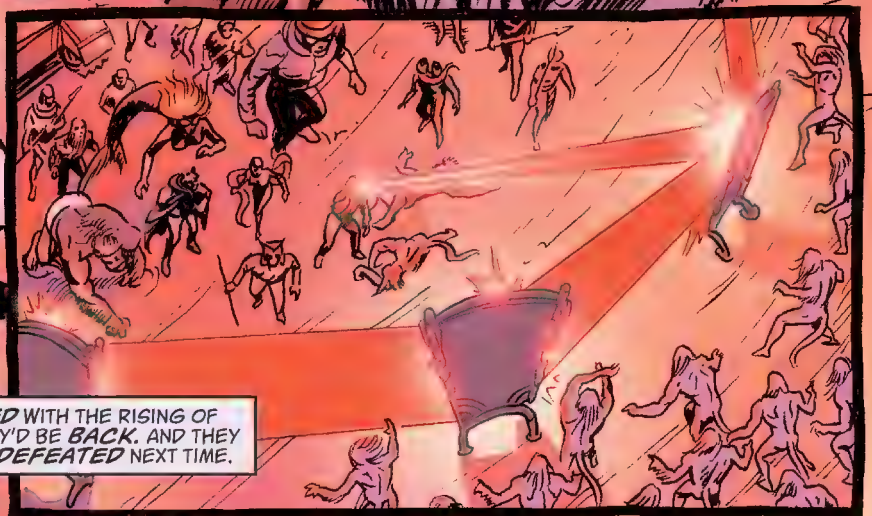
AND WHEN SCOTT LOOKS AT THE
WAY EVERYTHING TURNED OUT, AT A
MUTATED POPULATION THAT
DISBANDED THE X-MEN...

...I THINK HE BELIEVES
THE DREAM **CAME TRUE.**

SOMETIMES I WISH
I HAD THAT KIND OF
BLIND FAITH.

WHATEVER
YOU DO, **DON'T
BLINK.**

THE WENDIGO **RETRACTED** WITH THE RISING OF
THE SUN. BUT WE KNEW THEY'D BE **BACK**. AND THEY
WOULDN'T BE SO **EASILY DEFEATED** NEXT TIME.





THEN AGAIN, I CAN'T FORGET HOW EASILY WE WERE DEFEATED THE **FIRST TIME**. AND THAT HAD **NOTHING** TO DO WITH THE WENDIGO...AND EVERYTHING TO DO WITH **US**.

I KNOW YOU COULD HAVE **THOR** TAKE THE COSMIC CUBE FROM ME, MARVELL.

I KNOW I HAVE **NO CHOICE** HERE.



NO, KING T'CHALLA.

YOU HAVE HAD **FAR TOO MUCH** TAKEN FROM YOU TODAY ALREADY.

AS HAVE WE ALL.

SOMETHING WAS **WRONG** WITH THOR.

SOMETHING HAD HAPPENED ON THE MOON THAT HAD UNNERVED HIM...I MEAN, **HER**.

AND I WONDERED...

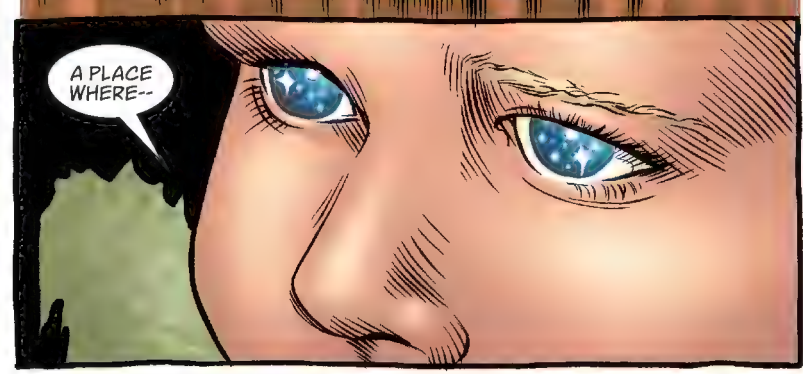
...COULD A GODDESS **LOSE** HER FAITH?

AND WHAT DOES A GODDESS **PUT** HER FAITH IN?



I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT YOUR WIFE IS NOW IN A REALM THAT I HOPE TO **LIBERATE**...

...A PLACE WHERE HER TALENTS AND GIFTS WILL DO **MORE GOOD** THAN THEY EVER COULD HERE ON EARTH.



A PLACE WHERE--





LIKE I SAID,
STORM WAS
AN X-MAN.

AND PERHAPS THAT
WAS **REASON**
ENOUGH TO
COME BACK FROM
THE DEAD.

THANK *THE*
SPIRITS...

I AM
SORRY, MCCOY. THERE IS
SOMETHING **WRONG**
HERE.

SOMETHING
THAT, WHEN REVEALED,
WILL **BREAK** THIS
KING'S HEART.



IT ALL SEEMS **OBVIOUS** TO ME NOW. IF I HADN'T THOUGHT OF IT THEN, SURELY **BANNER** SHOULD HAVE. THE KEY WAS THE **CUBE**.

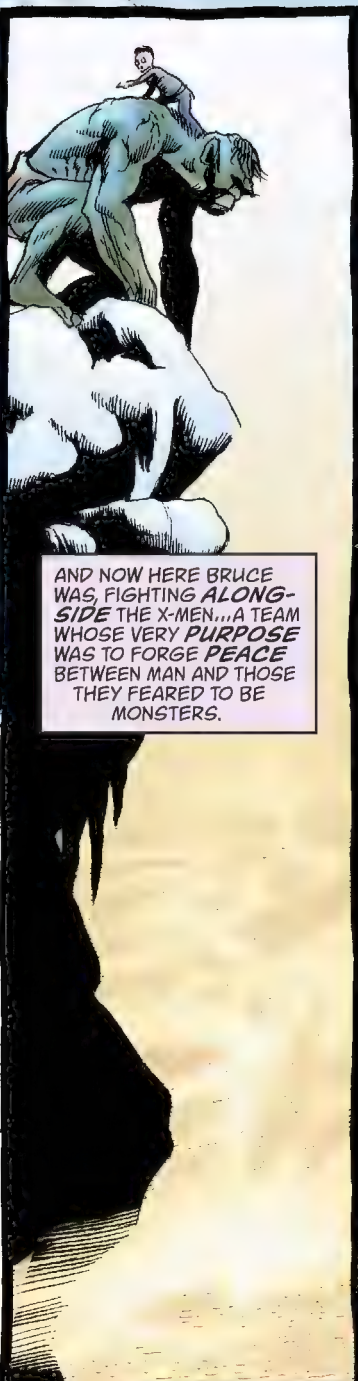
BRUCE BANNER IS THE **HULK**. OR ACTUALLY, HE BECAME THE **HULK** AFTER BEING EXPOSED TO THE GROUND ZERO EFFECT OF A **GAMMA BOMB** HE HIMSELF CREATED.



THE FULL EFFECTS OF THE BOMB ON BRUCE ARE ALMOST **IMPOSSIBLE** TO MEASURE. HIS FORMS AND MUTATIONS HAVE **VARIED** ALONG WITH HIS PERSONALITY OVER THE YEARS.

THE SECRET, OF COURSE, IS HIDDEN IN THE **HEART** OF THE GAMMA BOMB EXPLOSION.

A FISSION EXPLOSION WHICH SEEMS TO HAVE SPLIT THE **MAN** FROM THE **MONSTER**.



AND NOW HERE BRUCE WAS, FIGHTING **ALONG-SIDE** THE X-MEN...A TEAM WHOSE VERY **PURPOSE** WAS TO FORGE **PEACE** BETWEEN MAN AND THOSE THEY FEARED TO BE MONSTERS.



IF ONLY **CHARLES** WERE HERE. HE'D KNOW HOW TO ORGANIZE US. HE'D--

IT WAS A **MISTAKE**, SCOTT. SURELY YOU SEE THIS NOW?

WHAT, BRUCE? WHAT'S A MISTAKE?



THE WHOLE **IDEA** OF THE X-MEN.

YOU WERE **MUTANTS**, FIGHTING FOR THE **RIGHTS** OF MUTANTS. YOUR WHOLE **MOTIVATION** WAS SELFISH.



HOW CAN YOU SAY THIS?

BECAUSE I KNOW A LITTLE ABOUT BEING HUNTED AND HOUNDED...



YOU WERE **CHILDREN...** WITH **NO RIGHT** TO SPEAK AGAINST THE MAN WHO GAVE YOU A **PURPOSE** AND A **HOME**.



HOW COULD YOU SAY THE X-MEN WERE **WRONG**? WE **SAVED LIVES**. WE DIED SO OTHER PEOPLE, PEOPLE WHO **HATED US**, COULD LIVE.



WRONG TO HAVE A **PRIVATE SCHOOL**.



WRONG TO HAVE **SECRET IDENTITIES**.



WRONG TO **SEPARATE** YOURSELVES FROM HUMANITY THE WAY YOU DID.



XAVIER'S SCHOOL FOR GIFTED YOUNGSTERS



YOU ALL NEEDED TO UNDERSTAND THAT PEOPLE HAVE **EVERY RIGHT** TO BE AFRAID OF US.



IT WAS NEVER ABOUT **PREJUDICE** AT ALL.



IT WAS ABOUT THE **BALANCE OF POWER**.

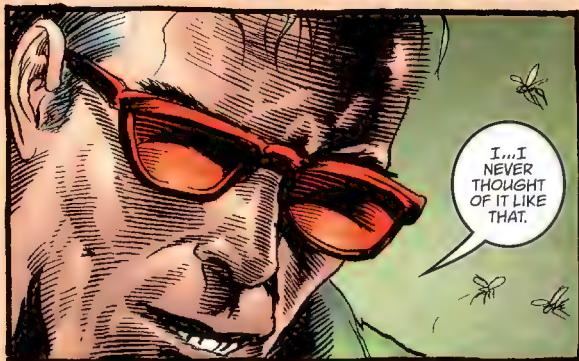


NO. IT **WAS** PREJUDICE... **FEAR**.

WOULDN'T YOU BE AFRAID IF YOUR NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBOR COULD KILL YOU WITH BUT A THOUGHT?

OR IF A SIDEWAYS GLANCE COULD RESULT IN YOUR HOSPITALIZATION?

OR IF THE FULL MANIFESTATION OF YOUR POWER COULD LEAD TO THE ANNIHILATION OF EVERY PERSON ON THE PLANET?



I...I NEVER THOUGHT OF IT LIKE THAT.



DID YOU, HANK?

SCOTT, MY FRIEND...

...WHY DO YOU THINK I JOINED THE AVENGERS?



AND HERE'S LORD PLUNDER NOW!

GREETINGS, MCCOY.

KA-ZAR AND SHANNA'S AID WAS GREATLY NEEDED...



...IF WE WERE EVER TO ESCAPE
THE **PREDICAMENT** THE
CUBE HAD PUT US IN.

THERE,
MAR-VELL. YOU
SEE?

THE CUBE
IS AS I LEFT
IT.

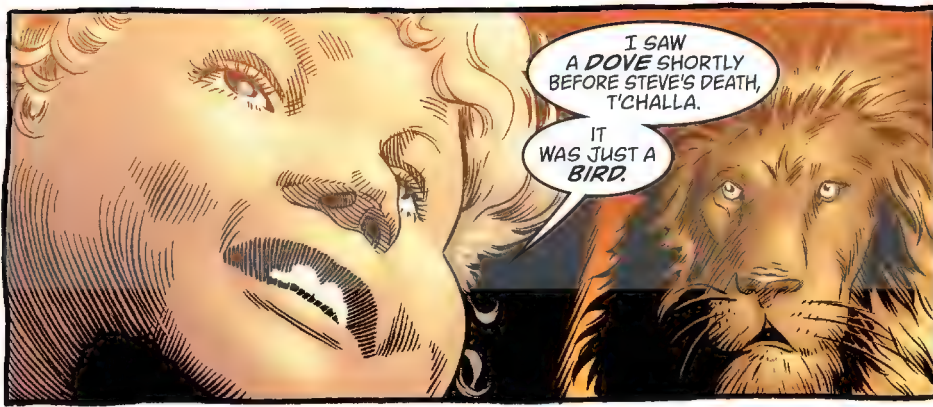
IT HAS NOT
BEEN TOUCHED SINCE
STEVE BROUGHT IT HERE
AND **BEGGED ME** TO
NEVER GIVE IT TO
ANOTHER BEING IN
THE WORLD.

STEVE TOLD
ME WHAT HE'D DONE TO
THE **RED SKULL**.

AND IF STEVE COULD
BE MOVED TO **MURDER** WITH SUCH
MORAL ABANDON... THEN **ANY** OF
US COULD.

THE SEALS HAVE
NOT BEEN BROKEN.
THE CUBE HAS **NOT**
BEEN USED.

SO YOU
SAY...

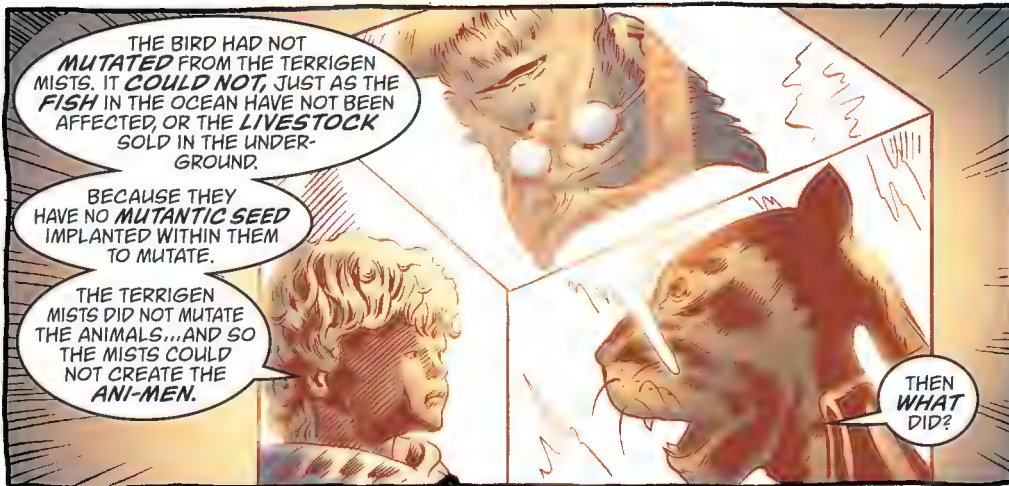


I SAW
A *DOVE* SHORTLY
BEFORE STEVE'S DEATH,
T'CHALLA.

IT
WAS JUST A
BIRD.



I HAVE
NOT TOUCHED
THE CUBE,
MAR-VELL.



THE BIRD HAD NOT
MUTATED FROM THE TERRIGEN
MISTS. IT *COULD NOT*, JUST AS THE
FISH IN THE OCEAN HAVE NOT BEEN
AFFECTED, OR THE *LIVESTOCK*
SOLD IN THE UNDER-
GROUND.

BECAUSE THEY
HAVE NO *MUTANTIC SEED*
IMPLANTED WITHIN THEM
TO MUTATE.

THE TERRIGEN
MISTS DID NOT MUTATE
THE ANIMALS...AND SO
THE MISTS COULD
NOT CREATE THE
ANI-MEN.

THEN
WHAT
DID?



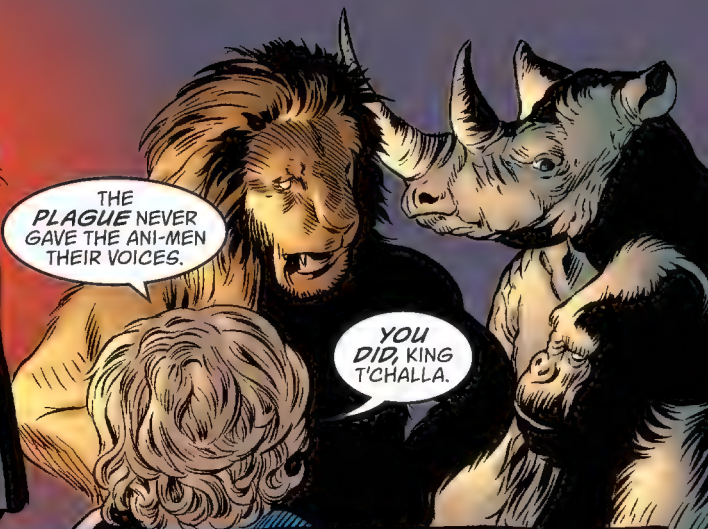
THE *CUBE*.

BUT THE
CUBE HAS NOT BEEN
TOUCHED!

MY GOD,
MAR-VELL...IT
DIDN'T *HAVE* TO
BE TOUCHED,
DID IT?



NO!
WHAT ARE YOU
SAYING?



THE
PLAGUE NEVER
GAVE THE ANI-MEN
THEIR VOICES.

YOU
DID, KING
T'CHALLA.



WHAT?



THE NATURE
OF THE CUBE IS THAT
IT'S A **MANIFESTATION**
OF THE POWER OF
CREATION. A POWER
THAT GOES **BEYOND**
NATURAL LAW.

YOUR
FAITH MUTATED
THEM AND GAVE
THEM VOICE IN
CONJUNCTION
WITH THE
CUBE.

JUST AS
IT WON **YOUR**
QUEEN FROM
THE REALM OF
DEATH.



NO! THEY
ARE THE **VOICES**
OF THE **GREAT**
SPIRITS! DON'T
DOUBT THAT!

BUT HOW
CAN YOU TELL A
SPIRIT WHAT
NOT TO DO?



I **COULDN'T**
HAVE DONE WHAT MAR-
VELL IS SAYING. I AM THE
KING. I WOULD HAVE
KNOWN!





...SERIOUS ENOUGH TO SEND US TRAVELING
TO **SENTINEL CITY**, DEEP IN THE HEART OF
THE SAVAGE LAND.

THE DOOR TO
THE CITY **WON'T OPEN**.
THERE SHOULDN'T BE A
DOOR THAT THE **HULK**
CAN'T OPEN.

THEN HOW
WILL WE GET TO
SAFETY BEFORE
THE **WENDIGO**
RETURN?



ARE
YOU WILLING TO
TRUST ME, LORD
T'CHALLA?



OF COURSE,
KA-ZAR. IT'S **YOUR**
LAND.



AND **YOURS**
NOW, AS WELL,
T'CHALLA.





FOLLOW
ME! THIS
WAY!

AND WHILE THE DINOSAUR'S
DIVERSION WAS A WELCOME ONE...

...I STILL COULDN'T STOP THINKING ABOUT WHAT HAD BROUGHT US HERE IN THE *FIRST PLACE*.

I HAVE REMADE MY *GODS* INTO MY OWN *IMAGE*.

WHAT IS IT?

WHAT IS THE *COSMIC CUBE*?

I HAVE MY *SUSPICIONS*.

IF I'D GIVEN CAP THE CUBE WHEN HE ASKED FOR IT, WOULD HE STILL BE *ALIVE* TODAY?

THERE WAS NEVER A DAY STEVE DIDN'T THINK YOU WERE HIS *FRIEND*, T'CHALLA.

BUT *NO MAN* IS A GOD. THAT'S WHAT *THOR* IS REALIZING RIGHT NOW.

HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT NO MAN IS A GOD...WITH ALL YOU'VE *SEEN*?

BECAUSE... *THIS*...

...*IS GOD*.

"IT ANSWERED YOUR **PRAYERS** IN A WAY THAT DIDN'T UTTERLY **DESTROY** YOU.

"IT GAVE **JOHANN SCHMIDT** A TASTE OF THE POWER HE NEVER HAD...AND RAISED **CAPTAIN AMERICA** UP TO KEEP **JOHANN** FROM BEING DESTROYED BY HIS OWN WISHES.

"WHEN **THANOS** ATTEMPTED TO USURP CREATION WITH THE CUBE, IT GAVE HIM A VISION OF **DEATH'S REALM** THAT KEPT HIM IN THE LAND OF THE LIVING.

"WHEN A BEING KNOWN AS **ENTROPY** ATTEMPTED TO EXPAND ITSELF BEYOND THE NATURAL ORDER, IT TOO RAISED BEINGS TO STOP IT SHORT."

LEAVE US ALONE.

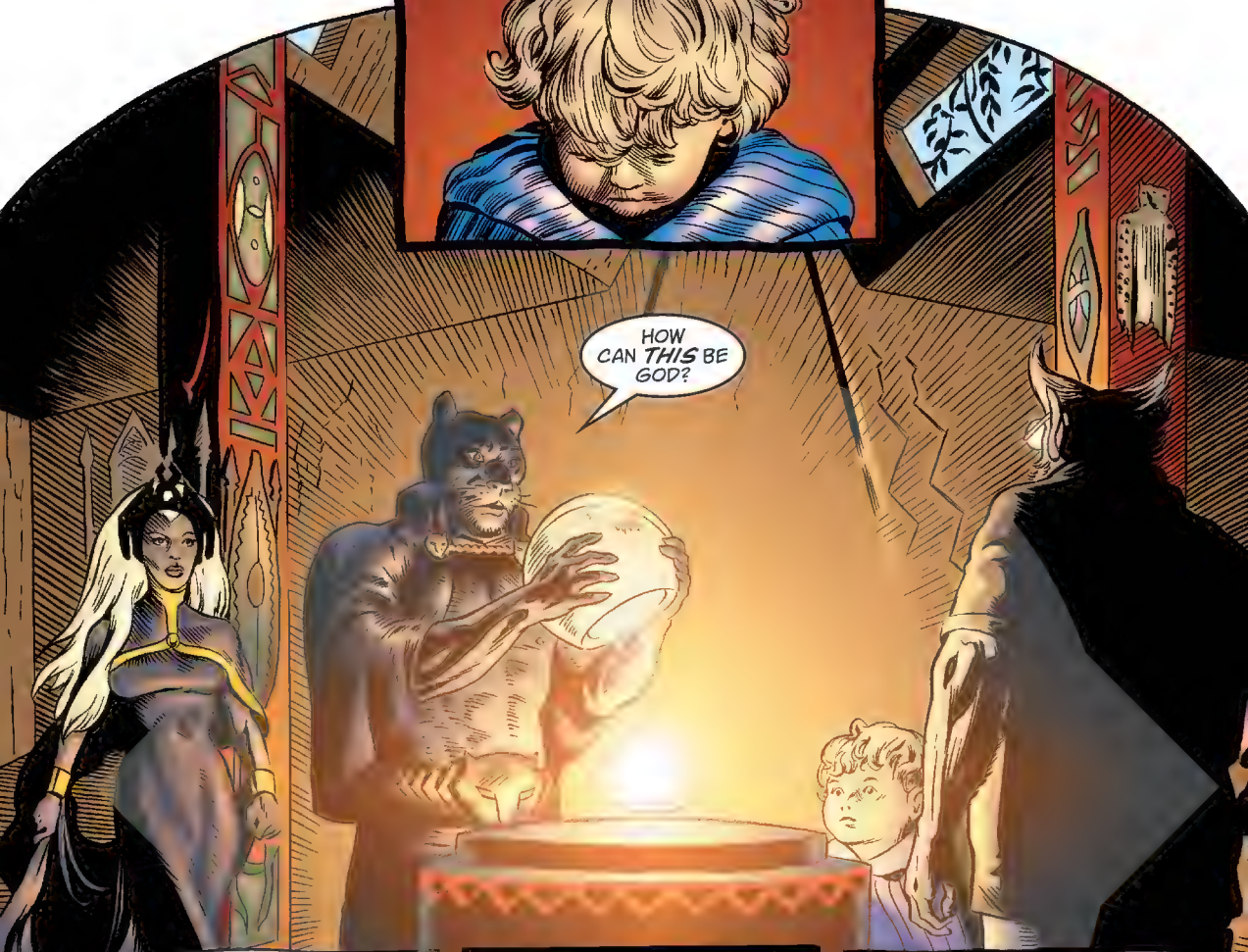
I WISH TO SPEAK TO **MAR-VELL**, AND I FEAR THE EFFECT HIS **WORDS** WILL HAVE ON THE REST OF YOU.

HENRY, STAY. I REQUIRE YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF SCIENCE.

ARE YOU SUGGESTING THAT **STEVE ROGERS** DID NOT **ENTRUST** THE COSMIC CUBE TO ME...BUT INSTEAD, WAS **PUSHED** BY IT TO DO SO?



HOW
CAN *THIS* BE
GOD?



HAVE YOU EVER ASKED
YOURSELF WHY ALL **MANKIND**
BELIEVES IN SOMETHING *BEYOND*
THEMSELVES? **GOD? JUSTICE?**
HAPPY ENDINGS?

HAVE YOU EVER
WONDERED WHERE THESE
THOUGHTS OR HOPES GO
AFTER THEY'VE BEEN
WISHED?

OR WHERE
THEY COME FROM
IN THE **FIRST**
PLACE?

I
HAVE HEARD OF A BEING
BECOMING AN **ASTEROID** UPON
WHICH HIS BROTHERS MIGHT
BUILD A HOME. OR OF ANOTHER
BECOMING AN **HERB** WHOSE
TASTE BRINGS THE OPPORTUNITY
TO CHANGE INTO ANY FORM
IMAGINABLE.

THE
CUBE IS A
GOD?

I DON'T KNOW...BUT IT
IS POSSIBLE THAT A BEING,
CERTAINLY NOT A **HUMAN**, ONE
WHOSE VERY BASIS OF BEING IS
DETERMINED BY THE COLLECTIVE
THOUGHTS OF OTHERS, MIGHT
BECOME A **COLLECTIVE**
POOL OF THE HOPES AND
PRAYERS OF ALL.



HOW
COULD I
POSSIBLY HOLD
GOD IN MY
HAND?

OR
COMMAND HIM...
IT...ACCORDING
TO MY BELIEF.

I
THOUGHT
YOU WERE A
PRAYING
MAN, KING
T'CHALLA.

ISN'T THAT
WHAT WE DO WHEN
WE PRAY?

WE TRY
TO MOVE GOD WITH
OUR PETITIONS AND
ACCORDING TO OUR
WILL.

WE SIT
IN JUDGMENT
OF HIM...

...AND
DISAGREE.

WE BELIEVE
ONLY WHEN IT SERVES
OUR INTEREST. THAT IS
THE SORT OF GOD WE
CREATE FOR OUR-
SELVES.

FOR
SOME, A GOD OF
VENGEANCE.

FOR
OTHERS, A GOD OF
MERCY.

AND STILL
OTHERS WILL ONLY
SEE A GOD OF
POWER.

OR OF
FAVORS.

WE
PUT GOD IN
A BOX.

NOW, MAY
I PLEASE HAVE
THE CUBE?



YOU ARE,
AT LAST, **FREE** TO
RULE YOUR PEOPLE,
KING T'CHALLA.

I DON'T
UNDERSTAND...

BECAUSE NOW YOUR
PEOPLE ARE FREE TO LOVE
AND FOLLOW YOU.

YOU DON'T
REALLY BELIEVE THAT
THE CREATION OF THE ANI-MEN
AND THE RESURRECTION OF STORM
WERE THE **ONLY** TWO TIMES YOUR
FAITH AND HOPE AND SELF-
DOUBT AFFECTED THE
CUBE, DO YOU?

HOW'D
THINGS WORK
OUT? DID MAR-
VELL TAKE THE
CUBE?

NO, VENOM.
T'CHALLA **GAVE** IT
TO HIM.

IF ONLY **JAMIE**
WERE STILL ALIVE, WE'D
HAVE HAD A **MULTIPLE-**
MAN ARMY TO TRAVEL
WITH.

MADROX IS **NOT**
DEAD, MCCOY...THOUGH I
DON'T SEE HIM IN THE LAND
OF THE **LIVING**, EITHER.

THE **WENDIGO** ARE
ON THEIR WAY. YOUR DEFENSES **WON'T**
LAST THIS TIME.

THE **X-MEN** ARE WILLING
TO STAY BEHIND AND HELP YOU
MOVE WAKANDA TO THE SAVAGE LAND,
T'CHALLA, WHERE **KA-ZAR**, THOUGH
HE DOESN'T KNOW IT YET, WILL
WELCOME YOU TO STAY.

HOW
DO YOU
KNOW
THIS?

I JUST
DO.



MY SPIRITS...WHO
I HAVE CAUSED TO **NO**
LONGER BE AS THEY
WERE.

I HAVE
COME TO BEG YOUR
FORGIVENESS.



YOUR
FEAR...

YOUR
PACIFISM...

YOUR
TEMPERA-
MENTS...

YOUR
VOICES...

...ARE NOT
YOUR OWN...BUT
MINE.

I
PLEDGE TO YOU
MY **PROTECTION**,
UNTIL YOU SEE FIT TO
RELIEVE ME OF
THIS CHARGE.



I HAVE
DONE A **GREAT**
WRONG TO YOU
ALL.



BEHIND THESE
VOICES I HAVE **FORCED**
UPON YOU, BEHIND THESE
ARTIFICIAL PERSONALITIES,
TO THE SPIRITS WHO SPEAK
IN THE SILENCE MY
FATHER KNEW...

...I THANK
YOU FOR SHOWING ME
MY **ERROR.**



IT IS
TIME TO **GO**.
OUR SAFETY
LIES **ELSE-
WHERE.**



THE WENDIGO
ATE THEM. KEVIN,
WHAT ARE WE GOING
TO DO?

THIS IS A
PROBLEM.

ISN'T IT *OBVIOUS*?

WE'RE NOT FACING
AN *ARMY* OF WENDIGO HERE.
WE'RE FACING *ONE BEING*,
WHO AFTER ITS HUNGER IS
SATISFIED, LEAVES TO *RE-*
TURN AGAIN.

MAR-VELL
WAS *RIGHT*. HE *WASN'T*
DEAD AT ALL. WE'RE FACING
JAMIE MADROX.

THE WENDIGO ARE A
SUPERNATURAL FORCE.
IT HAS BEEN CONSIDERED A SUPER-
NATURAL CONSEQUENCE TO
CANNIBALISM.

BUT IN LIGHT
OF WHAT RICHARDS HAS
DISCOVERED, IT MUST BE
ANOTHER RESULT OF THE
MUTABLE SEED PLACED
AND TRIGGERED WITHIN
MANKIND.

BRUCE,
OVER
HERE.

NO.
*ONE AND THE
SAME.*

WHEN IT
WAS DYING, IT
TRIED TO *REPLI-*
CATE, BUT IT DIDN'T
LIVE LONG ENOUGH
TO *FINISH* THE
PROCESS. OR
COVER UP ITS
IDENTITY.

HANK,
WHAT ARE YOU
SAYING?

WHA--?
SIAMESE
WENDIGO?



WE
DON'T HAVE MUCH
TIME...

JAMIE MADROX WAS THE MEMBER OF
THE X-MEN KNOWN AS **MULTIPLE MAN**.
AND WHILE WE HAD **NO IDEA** WHAT
BROUGHT HIM TO THIS POINT, HE HAD
TO BE **STOPPED**.

AS A MUTANT, HE COULD
CREATE AN **UNLIMITED**
AMOUNT OF BODIES
SHARING THE **SAME**
CONSCIOUSNESS.
PERHAPS THE NATURE OF
MULTIPLE BODIES
RESULTS IN GREATER
PHYSICAL CRAVINGS.

AS A WENDIGO,
JAMIE HAD AN
UNLIMITED
APPETITE.

YOU WILL HAVE
PROVISIONS TO LAST
A **WEEK**. FOOD AND
WATER.

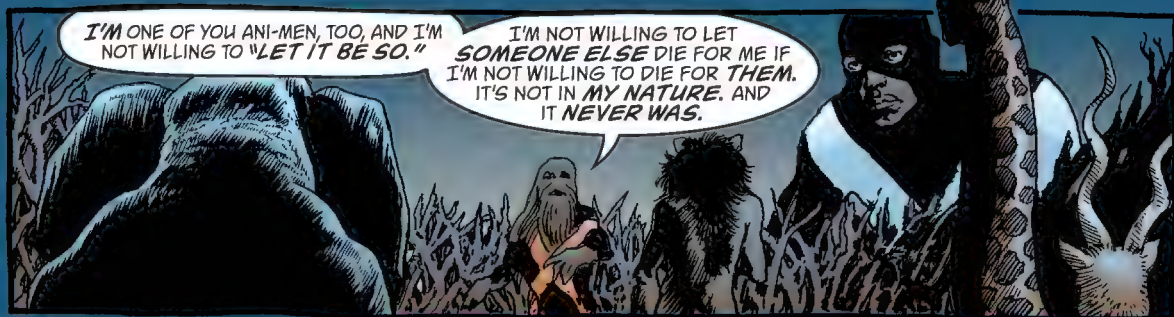
THIS LAST
STAND OF KING
T'CHALLA IS TO
PROTECT YOU
ALL, YOU
KNOW?

BUT THE
RING OF FIRE
ISN'T GOING TO KEEP
THE WENDIGO OUT
FOREVER.

THAT
IS **NOT** OUR
CONCERN. IF
WE ARE TO BE
TAKEN BY
VIOLENCE,
THEN LET IT
BE SO.

OF COURSE, THE
QUESTION REMAINS
AS TO **WHERE** THE
MASS FOR THIS
DUPLICATION
COMES FROM.

HERE THEY
COME! TAKE YOUR
POSITIONS!





WE WEREN'T ABOUT TO ALLOW THE WENDIGO TO SPREAD **BEYOND US** IF WE FAILED TO STOP THEM.

THAT'S WHY WE BUILT THE **OUTER RING**.

IF **WE** WERE TO DIE HERE, THEN SO WOULD **MADROX**.

T'CHALLA KNEW THIS, AS WELL.



AND THIS TRUTH MADE HIM THE **FIERCEST** OF ALL THAT DAY.

THE **ANI-MEN** HID WITHIN THEIR INNER CIRCLE, UNABLE TO **STOMACH** WAR AND ITS CONSEQUENCES...

...WHILE **WE** FOUGHT LIKE **ANIMALS**.

WITH WHAT LITTLE *MIND* MADROX MIGHT HAVE LEFT, MR. S WAS CERTAIN JAMIE WOULD ASSUME THE SPEARS WERE TO KEEP THE WENDIGO BACK.



WHILE OTHER MEMBERS OF HIS TEAM TRIED TO AFFECT THE COLLECTIVE STATE OF THE WENDIGO...



...WE PULLED THEM TOWARDS US, AWAY FROM THE OUTER RING.



ACTUALLY, I HAVE NO IDEA HOW HE EVER THOUGHT WE'D SURVIVE.



NOW!





THIS IS THE
END, HANK...WE'RE
ABOUT TO BE AMONG
FRIENDS WE HAVEN'T
SEEN IN A VERY
LONG TIME.

I'M ALMOST SORRY
IT HAS TO BE THIS WAY, SCOTT.
I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT JAMIE'S
ABILITIES TO **EXPAND** AND **RETRACT**
HIMSELF THROUGH HIS MULTIPLE
BODIES.

PERHAPS THE WENDIGO
HOLD SOME **SECRET** TO SAVING
THE EARTH'S CURRENT **MASS**
PROBLEMS.

NICE TO SEE
YOU HAVEN'T LOST
YOUR **SENSE OF**
HUMOR, HENRY.

OH, WHAT
HAVE I **DONE** TO
MY COUNTRY?

HOLD ME,
T'CHALLA. **HOLD**
ME, MY KING AND
FRIEND.

DO YOU
HEAR THIS,
BROTHERS?

WE ARE
ABOUT TO **DIE!**
AND THEN YOU
WILL, TOO!

FIGHT, ANI-MEN!
FIGHT AND SHOW THE
KING WHO HAS ONLY SHOWN YOU
KINDNESS THAT AN **HONEST**
MISTAKE WILL NOT BE HIS
DAMNATION!

SHOW HIM
THAT THE SPIRITS
STILL LIVE WITHIN
YOU!



THIS WAS NOT ABOUT
SAVING US.

IT WAS ABOUT LAYING
CLAIM TO SOMETHING
LOST.

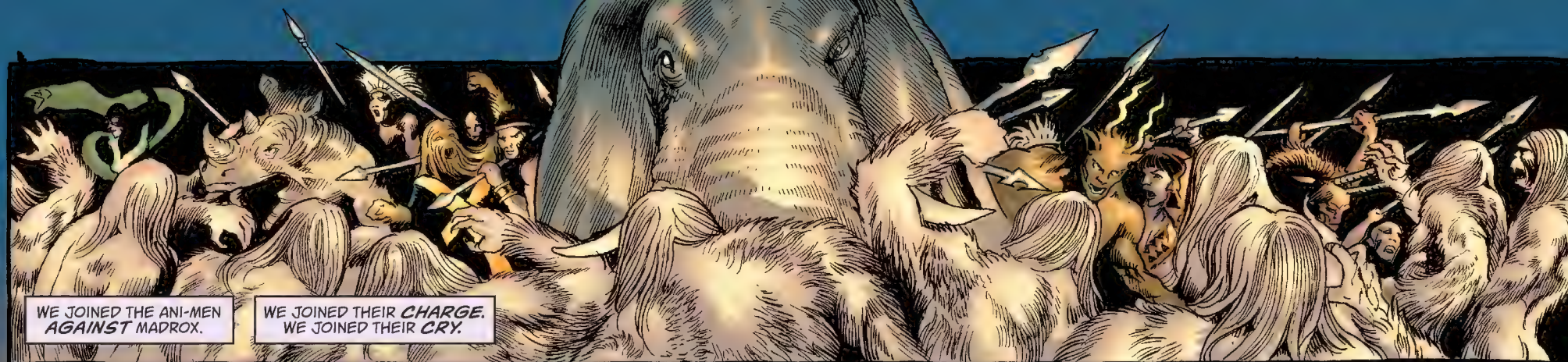
SOMETHING TAKEN
FROM THEM.

THEY WOULD NOT DIE AS
VICTIMS... BUT AS VICTORS
OF THEIR OWN BEING.



TO ONCE
AGAIN BE
WHAT THEY
WERE.

AGAINST AN
ENEMY THAT
WAS ONCE A
MAN.



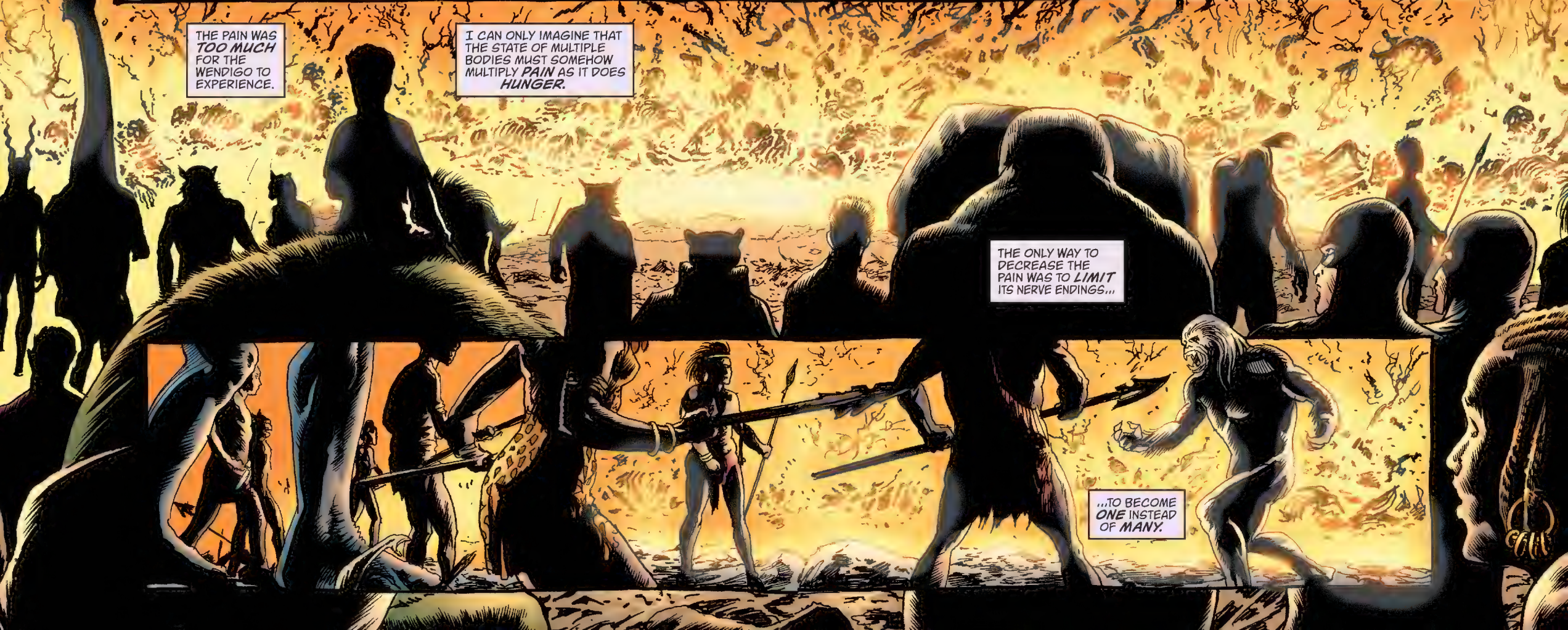
WE JOINED THE ANI-MEN
AGAINST MADROX.

WE JOINED THEIR *CHARGE*.
WE JOINED THEIR *CRY*.



ALL ANIMALS
FEAR FIRE.

THE ANI-MEN FOUGHT
AGAINST THEIR *EVERY*
INSTINCT TO RUN...TO
COWER. THEY IN-
SPIRED US.



THE PAIN WAS
TOO MUCH
FOR THE
WENDIGO TO
EXPERIENCE.

I CAN ONLY IMAGINE THAT
THE STATE OF MULTIPLE
BODIES MUST SOMEHOW
MULTIPLY PAIN AS IT DOES
HUNGER.

THE ONLY WAY TO
DECREASE THE
PAIN WAS TO *LIMIT*
ITS NERVE ENDINGS...

...TO BECOME
ONE INSTEAD
OF *MANY*.

THE WENDIGO HAD BEEN A *LIMITLESS*, ALMOST *ETERNAL* HUNGER.

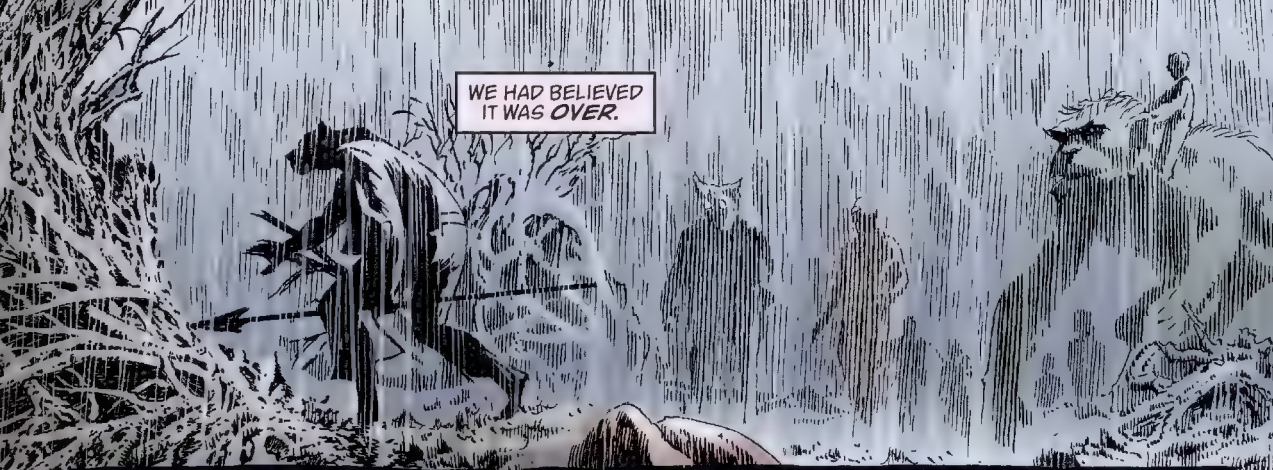
AND IN ONE MOMENT, THEY WERE *NOTHING* AGAIN.

ANOTHER FRIEND TURNED *ENEMY* BY POWER.

WHAT *SPEARS* STILL LAY WITHIN OUR REACH, WE *ADDED* TO THE INNER CIRCLE OVER THE NEXT THREE HOURS.

TOWER AND THE HULK PROVIDED OUR ONLY *ESCAPE ROUTE*.

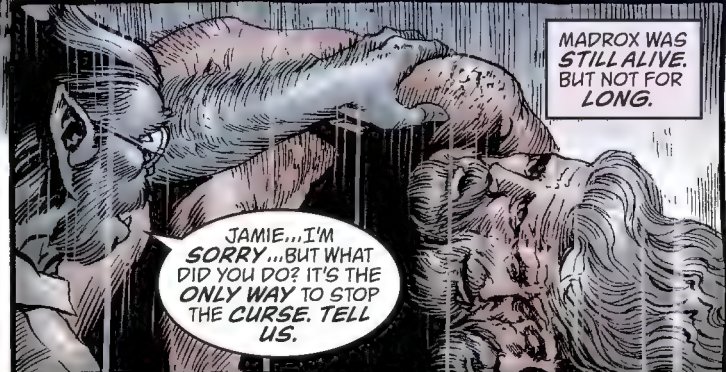
UNTIL IT STARTED TO *RAIN*.



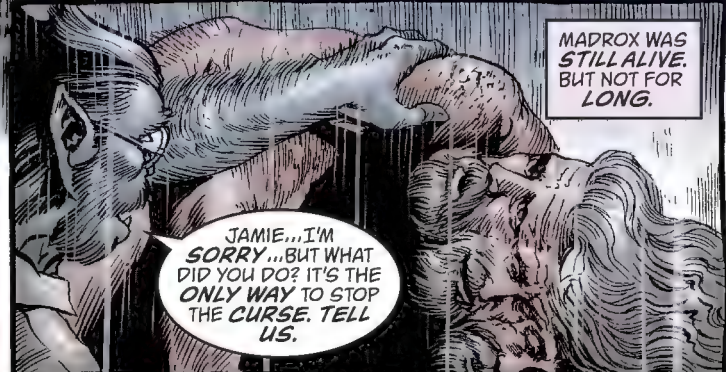
WE HAD BELIEVED
IT WAS *OVER*.



WE HAD FOOLISHLY
HOPED FOR A
HAPPY ENDING.



MADROX WAS
STILL ALIVE.
BUT NOT FOR
LONG.



JAMIE...I'M
SORRY...BUT WHAT
DID YOU DO? IT'S THE
ONLY WAY TO STOP
THE CURSE. TELL
US.



SCOTT?
HANK?



I'M
SO *SORRY*.
I DI-DIDN'T MEAN...
I WAS SO *HUNGRY*...
ATE ONE OF MY OWN
BODIES TO SURVIVE
OUTSIDE THE
PERIMETER.



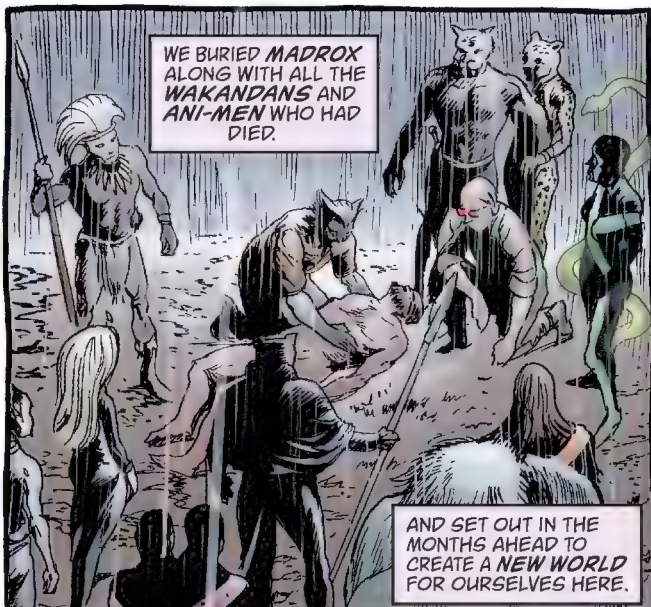
I'M SORRY, JAMIE.



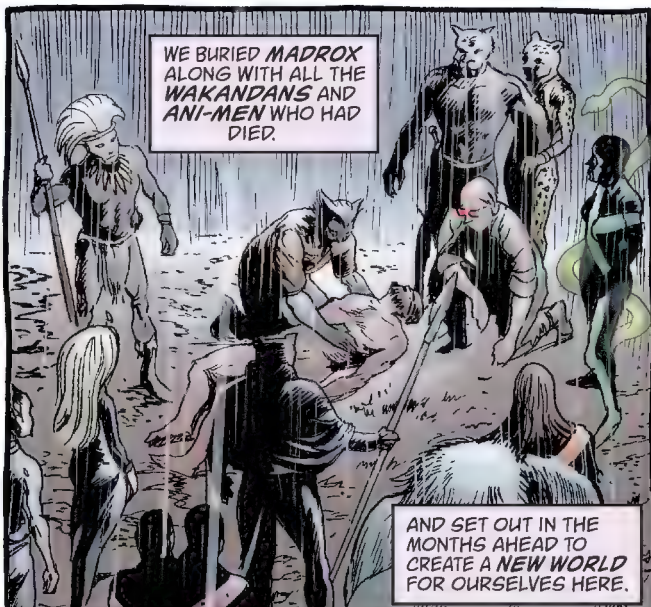
I COULD
BE *EVERYWHERE*
AT ONCE, HANK.



IT WAS...
JUST LIKE BEING
GOD.



WE BURIED *MADROX*
ALONG WITH ALL THE
WAKANDANS AND
ANI-MEN WHO HAD
DIED.



AND SET OUT IN THE
MONTHS AHEAD TO
CREATE A *NEW WORLD*
FOR OURSELVES HERE.

SOMETIMES I WONDER WHY
WE **BEASTS** EVER CAME
DOWN FROM THE TREES IN
THE **FIRST** PLACE.



U N I V E R S E



KRUEGER
BRAITHWAITE
REINHOLD

"Help me pull Isaac away from Mephisto's army, Aaron."

"How could Mephisto trick Immortus this way, Kyle? How could he steal his army so easily? The future and the past was all his for the taking. He should have foreseen Mephisto's interference."

"But he couldn't see it. He was locked out of Limbo by Mephisto. He could not return. He could not see what was about to happen."

"Did Mephisto take over Limbo, then?"

"I don't think so. Mephisto is afraid of Limbo because the ability to see the future along with the past is something like omniscience. This knowledge is fearful to the Lord of Lies."

"Why? I'd think that it would only make him more powerful."

"He's afraid that such knowledge would affect his predisposition. He's afraid that knowing everything might change him to such a degree that he wouldn't be who he is now. He does not want to change. And this is the reason he set up his own curator in Limbo — Belasco. And also why Mephisto wanted to know what I saw of the future."

"Come with me to the moon, Kyle. If what you are telling me is true, and Mephisto is after your visions, that's the safest place for you."

"It's too late."

"What do you mean?"

"I think I'm going to die in a few days."

"Why?"

"Because that's when everything I see of the future goes black."



UNIVERSE X

I S S U E 9

JIM KRUEGER
story and script

ALEX ROSS
story, cover painter and character designer

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LAURA DEPUY
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MIKE RAICHT
assistant editor

MIKE MARTS
editor

JOE QUESADA
editor in chief

"TELL ME, KYLE, WHAT IS *LIMBO*? WHY CAN'T I SEE IT? I SHOULD BE ABLE TO SEE *EVERYTHING* AS EARTH'S WATCHER."

"BUT YOU *HAVE* SEEN IT, AARON. YOU JUST DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU ARE *LOOKING AT*."

"RAMA-TUT'S ESCAPE LEADS HIM TO MEET DR. DOOM."

"HIS POSSIBLE *DESCENDANT*?"

"YES. DOOM *INSPIRED* RAMA-TUT WITH HIS VISION AND POWER."

"AND SO RAMA-TUT *CHOSE NEW FORMS* FROM WHICH HIS HUNGER FOR ADVENTURE MIGHT BE SATIATED."

"ADVENTURE?"

"YES. THE BILLIONS SLAIN OR CONQUERED SINCE HIS EARLIEST BEGINNINGS WERE DONE SO FOR *ONE PURPOSE*. HE WAS *BORED* IN THE FUTURE HE WAS BORN INTO."

"AND SO HE BECAME RAMA-TUT TO BECOME THE *ENSLAVER*."

"HE BECAME THE *SCARLET CENTURIAN* TO BECOME THE *DICTATOR*, LIKE DOOM."

"AND YOU HAVE SEEN WHAT HAS BECOME OF *IMMORTUS*."

"BUT HOW COULD *ONE MAN* BECOME ALL *FOUR* AT ONCE?"

"THIS IS THE KEY TO YOUR EARLIER QUESTION, AARON. EVERY TIME HE INTERMINGLED WITH A PARTICULAR TIMELINE, HE CREATED A *NEW ONE*."

"THIS INCLUDED HIMSELF."

"THERE ARE NOT MERELY FOUR FORMS OF RAMA TUT, BUT *THOUSANDS*... ALTHOUGH HERE ON EARTH, THIS MAN IS BEST KNOWN AS *KANG*."

"KANG THE *CONQUEROR*."

"AS THE CENTURIAN, HE FOUGHT THE *SQUADRON SUPREME* AND WAS DEFEATED OVER AND OVER AGAIN JUST AS HIS INSPIRATION--*DOOM*--HAD BEEN BY THE FANTASTIC FOUR."

"AS KANG, THE LEAST AMONG THE *AVENGERS* PROVED JUST AS TROUBLING AS THE STRONGEST AND HE WAS DEFEATED AGAIN."

"HIS DEFEAT OF THE *BROTHERHOOD OF THE BADOON*, AN ALIEN RACE, WOULD ONE DAY CAUSE THESE ALIENS TO STRIKE AT EARTH IN THE FAR FUTURE AND FACE A NEW SET OF AVENGERS, THE *GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY*."

"BUT HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO MY EARLIER QUERY? HOW DOES THIS AFFECT THE CREATION OF *LIMBO*?"

"THE VARIED FORMS OF KANG DREW TOGETHER AND BEGAN CONSTRUCTING A PLACE *OUT OF TIME* THEY DUBBED *CHRONOPOLIS*. THIS CITY WAS BUILT IN THE HEART OF *LIMBO*."

"I'M SORRY, KYLE. I'VE SPENT SO MUCH TIME LISTENING AND WATCHING THINGS UNFOLD TO THE POINT WHERE I *FORGOT* THE QUESTION I WAS ASKING IN THE *FIRST PLACE*. WHAT *IS LIMBO*?"

"I'M SORRY, AARON. I THOUGHT YOU'D HAVE *GUESSED* BY NOW."

"FOR EVERY TIME-DIVERGENT KANG THAT EXISTED, THERE WAS A CORRESPONDING TIME-DIVERGENT *TIME MACHINE* THAT COULD TRAVEL OUT OF HISTORY. *LIMBO* IS THE *COLLECTION* OF THESE DIVERGENT TIME MACHINES."

"EVERY TIME KANG STEPPED OUT OF TIME, *LIMBO GREW*."

"FOR EVERY CONQUERED PEOPLE IN THE EXPANSE OF HISTORY RECORDED AND NOT RECORDED, THIS PURGATORY OF SORTS BECAME A *HOME*."

"*LIMBO IS DOOM'S TIME MACHINE*."

"OH MY GOD...IF **MEPHISTO** HAS STOLEN DOOM'S TIME MACHINE FROM REED RICHARDS, THEN HE COULD NOT ONLY USE IT TO **UNDO EVERYTHING**, BUT GO TO A FUTURE THAT--"

"NO, HE CAN'T. OR...HE **WON'T**."

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN?"

"TIMELESSNESS **CHANGES** THE WAY YOU LOOK AT TIME. MAYBE **MEPHISTO** IS THE **REASON** DOOM'S TIME MACHINE FALLS INTO THE HANDS OF HIS ANCESTOR IN THE FIRST PLACE. HOW CAN WE BE CERTAIN?"

"WE DO KNOW THAT THERE IS A **GAME** BEING PLAYED HERE. AND WE ARE THE **PIECES** TO IT. THERE WILL COME A TIME WHEN **ALL LIFE** WILL COME TO AN END AND THE LAST BEING ON EARTH--SOMEONE CALLED '**HE WHO REMAINED**'--WILL CREATE BEINGS OF **PURE KNOWLEDGE** WHOSE PURPOSE IS TO SAFEGUARD THE NEXT CYCLE OF TIME."

"ARE THEY **WATCHERS** LIKE UATU? DO THEY **DO** ANYTHING?"

"OH YES. THEY GUARANTEE THAT TIME REMAINS A **CYCLE** AND NOT LINEAR. THEIR ROLE AND PURPOSE IS TO MAKE SURE THAT IF THERE EVER IS A '**HE WHO REMAINED**' AGAIN, THAT HE IS **SENT BACK** TO THE BEGINNING OF TIME. THEY SEE TO IT THAT HISTORY AND TIME ENDS **WITH** THEM."

"THE FIRST '**HE WHO REMAINED**'...WAS IT **KANG**?"

"NO. NOT **KANG**. AND NOT EVEN **IMMORTUS** WHO AGREED TO SERVE THEM."

"I THINK **KANG** **SUSPECTED** THE IDENTITY OF '**HE WHO REMAINED**' AND THAT'S WHY HE ELICITED THE AID OF THE AVENGERS TO STOP THE TIME KEEPERS FROM MAKING CERTAIN THAT HISTORY **ENDED** WITH THEM."

"THEN **WHO**?"

"WHO DO YOU **THINK**, AARON? WHO WOULD BE THERE **REGARDLESS** OF WHAT TIME PERIOD **KANG** CAME TO?"

"WHO WAS THERE IN THE **BEGINNING** AND WILL ALMOST BE **GUARANTEED** TO BE THERE WHEN **ALL THINGS END**?"

"WHO?"

"**MEPHISTO**, OF COURSE. THE **DEVIL**."

"THAT'S **CRAZY**! WHY WOULD THE **DEVIL** WANT TO STOP HISTORY?"

"HAVEN'T YOU EVER GONE TO **SUNDAY SCHOOL**, AARON?"

"NO. I WAS BORN A **GROWN MAN**."

"SORRY. IN THE END, THERE WILL COME A **JUDGMENT**."

"TIME WILL END LIKE WAKING FROM A **DREAM**."

"**MEPHISTO** KNEW THIS AND REALIZED THAT HE COULD **SAVE HIMSELF** THROUGH A SORT OF GEOMETRICAL SALVATION. TIME, HE REALIZED, WAS A **TWO-DIMENSIONAL** CREATION IN SPACE. IT MOVED FROM ONE POINT TO ANOTHER."

"BY CREATING ALTERNATE REALITIES, BY MANIPULATING SPACE AND TIME, HE ADDED **DEPTH** TO THAT LINE, CREATING WITHIN IT A **THIRD DIMENSION**. AND THAT DIMENSION WOULD GO ON AND ON AS FAR AS **POSSIBLE**."

"WE THOUGHT TRAVELING IN TIME WAS ENTERING THE **FOURTH DIMENSION**. WHAT A **JOKE**. WE ONLY **ADDED** A DIMENSION."

"SO HOW DID DOOM **MAKE** THE TIME MACHINE, YOU ASK? HE MADE A **DEAL** WITH THE **DEVIL**."

"AND HOW DID THE **DEVIL** **CHEAT** EVEN HIS OWN **JUDGMENT**? HE CREATED AN **ETERNITY** THAT SPREAD OUT WITH EACH NEW MANIPULATION."

"WE ONLY **THINK** WE'VE BEATEN HIM OVER AND OVER AGAIN. EVERY TIME WE THOUGHT WE DEFEATED HIM, WE WERE **WRONG**. WE WERE ONLY **HELPING** HIM."

"AND MEPHISTO HAS DONE IT *AGAIN*.
HE FOUND OUT WHAT THE FUTURE HELD
BY GOING THROUGH POOR ISAAC HERE.

"HE TOOK ADVANTAGE OF IMMORTUS
ONCE AGAIN, *TRICKING* HIM INTO
DELIVERING THE PEOPLE OF EARTH
INTO HIS CARE.

"AND IT DOESN'T EVEN *MATTER*, DOES
IT? I MEAN, THIS WORLD IS SO CLOSE
TO BEING *GONE*... BUT THERE ARE A
ZILLION MORE FOR HIM TO PLAY IN!

"KIND OF MAKES YOU WANT
TO *GIVE UP*, DOESN'T IT?"

"...AND I THOUGHT *UATU*
WAS DEPRESSING."



I'M SO...
COUGH...
SO...

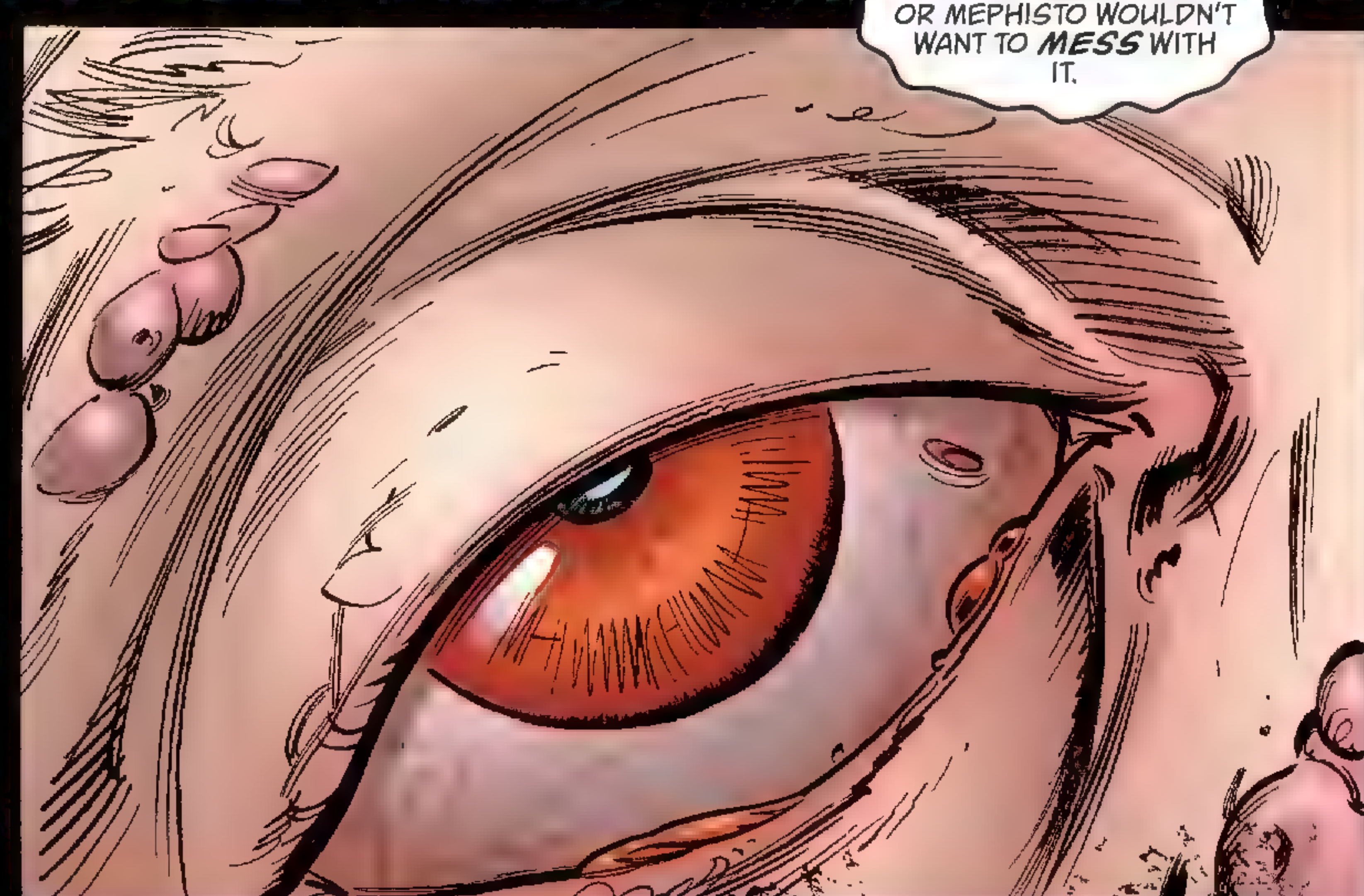
I
KNOW, ISAAC.
CONSERVE YOUR
STRENGTH.



LET...ME...
SPEAK...



THE FUTURE
MUST BE *AMAZING*...
OR MEPHISTO WOULDN'T
WANT TO *MESS* WITH
IT.



POOR
DAMNED
FOOL.

LIKE
THE REST
OF US.



YOU HAVE BEEN A SERVANT TO THE PEOPLE OF ENGLAND FOR SO LONG. A **TRUE KNIGHT**.

BUT THIS WORLD WILL **NOT** RECOGNIZE A SERVANT HERO WHO WON'T ALSO **RULE**. YOU ARE THE **BLACK KNIGHT**. BUT YOU MUST BE THE **BLACK KING**. ON THIS, AT LEAST, YOUR MOTHER AND I AGREE.



I KNOW, FATHER, BUT...

I AM **NOT** YOUR FATHER. I NEVER ASKED YOU TO CALL ME THAT. **BLACK BOLT**, THE KING OF THE INHUMANS WAS YOUR FATHER.



KING BRITAIN, YOU ARE THE **ONLY** FATHER I KNOW.

AND I DO NOT BELIEVE, AS MY MOTHER SAYS, THAT YOUR **EMOTIONS** HAVE CORRUPTED ME. I WILL DO WHAT YOU ASK.

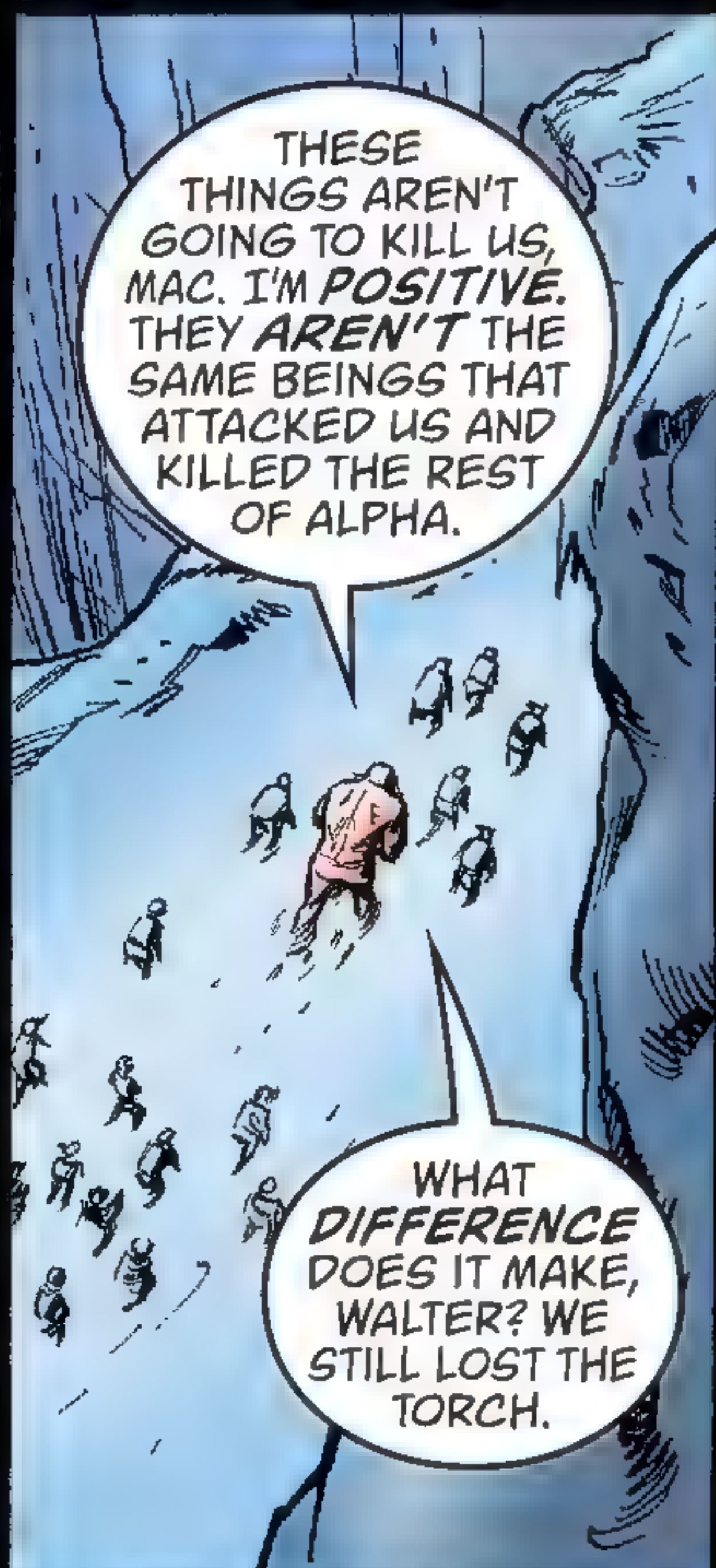


THE BATTLE HAS NOT GONE WELL FOR THE WORLD.

THE **HUMAN TORCHES** HAVE ALL BUT BEEN DOUSED AROUND THE WORLD.



"CANADA WAS THE LAST TO FALL..."



THESE THINGS AREN'T GOING TO KILL US, MAC. I'M **POSITIVE**. THEY **AREN'T** THE SAME BEINGS THAT ATTACKED US AND KILLED THE REST OF ALPHA.

WHAT **DIFFERENCE** DOES IT MAKE, WALTER? WE STILL LOST THE TORCH.



BUT WE'RE **ALIVE**, MAC...

SPEAK FOR YOURSELF.



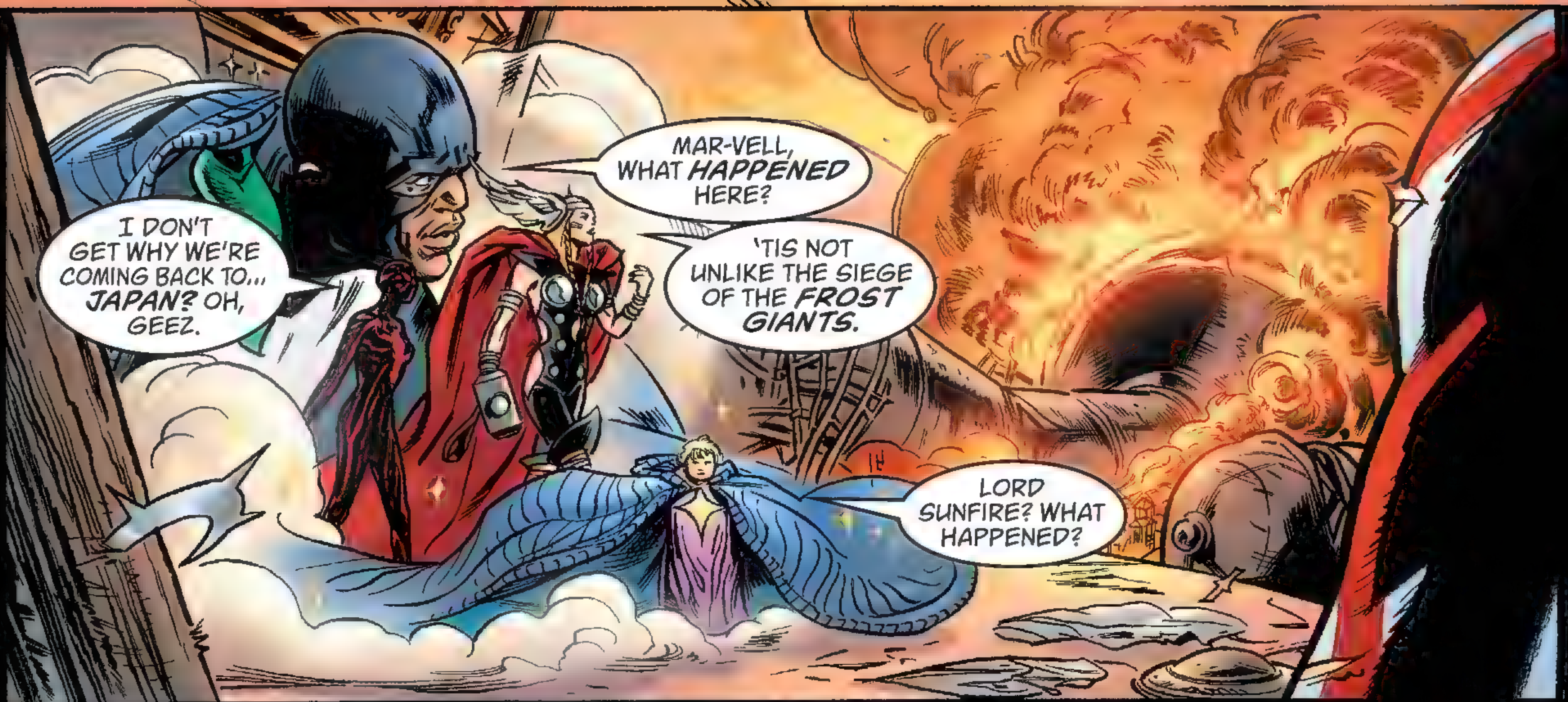
IT'S INTERESTING, ISN'T IT, MAC?



I'M ALL EARS...



UNLIKE THE REST OF THE WORLD, THESE CREATURES ALL MUTATED THE **SAME** WAY.



I DON'T GET WHY WE'RE COMING BACK TO... JAPAN? OH, GEEZ.

MAR-VELL, WHAT HAPPENED HERE?

'TIS NOT UNLIKE THE SIEGE OF THE FROST GIANTS.

LORD SUNFIRE? WHAT HAPPENED?



THE TONG OF CREEL HAPPENED.

THERE WAS NO ONE TO SAVE THE TORCH WHEN THEY HAD ALL FINISHED WITH US.

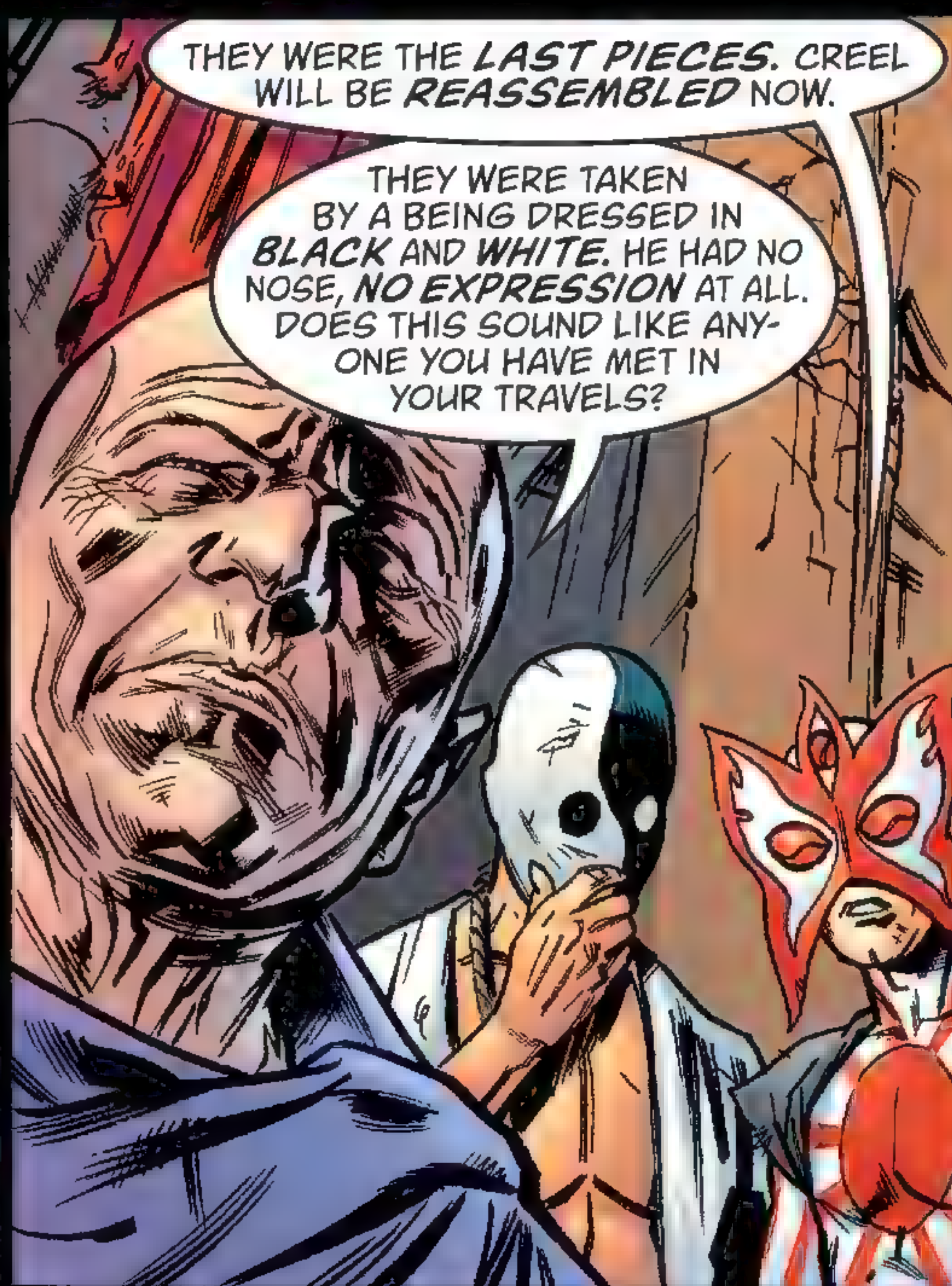


THEY TOOK THE *FISTS* OF CREEL THAT I WORE AROUND MY NECK.



KINDA STUPID TO KEEP THEM IN THE *OPEN* LIKE THAT.

IF YOU HAD *ANY* UNDERSTANDING AT ALL, YOU WOULD KNOW THAT TAO'S HANDS WERE THE *SAFEST PLACE* FOR THEM.



THEY WERE THE *LAST PIECES*. CREEL WILL BE *REASSEMBLED* NOW.

THEY WERE TAKEN BY A BEING DRESSED IN *BLACK AND WHITE*. HE HAD NO NOSE, NO *EXPRESSION* AT ALL. DOES THIS SOUND LIKE ANY-ONE YOU HAVE MET IN YOUR TRAVELS?



LOKI.

THOR? THOR?

FORGET ABOUT
WHAT HAPPENED. FOCUS
ON THE *FUTURE*.

I... *CANNOT*. I WAS
THERE AND I *SAW* WHAT YOU
DID. IT BETRAYS THE VERY *FATES*
THEMSELVES... I FEEL AS IF MY
BROTHER LOKI HAS SPOKEN THE
TRUTH, AND I AM *LOST*.

WHY ARE
MY PEOPLE NOT
AMONGST THE DEAD,
SUPREMO?

YOUR
"PEOPLE"
ARE NO LONGER
YOUR CONCERN,
CAPTAIN.

GO AWAY.

JUST AS *YOU*
ARE NO LONGER OF
CONCERN TO MYSELF.
GO AWAY, LITTLE
HERO.

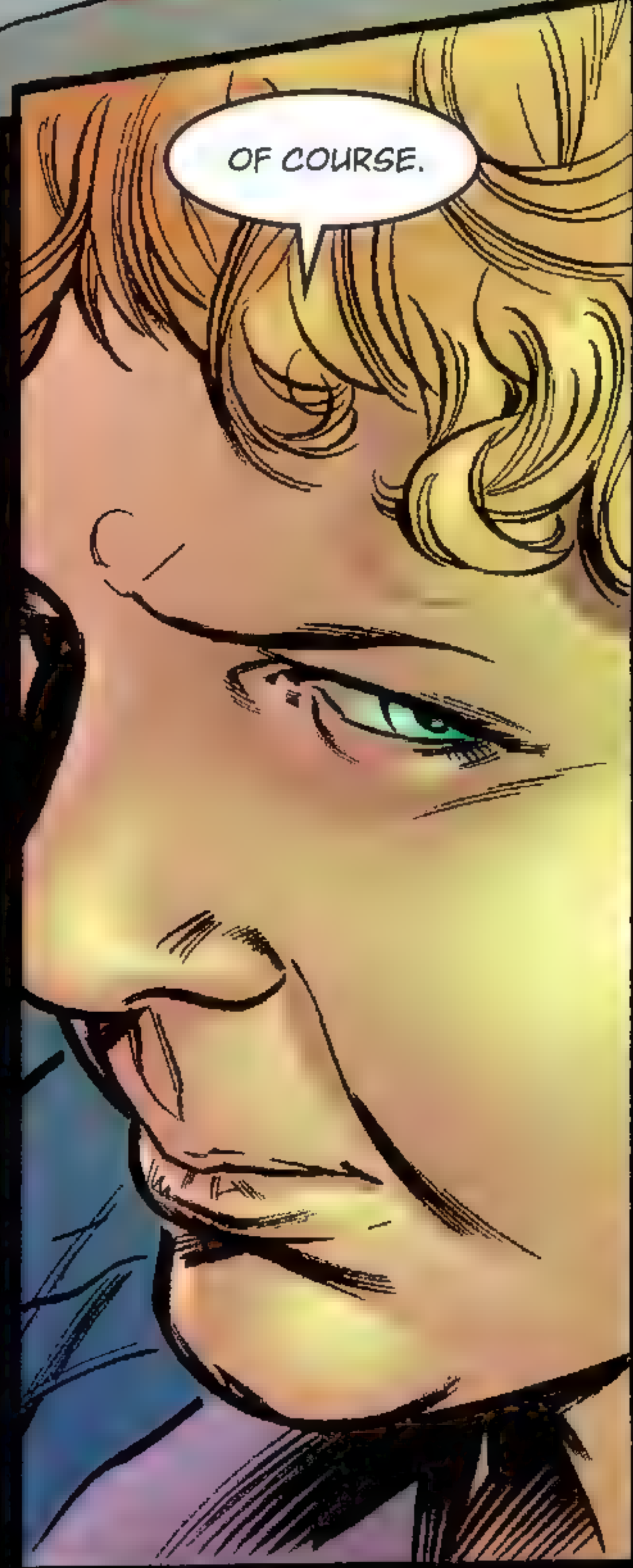
WE
WILL BE
BOTHERED
BY YOUR LIKES
NO
LONGER.



YOU'LL NEVER CHANGE. YOU'RE AS **UNFEELING** AS EVER.

"WE?"

THE SUPREME INTELLIGENCE IS A **COMPOSITE** OF THE GREATEST MINDS IN THE KREE EMPIRE.



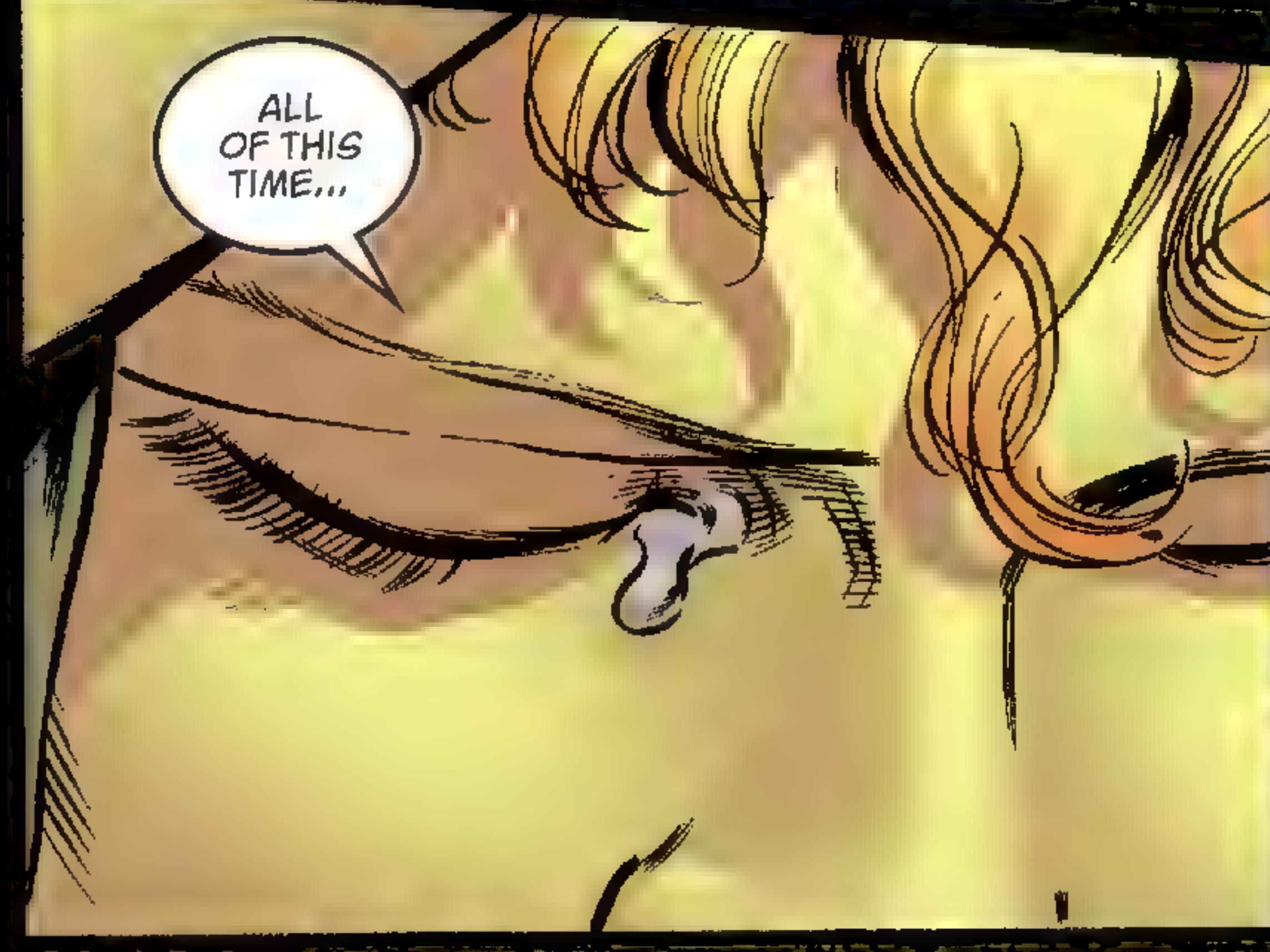
OF COURSE.



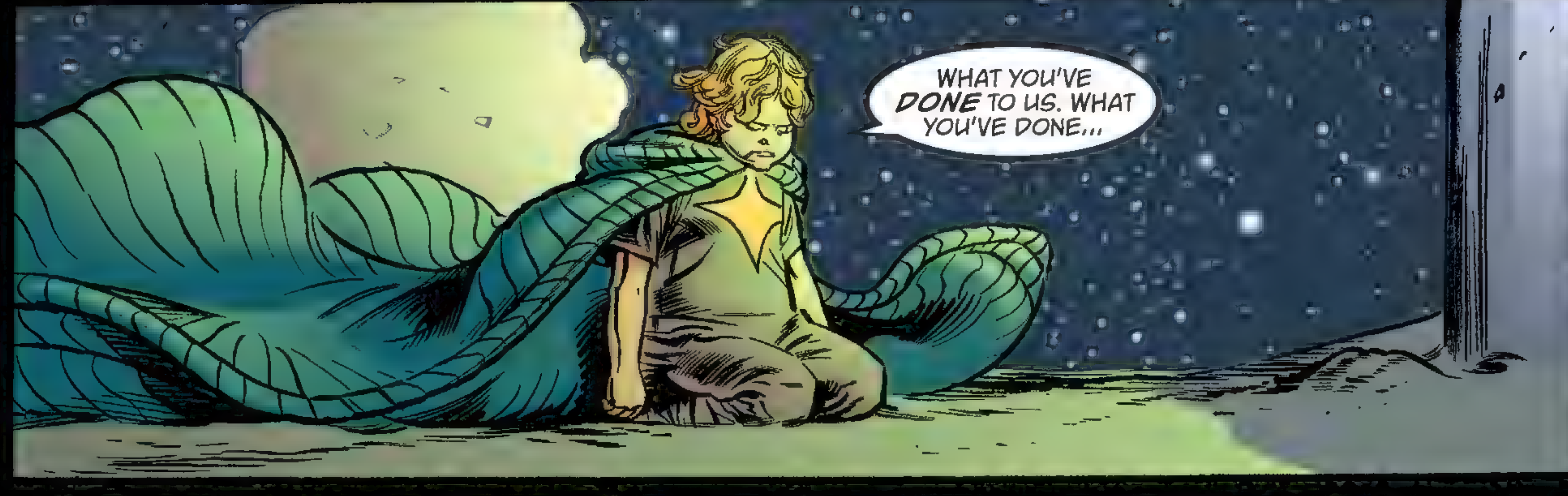
DAMN YOU, MONSTER!



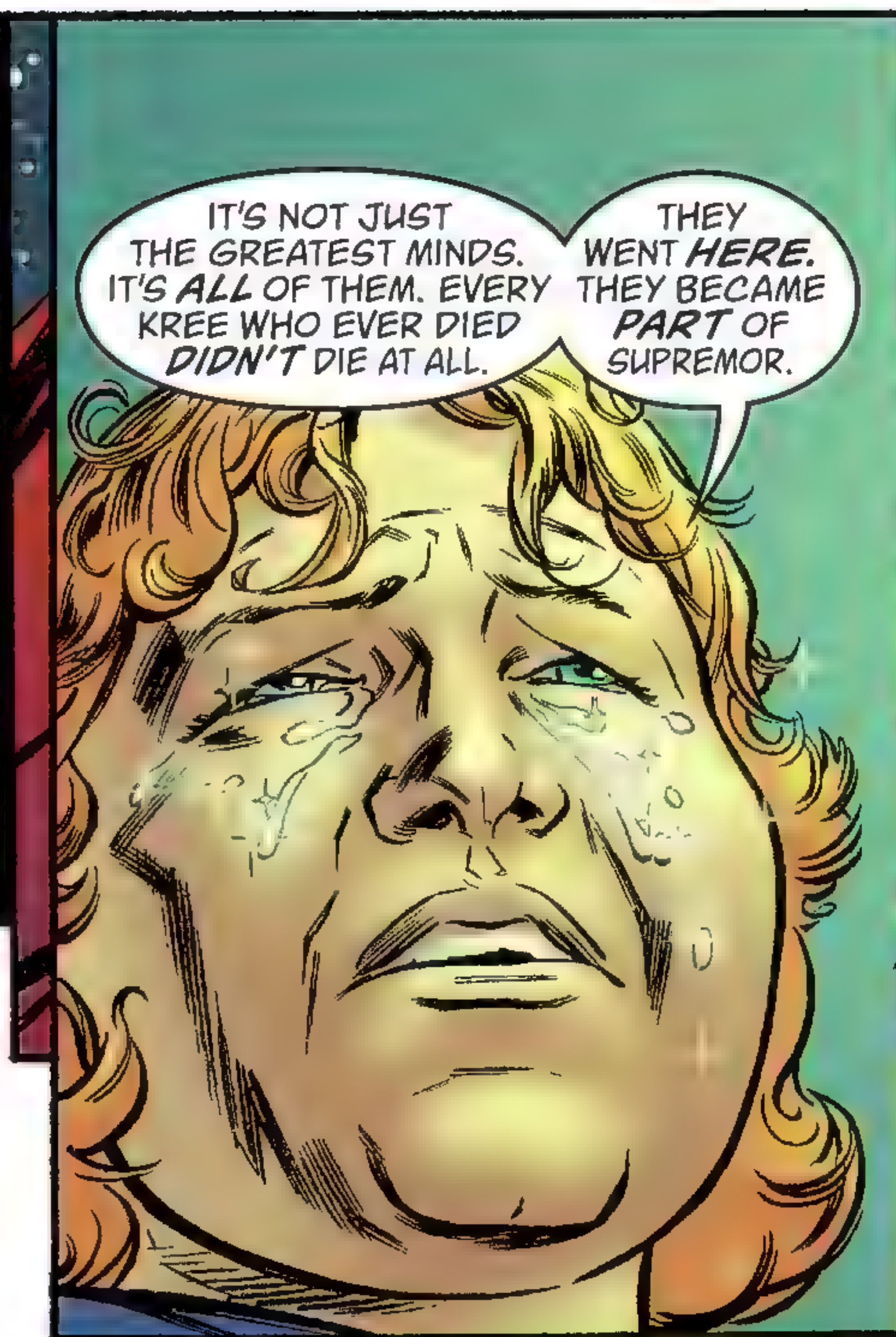
ALL THIS TIME!



ALL OF THIS TIME...

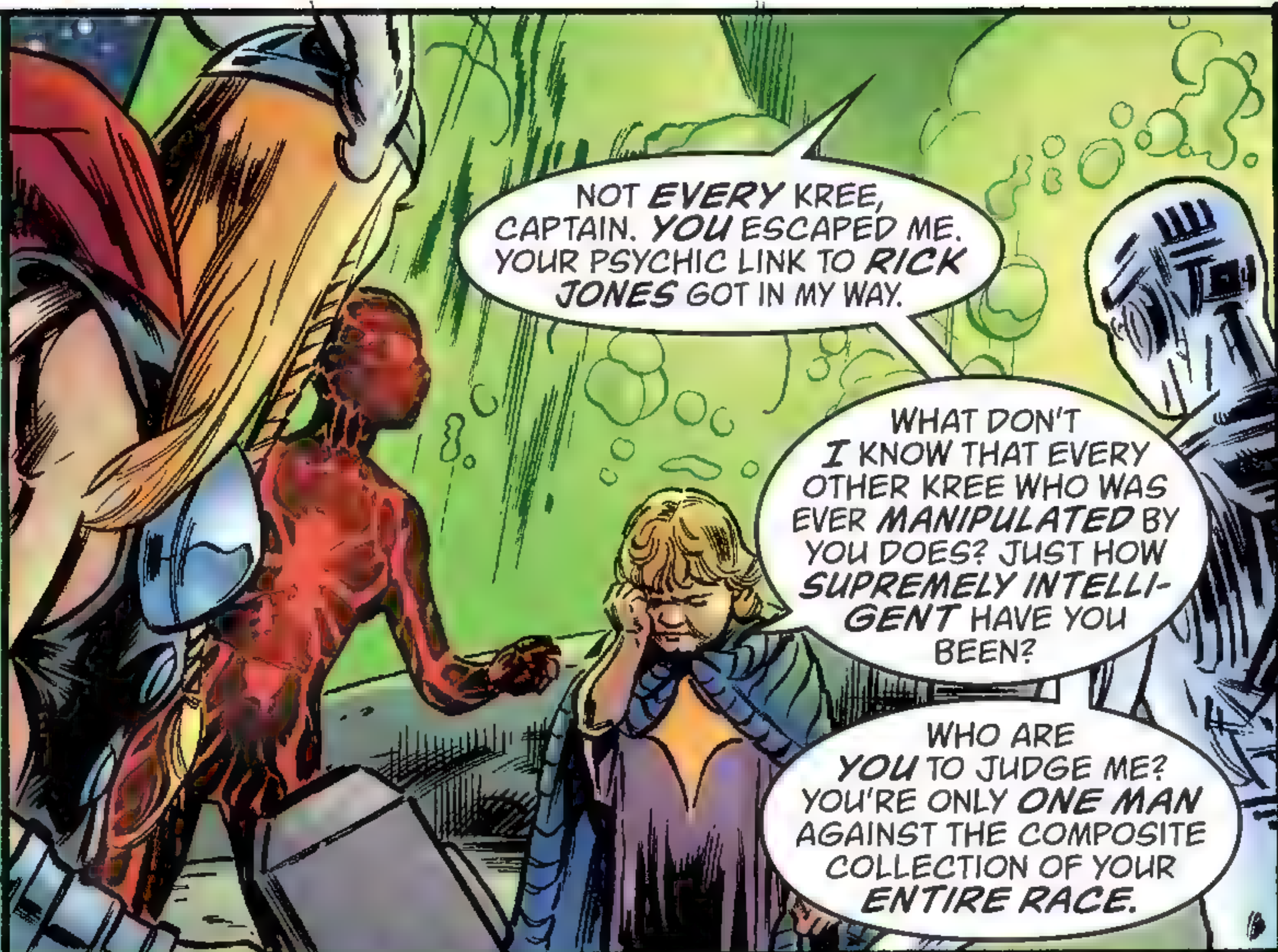


WHAT YOU'VE **DONE** TO US. WHAT YOU'VE DONE...



IT'S NOT JUST THE GREATEST MINDS. IT'S **ALL** OF THEM. EVERY KREE WHO EVER DIED **DIDN'T** DIE AT ALL.

THEY WENT **HERE**. THEY BECAME **PART** OF SUPREMOR.



NOT **EVERY** KREE, CAPTAIN. **YOU** ESCAPED ME. YOUR PSYCHIC LINK TO **RICK JONES** GOT IN MY WAY.

WHAT DON'T I KNOW THAT EVERY OTHER KREE WHO WAS EVER **MANIPULATED** BY YOU DOES? JUST HOW **SUPREMELY INTELLIGENT** HAVE YOU BEEN?

WHO ARE **YOU** TO JUDGE ME? YOU'RE ONLY **ONE MAN** AGAINST THE COMPOSITE COLLECTION OF YOUR **ENTIRE RACE**.

THE **SKRULLS** THAT CAME IN PEACE TO YOUR PLANET, TO YOUR PRIMITIVE AND UNENLIGHTENED ANCESTORS, WERE AT A **SPECIAL STAGE** IN THEIR EVOLVED MUTATION.

THEY WERE ON THE EVE OF THEIR CHANGE INTO THE **THIRD STAGE** OF THEIR MUTATION--A STAGE IN WHICH FORM AND WILL WERE DETERMINED BY **OTHERS'** BELIEFS AND PERCEPTIONS.



DO YOU NOT EVEN **REALIZE** WHAT YOUR PEOPLE DID BEFORE I WAS HERE?



WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?

SIMPLY THAT THE SKRULLS WERE PEACEFUL SHAPE-SHIFTERS IN THEIR THIRD MUTATION...UNTIL YOUR "**PEOPLE**" CAUSED THE WAR THAT DESTROYED TWO ENTIRE WORLDS. THEIR FEARS SHAPED A PEACEFUL PEOPLE INTO A RACE OF **KILLERS**.

THEY DESERVE **EVERYTHING** THAT'S BECOME OF THEM.





BILLIONS
OF LIVES!
BILLIONS!

EVERYTHING WE WERE *EVER*
TOLD! EVERYTHING YOU *TAUGHT* US! YOU COULD
HAVE TOLD US THE *TRUTH!* YOU COULD HAVE
STOPPED THE WAR!

EVERY DEATH MADE
ME **STRONGER**. EVERY TIME
YOUR RACE HAD ITS CHANCE, IT
MADE SAD AND BITTER LOVE LIKE
THAT WAS THE **LAST TIME** THEY
WOULD. THE DEATH TOLL CREATED
A **RISE** IN THE NUMBER
OF BIRTHS.

I **ENCOURAGED**
THE KREE TO BREED WITH
OTHER RACES... I BECAME
STRONGER. I HOPED THAT WHEN
YOUR MATE **UNA** DISCOVERED
SHE WAS BARREN, THAT HER DEATH
WOULD LEAD YOU TO MATE
WITH THE EARTH WOMAN,
CAROL DANVERS.
I--

I AM
DECEIVED.
THIS CANNOT
BE!

YOU'RE
SICK!

GOODBYE,
SUPREMOD!

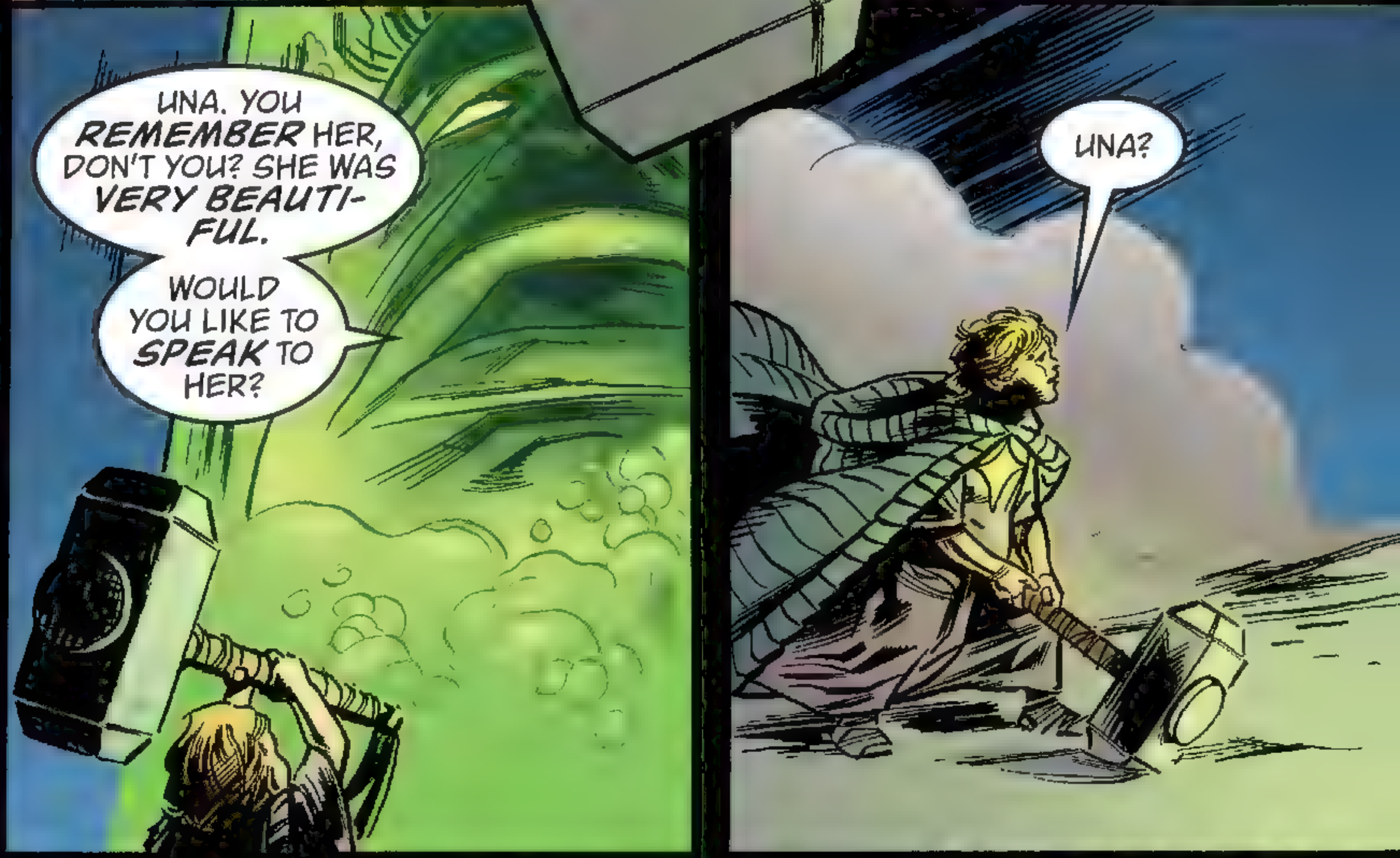
YOU **WILL**
NOT KILL ME. THE
MOMENT YOU DO, **EVERY**
MEMBER OF YOUR RACE
WILL **DIE...** INCLUDING
UNA.

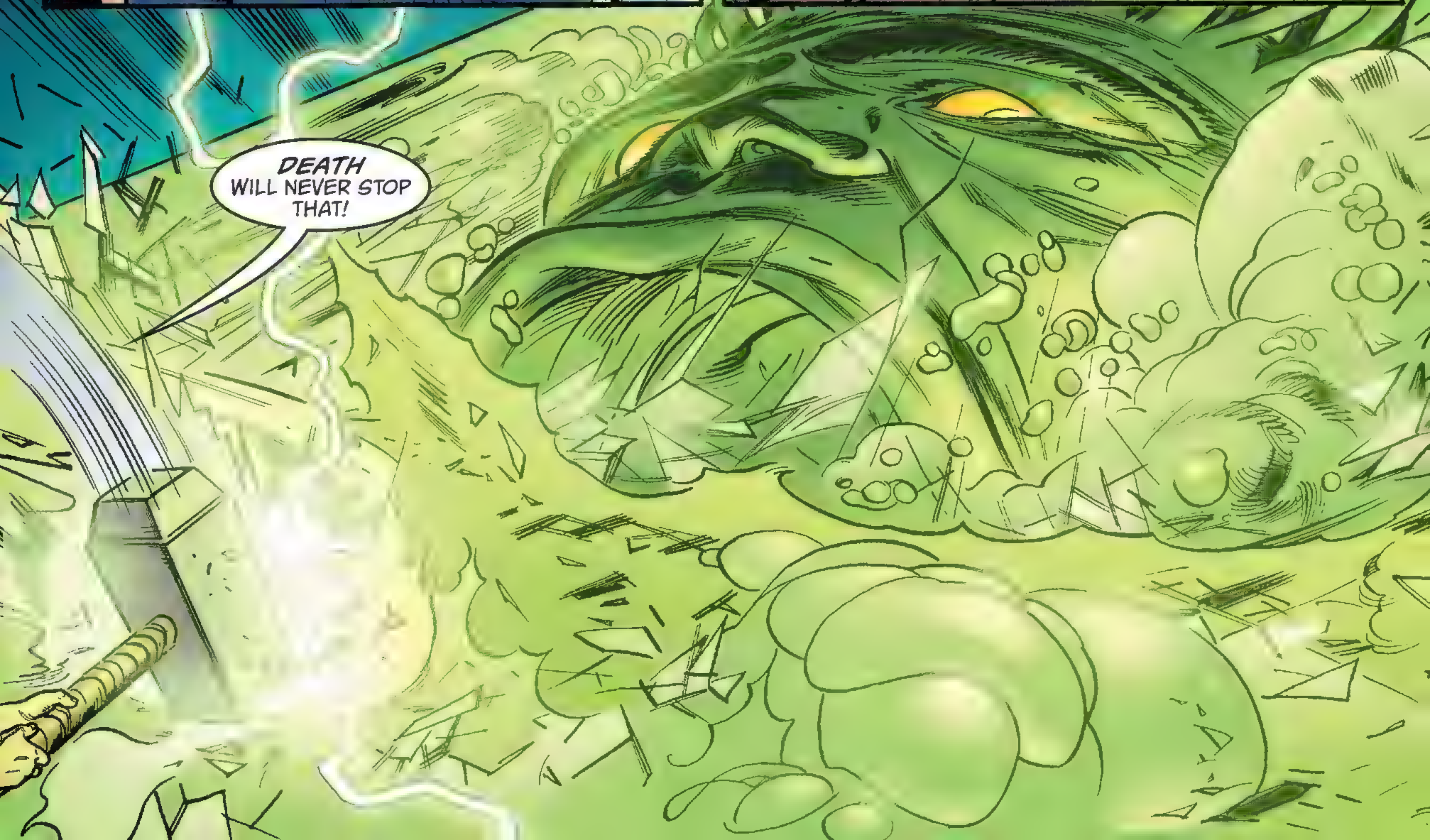
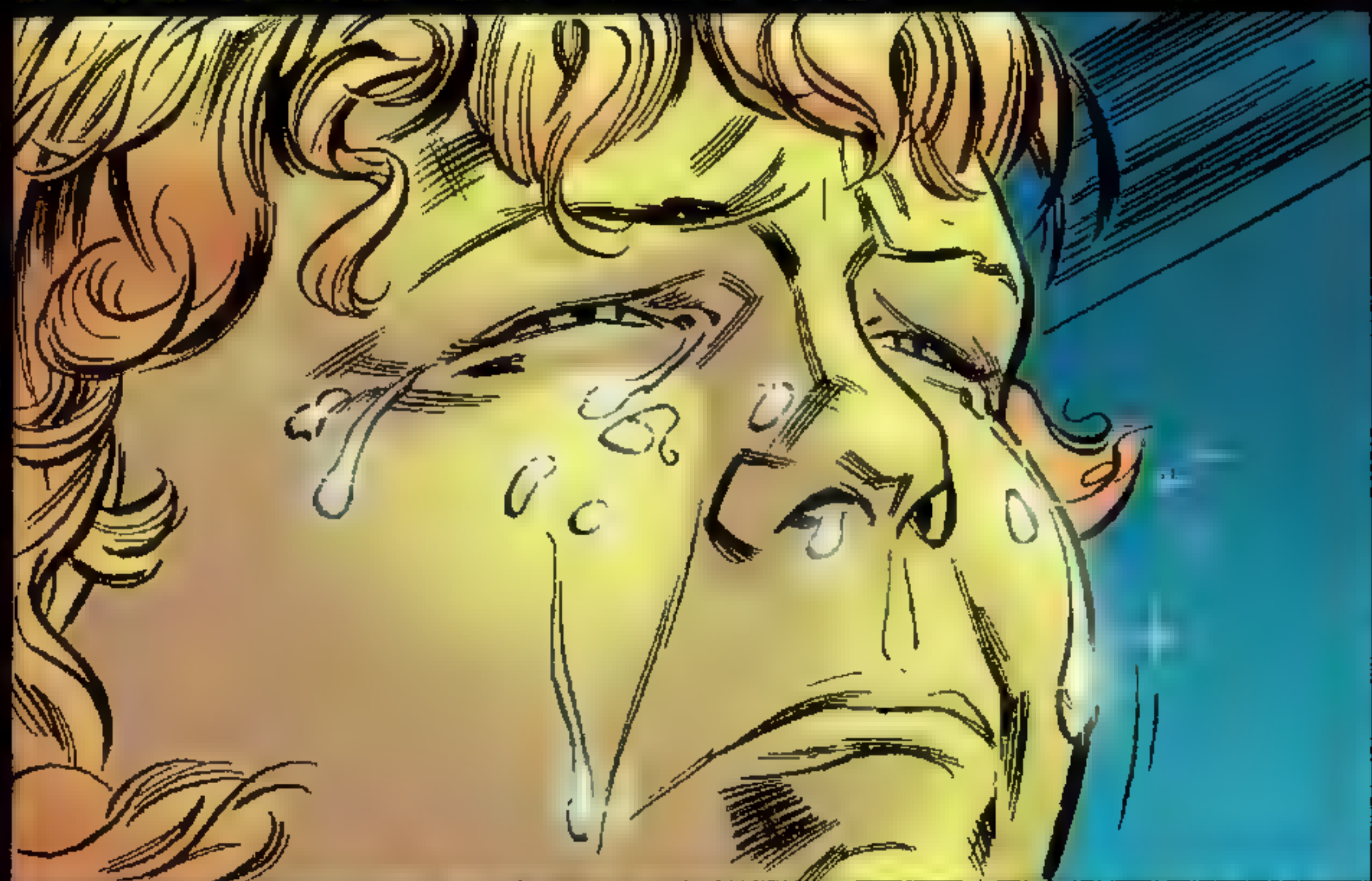
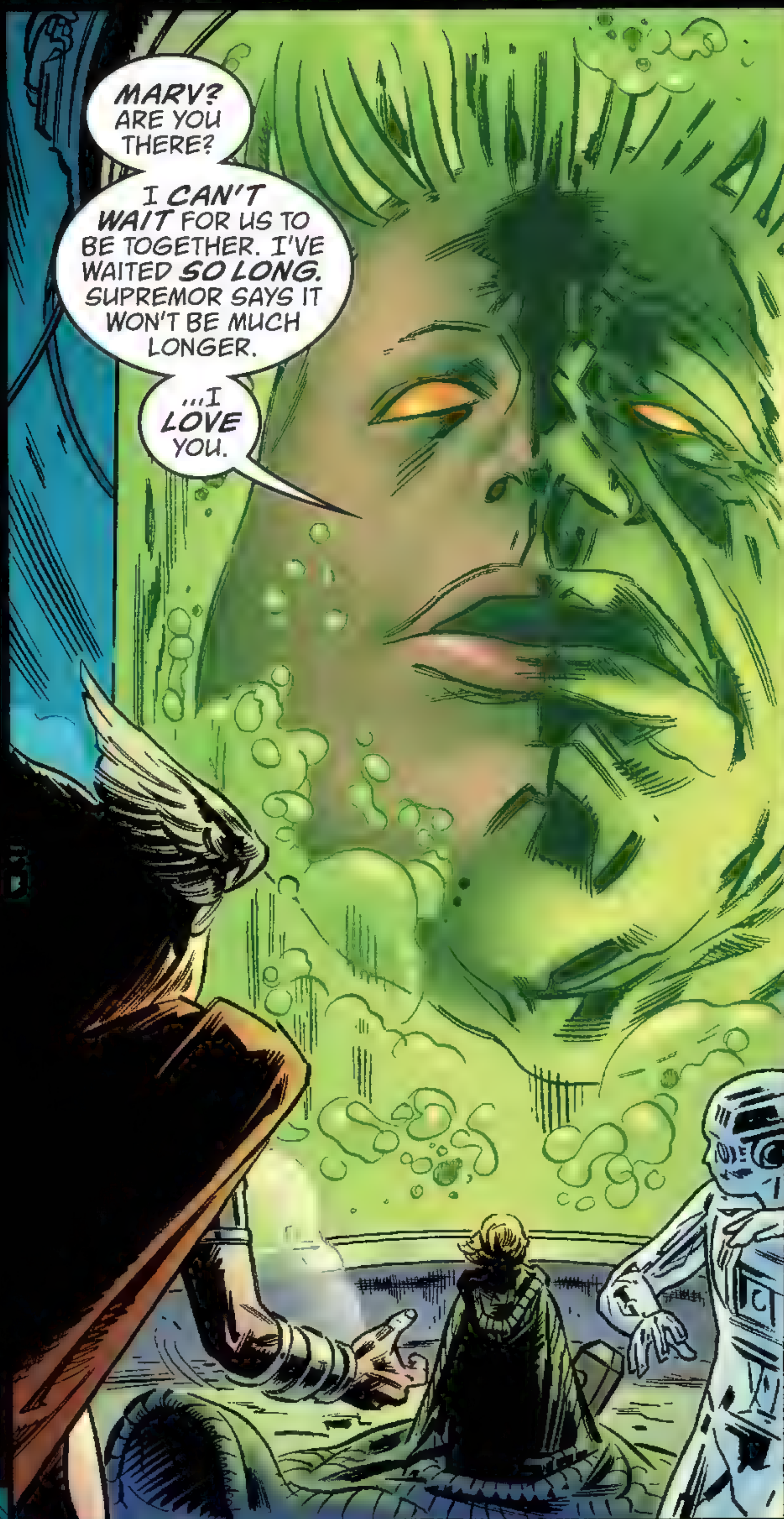


UNA. YOU
REMEMBER HER,
DON'T YOU? SHE WAS
**VERY BEAUTI-
FUL.**

WOULD
YOU LIKE TO
SPEAK TO
HER?

UNA?







IT'S ONLY THE
BEGINNING.



WHAT'S
YER
SIGN?

I SAW HER
FIRST.

YOU BOYS
HAVE A **THING**
FOR ME?
REALLY?

WE'RE ALL
MONSTERS, MR. RICHARDS,
IF YOU LOOK CLOSELY ENOUGH.
WHETHER ONE LIVES LIKE **DOOM**
DID IN THIS CASTLE AND RULES
THE LATVERIANS LIKE A **DIC-
TATOR** OR NOT.

HOW
DO YOU
MEAN?



JUST A
THEORY IN RE-
GARDS TO THE
MUTATIONS, IS
ALL.



WHAT IF THE
MUTATION **TRIGGERS**
SOMETHING PSYCHOLOGICAL
OR METAPHYSICAL...EVEN
BEFORE IT CHANGES US
PHYSICALLY?

I SEE. THEN THE
MUTATION MIGHT POSSIBLY BE
LINKED TO OUR PREDISPOSITIONS
AND BELIEFS ABOUT OURSELVES.
INTERESTING.

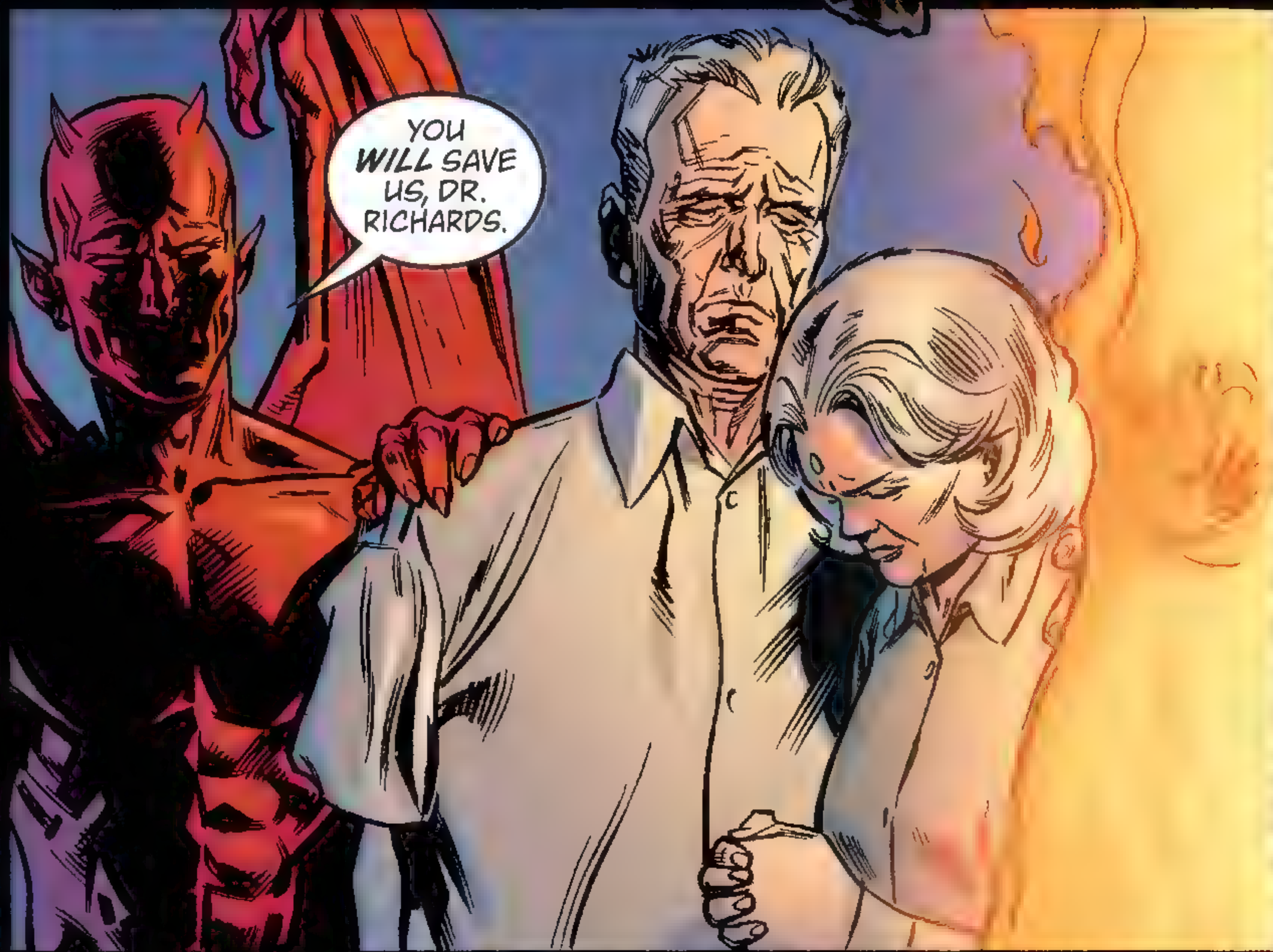


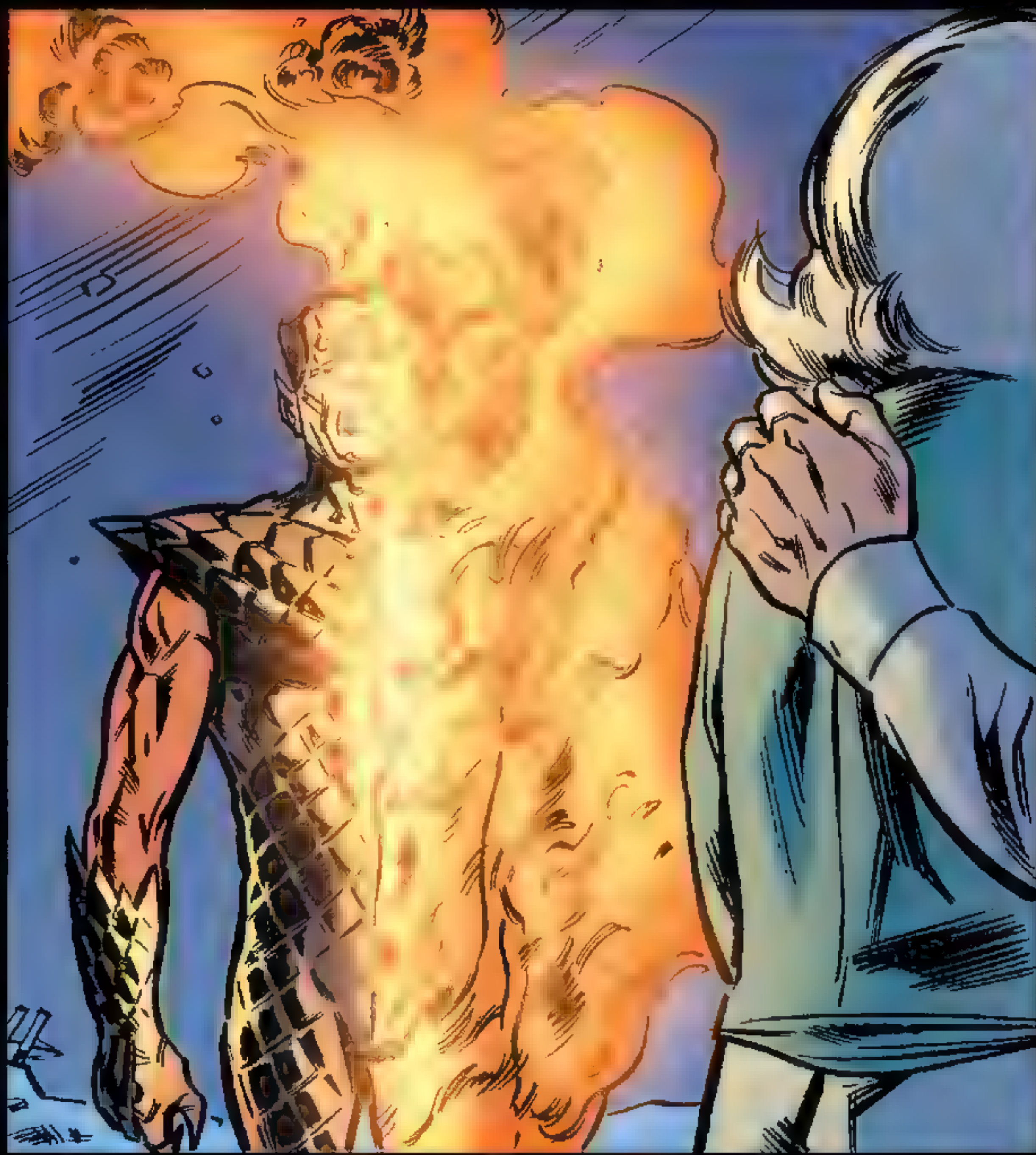
THAT'S SIMPLY
NOT POSSIBLE. LOOK
AT **ME**.

I WOULD
NEVER DO THIS TO
MYSELF.



DR. RICHARDS,
SOMEONE'S COMING!
IT'S A **FLYER** AND I THINK
IT'S ON **FIRE!**

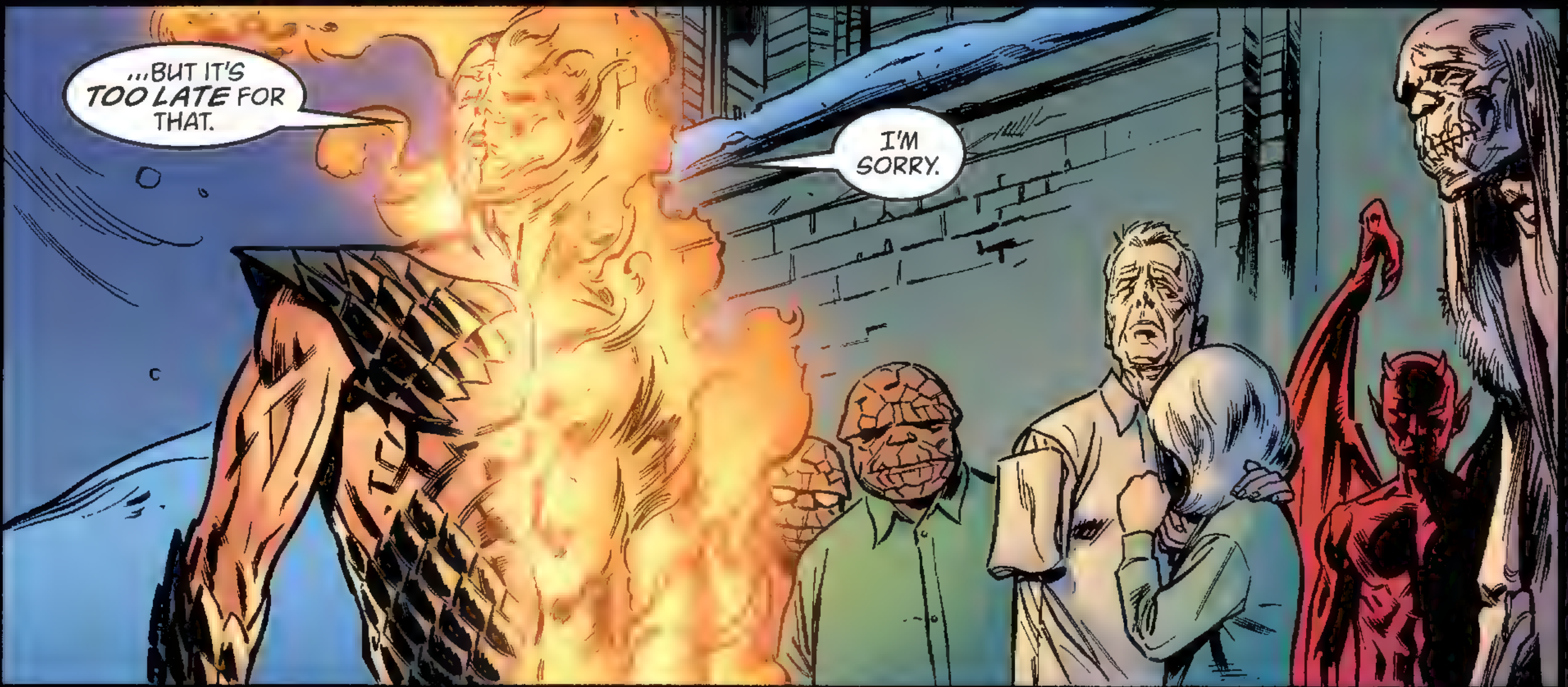




I WANT
YOU TO KNOW,
SUSAN...

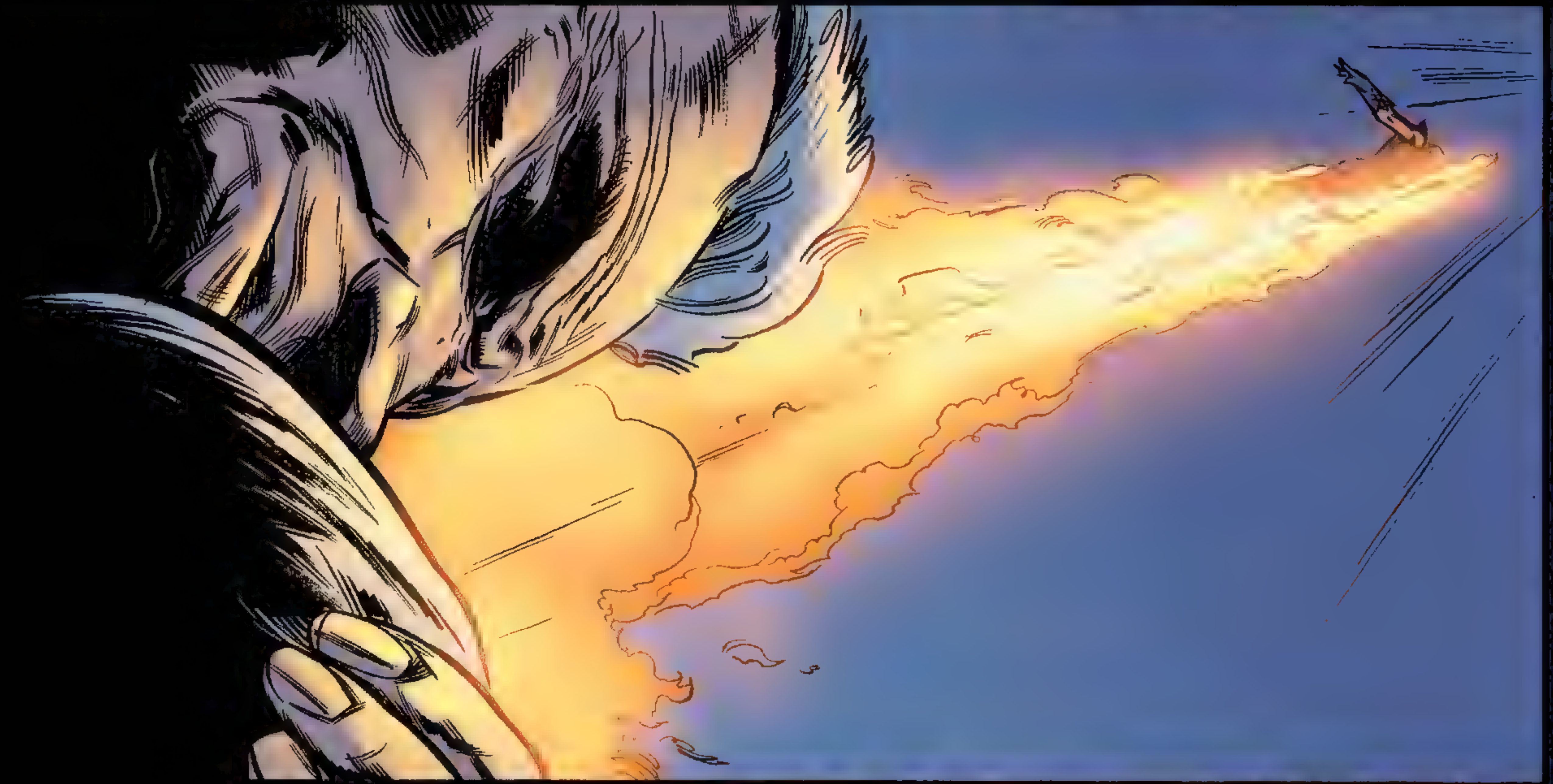


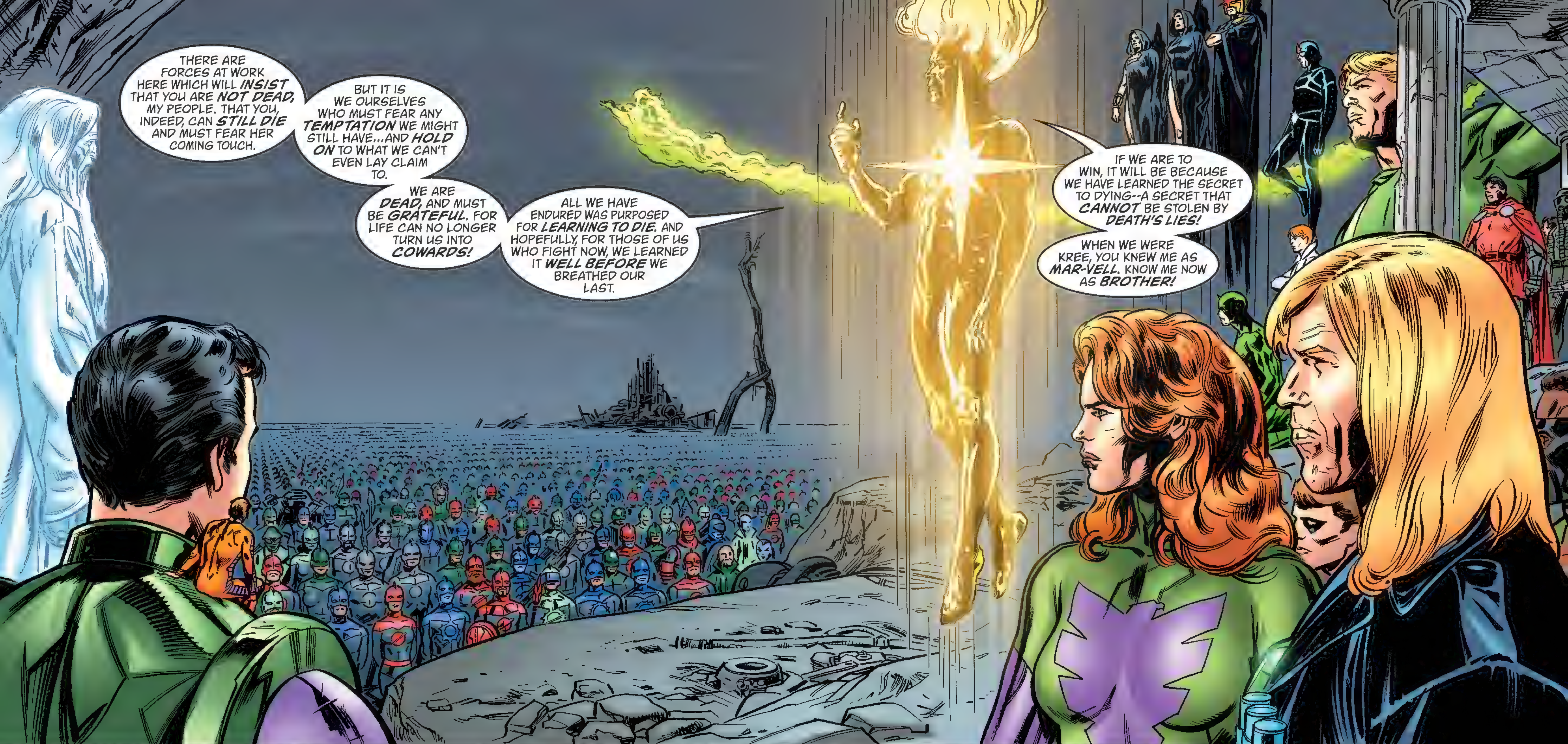
...THAT I AM
SORRY FOR WHAT
HAPPENED TO YOUR
BROTHER. I DON'T
KNOW WHY
I...



...BUT IT'S
TOO LATE FOR
THAT.

I'M
SORRY.





THERE ARE FORCES AT WORK HERE WHICH WILL *INSIST* THAT YOU ARE *NOT DEAD*, MY PEOPLE. THAT YOU, INDEED, CAN *STILL DIE* AND MUST FEAR HER COMING TOUCH.

BUT IT IS WE OURSELVES WHO MUST FEAR ANY *TEMPTATION* WE MIGHT STILL HAVE...AND *HOLD ON* TO WHAT WE CAN'T EVEN LAY CLAIM TO.

WE ARE *DEAD*, AND MUST BE *GRATEFUL*. FOR LIFE CAN NO LONGER TURN US INTO *COWARDS!*

ALL WE HAVE ENDURED WAS PURPOSED FOR *LEARNING TO DIE*. AND HOPEFULLY, FOR THOSE OF US WHO FIGHT NOW, WE LEARNED IT *WELL BEFORE* WE BREATHED OUR LAST.

IF WE ARE TO WIN, IT WILL BE BECAUSE WE HAVE LEARNED THE SECRET TO DYING--A SECRET THAT *CANNOT* BE STOLEN BY *DEATH'S LIES!*

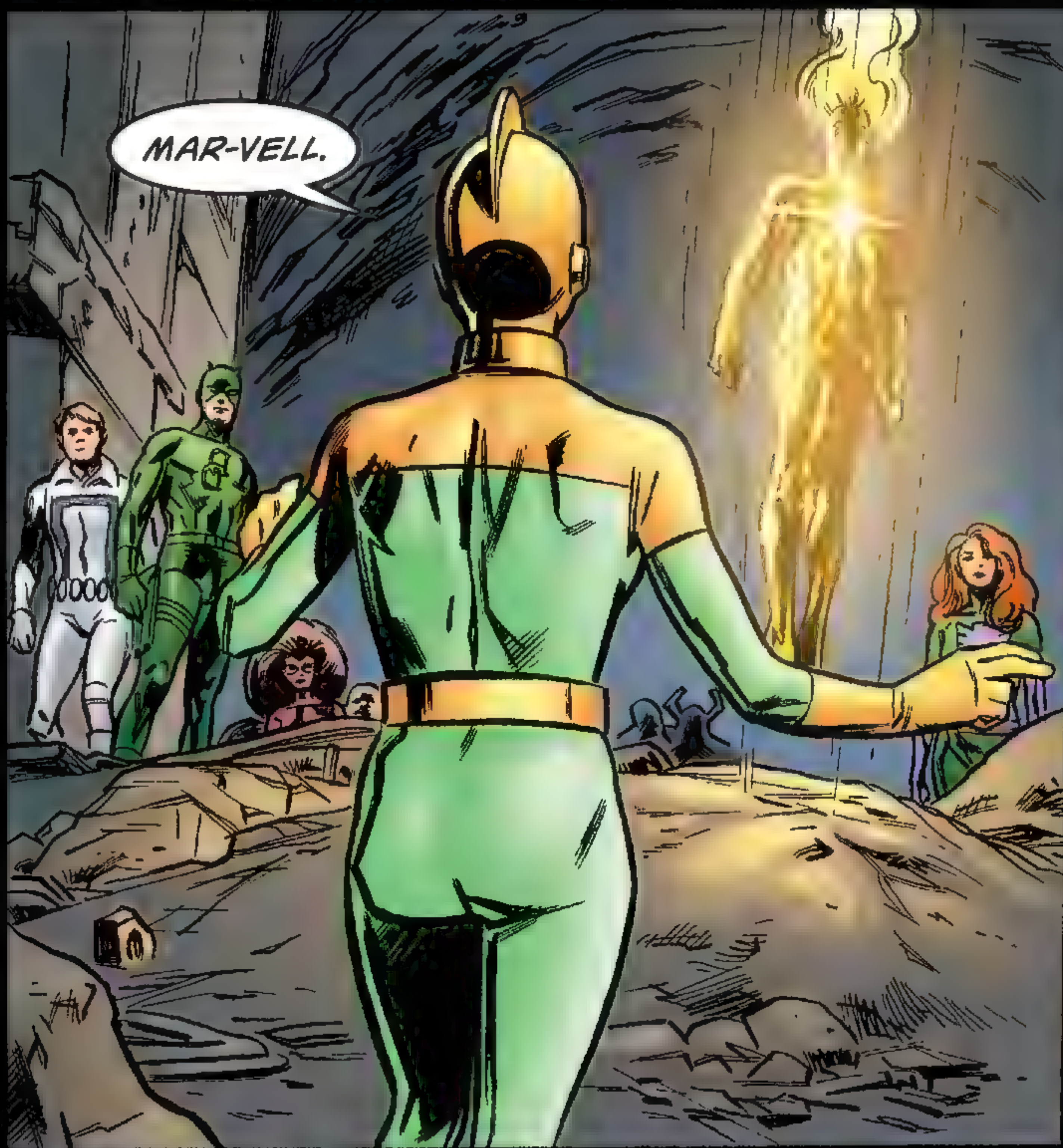
WHEN WE WERE KREE, YOU KNEW ME AS *MAR-VELL*. KNOW ME NOW AS *BROTHER!*



"WE FIGHT IN THIS PLACE FOR ALL THOSE WHO HAVE *DIED*."

"OR *EVER WILL*."

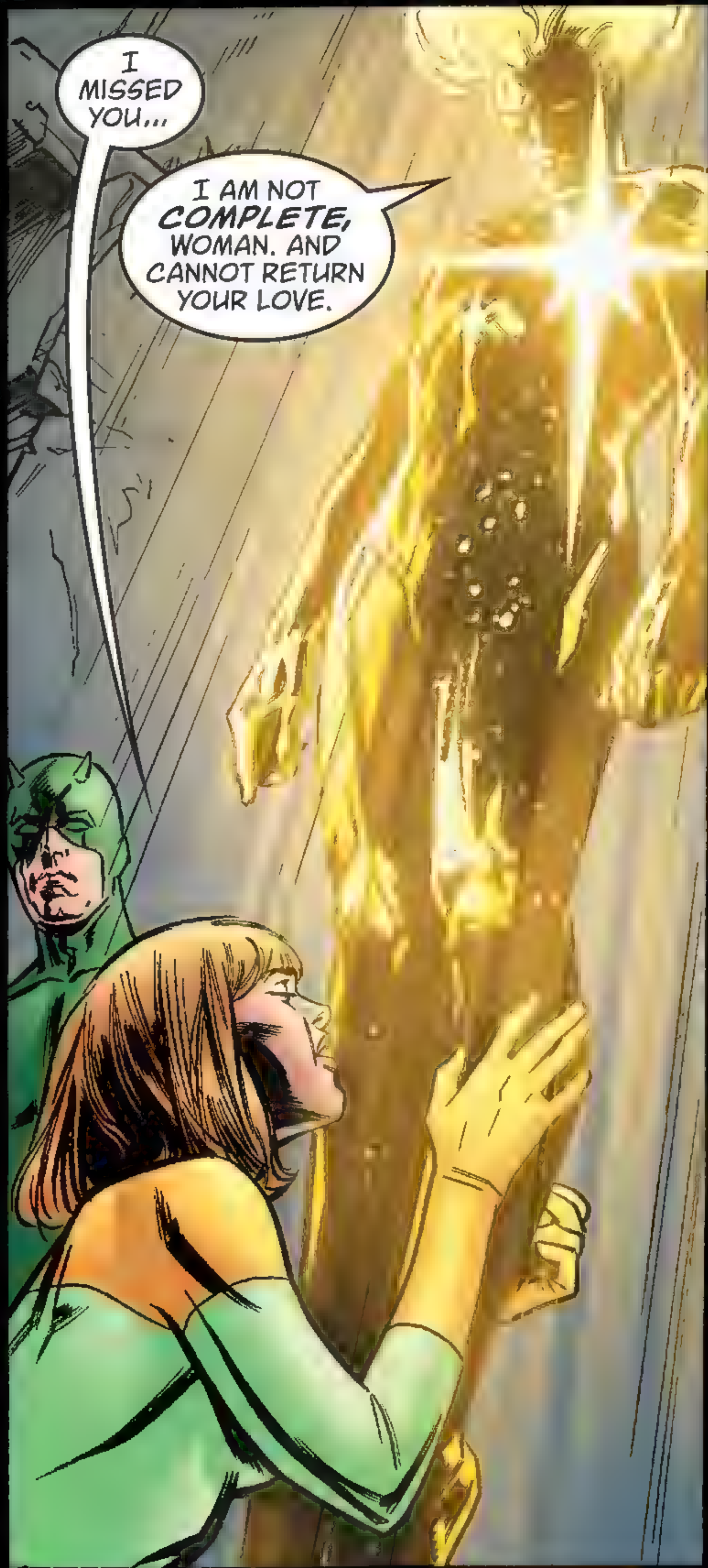
"AND WE PREPARE A *PLACE* FOR THEM."



MAR-VELL.

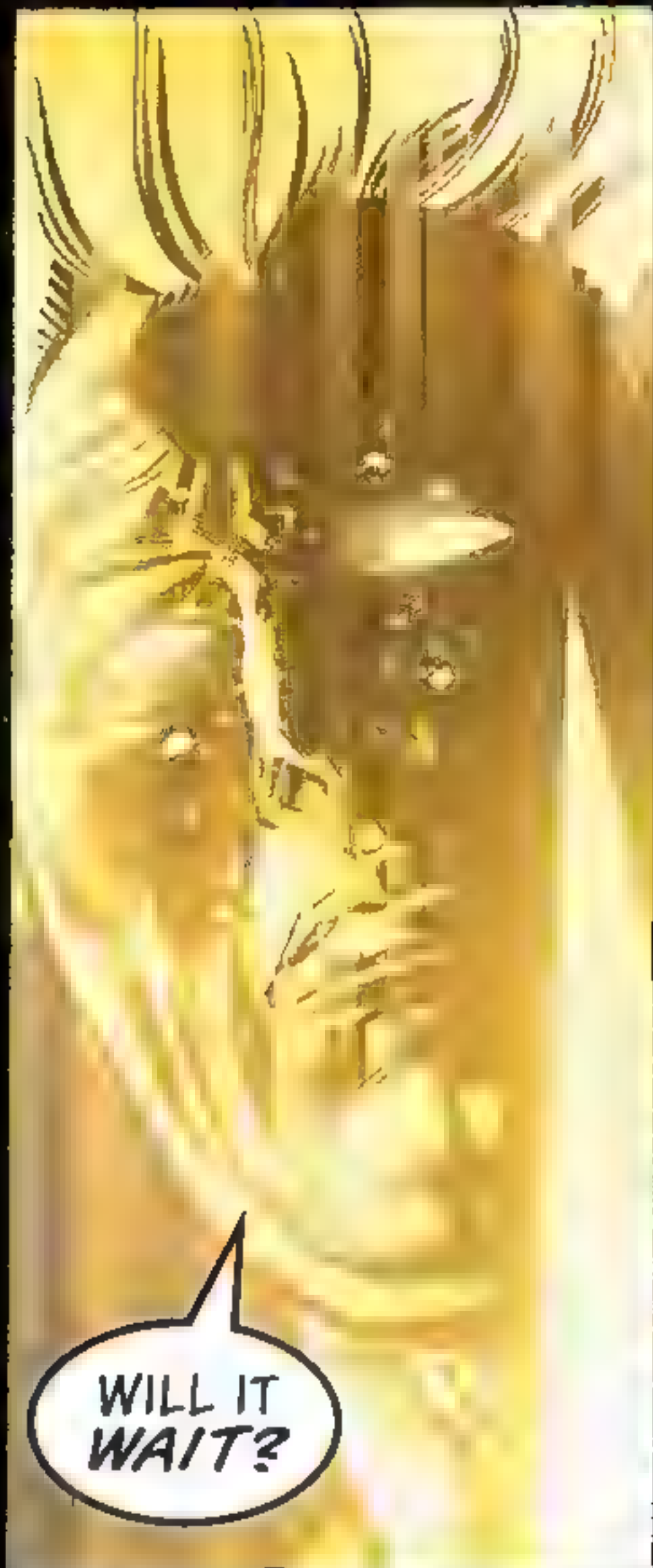


IT'S *ME. UNA*. YON-ROG WANTED ME TO TELL YOU THAT HE'S *SORRY* AND THAT HE'LL *FIGHT* FOR YOU. HE COULD NOT FACE YOU HIMSELF.



I MISSED YOU...

I AM NOT *COMPLETE*, WOMAN. AND CANNOT RETURN YOUR LOVE.



WILL IT WAIT?



OF COURSE. DEATH MUST BE *DEFEATED*.

NO. THAT IS NOT ALL.



WHAT I TELL YOU NOW I'VE ONLY REVEALED TO *ONE OTHER*.



WHO IS SHE?
WHAT'S HE SAYING
TO HER?

I DO
NOT KNOW,
STARK. A
PAST LOVER,
PERHAPS.

ARE THESE
YOUR *FRIENDS* NOW?
HAVE THEY COME TO
HELP YOU?



YES. I'M
GOING TO USE THIS
COLLECTION OF POWER
I TOLD YOU OF...TO *CREATE*
SOMETHING FOR ALL OF US
TO INHABIT ONCE DEATH
IS DEAD.



I'M
GOING TO BUILD
HEAVEN.

"Everything we are.
Everything we have.
Everything we do."
-The Call,
Os Guinness

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER NINE

W R I T T E N B Y
J I M K R U E G E R

"My name is Arron. Arron Stack. It is true what they say about worlds existing within worlds. I am not speaking of sub-atmica, the point of origin of the Ant-Men and the Enigma Force, and therefore Galactus. I am speaking of experience. I am speaking of life.

"To the Celestials mankind is sort of a cog in a two-dimensional machinery between the death of a given world and the birth of their species.

"Uatu, the Watcher I replaced on the moon said that this was all there was to know, all else was superfluous. But he was wrong. This world is not two-dimensional at all. There are three dimensions. For years it has been thought that time was the fourth dimension. It is not. It is only the third when considering the make-up of reality, or merely from a perspective outside humanity.

"This notion of time manifests itself in the form of other realities. And again, the alternate realities of which I am becoming more and more familiar are somehow the result of manipulations devised by Mephisto.

"My understanding of this has, indeed, been influenced by my understanding of Uatu's machinery and abilities to somehow catalogue all events on Earth. This omniscience of course, has blind spots. I have learned that every alternate reality to our own is somehow the result of leading a man to despair of his lot to such a degree that his conscience will be moved to try to undo the instigation of that despair. If this is true, I must target all those whose despair seems to be overwhelmed to try to catalogue where divergent histories have been created.



"Uatu's equipment is useless for attempting to find Mephisto, not because he is invisible to our monitors, but because his ability to alter his form is impossible to track.

"How many faces has Mephisto worn?

"Has it been his shoulder mankind has cried upon, or his hands that pushed humanity to commit its evils?

"Both... or neither. The problem it seems with coming to believe and accept the notion that he, indeed, may be the devil, is that we want to



ascribe to him, perhaps, more power than he deserves.

"If I am to understand him, I must look upon his origins. Is there a secret origin to the devil?

"According to popular faith, he is Lucifer, the daystar, the greatest of the angels. He became tired of his role in the design of the firmament, or perhaps, merely wanted the role of god. Either way, he rebelled, encouraging other angels to join his ranks in an attempt to overthrow their maker.

"Satan failed in his attempt and was cast down (?) to Earth with his brethren, where they continued their rebellion against their maker, not willing to accept that they had, indeed already lost.

"If Mephisto is Satan, and there have been so many time in which he has denied this, then is it possible that he has found a way to truly win this conflict? Has he, in the creation of alternate realities indeed discovered a way to escape what has been destined for?

"The problem is not one of the origins of his plan, but how indeed he hopes to accomplish such a thing. To consider the possibility that this is true leads me to also consider that if one like Mephisto exists, if there is a true Satan, than does not the possibility of a God also exist?

"But what of suffering? What of all I've seen? I can accept, on faith, I suppose, a being of evil attempting to infect the will and actions of others in the world I have now watched for these years. But how can a God allow such suffering?

"Yet still, if this sort of moral pendulum is not swung between a being of evil and a being of good, than is it as Uatu stated? Is there good at all? Is there purpose at all? And if there isn't, than I fear Uatu, the Watcher, has been correct all along... because there is no reason to question suffering.



"I suppose the real problem with Mephisto's plan, if there is god indeed, is that he supposes that this god is powerless and ineffective to stop him. "It seems to only way to defeat the devil, is to hope he does not have any real power or purpose. And to do that, suggests that neither do we. I wonder, if how many new worlds will be created as a result of this despair. "Whether Earth survives the changes to its eco-system or the attacks of Immortus' army may be insignificant. For this is humanity's ultimate defeat."



UNIVERSE



KRUEGER
BRAITHWAITE
REINHOLD

"I've never seen this sort of molecular breakdown. It's like watching Uatu's equipment at fast-forward speed. What's happening to him, Kyle?"

"All I can see with these accursed eyes is what's going to happen to him, Aaron. Isaac's already dead to my vision."

"You knew this would happen, Kyle. You saw it happen before I did. Why didn't you stop him?"

"He's my friend, Aaron. How could I control someone I love?"

"But if you truly loved him, how could you let him go off to make a bargain with Mephisto? Why didn't you tell him?"

"I did, Aaron. I warned him over and over again. But Isaac didn't believe me. He didn't *want* to believe me. There's not much difference between the two notions in the end."

"But you're talking about accepting the death of a friend because you loved him enough not to stop him. That's insane."

"Perhaps if you could see all that I can, Aaron, you would feel differently."

UNIVERSE X

ISSUE 10

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president

"IS MEPHISTO THE *DEVIL*, KYLE?
IS HE REALLY? IS THERE SUCH A
BEING?"

"I'VE WATCHED AND SEEN SO MUCH.
SO MUCH GOOD. EVEN MORE EVIL.
BUT I REFUSE TO BELIEVE IT'S ALL
MEANINGLESS. AND IF IT ISN'T,
THEN THERE *HAS* TO BE AN
EXPLANATION FOR THE EVIL."

"WHEN *PRINCE WAYFINDER*
AND HIS FOLLOWERS TRAVELED
BACK IN TIME TO EARTH'S PRIMOR-
DIAL PAST, THEY FOUND *DEMONS*
THERE, AARON."

"DEMONS? THIS WAS A COMMON
MISCONCEPTION FOR THE
CELESTIAL-MUTATED RACE KNOWN
AS THE *DEVIAN*T*S*. PERHAPS
MEPHISTO IS ONE OF THOSE FIRST
PRIMITIVE HUMANS MANIPULATED
BY THE CELESTIALS."

"I DON'T KNOW, AARON ...I DON'T
KNOW. BUT THE *EYES* THAT
MEPHISTO GAVE ME THAT ALLOW
ME TO SEE THE FUTURE ARE PART
OF SOMETHING CALLED THE
COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS.
IT'S LIKE OMNISCIENCE. BUT
THESE EYES ARE ONLY A *PIECE*
OF IT."

"MANY OF THE DEMONS I HEARD ABOUT
AS A DEFENDER MAY HAVE BEEN *DEVIAN*T*S*,
AARON. THEIR ORIGINS *CONTRADICTED*
THE COMING OF THE CELESTIALS THAT
YOU SPEAK OF, SO IT IS POSSIBLE THAT
THESE ORIGINS WERE FORMED BY
SUPERSTITION OR *MYTH*."

"BUT NOT MEPHISTO. IS THAT WHAT
YOU'RE SAYING? HE HAS BEEN CALLED
THE FATHER OF LIES. THE FATHER OF
DEMONS."

"...AND THE FATHER OF *REBELLION*.
HOW COULD HE EVER HAVE CREATED
AN *ALLIED* DEMONIC FORCE? HE
KNOWS ALL TOO WELL THAT THE VERY
NATURE OF THEIR BEING WILL LEAD
TO THEIR *BETRAYING* HIM FOR
THEMSELVES."

"BUT LIKE THE MANIPULATOR THAT HE
IS, HE CREATES DEMONS TO *FIGHT*
EACH OTHER. TO SERVE AND BETRAY
EACH OTHER--TO BUILD ON HUMANITY'S
SUPERSTITIONS AND FEARS."

"HE USED THEIR REBELLION
TO SERVE HIS *OWN ENDS*."

"MEPHISTO KNEW THAT
IF HE HAD A SECOND,
A *SERVANT* OF SORTS,
THAT THIS SECOND
WOULD ULTIMATELY
BETRAY HIM--AND SO
HE PRIMARILY CHOSE
HUMANS WITH LITTLE
POWER."

"HE KNEW OF THE
CELESTIAL PLAN FOR
PROPAGATION AND
MUTATED THE SEEDS
WITHIN THEM HIMSELF."

"KYLE, HOW DO *YOU* KNOW
OF THE CELESTIAL PLAN?"

"BECAUSE THE KNOWLEDGE
FLOWS THROUGH ME,
AARON. I'M ALMOST NUMB TO
IT ALL, NOW."

"MEPHISTO
SET THESE
UNDERLINGS
TO RULE IN THE
ALTERNATE
REALITIES
HE HELPED
CREATE. THIS,
OF COURSE,
WAS HIS PLAN
TO ESCAPE
DIVINE
JUDGEMENT."

"IN ALMOST EVERY
CASE, HE ALLOWED
THESE NEW MUTAT-
ED BEINGS TO BE-
LIEVE THEMSELVES
TO BE THE *TRUE*
SATAN. THERE'D
BE NO ONE TO REBEL
AGAINST IF EACH WAS
CONVINCED THEY WERE
NUMBER ONE!"

"WHEN *DR. STRANGE* FIRST CAME
UPON *DORMAMMU* IN ANOTHER
DIMENSION, HE HAD *NO IDEA* HE
WAS FACING ONE OF THESE OTHER
BEINGS...OR THAT HE WAS WALKING
UPON AN ALTERNATE EARTH."

"THAT'S WHERE THE *MAGIC* COMES
FROM, AARON. FROM POWER FOUND
IN ALTERNATE REALITIES."

"THAT'S INCREDIBLE."

"IS IT? I'VE *FORGOTTEN*
HOW TO BE AMAZED."

"AND IF THIS IS SO IMPOSSIBLE
TO CONSIDER, HOW IS IT THAT
CLEA, THE DISCIPLE AND LOVER
THAT STRANGE FOUND THERE,
WAS *HUMAN* WHEN STRANGE
FOUND HER?"

"OF COURSE, THIS IS ONLY
ONE EXAMPLE OF *MANY*."

"IN THE CASE OF *DRACULA*,
MEPHISTO INFECTED A MAN WITH
A COMMUNICABLE *BLOOD*
DISEASE THAT STRUCK FEAR
INTO UNMUTATED MANKIND."

"BUT THE FEAR MANKIND HELD
FOR DRACULA WAS THE FEAR
OF BECOMING LIKE HIM."

"*MUTATED*?"

"IF THAT'S THE WORD YOU
CHOOSE TO USE, AARON."

"DRACULA ESCAPED HIS
THIRST FOR BLOOD *ONCE*.
BUT MEPHISTO CURSED HIM
AGAIN, WITH THE THIRST...
WITH *IMMORTALITY*."

"AND AT THAT MOMENT,
DRACULA KNEW FROM
WHOM HIS POWER CAME."

"THEN *DRACULA*
IS A MUTANT?"

"AGAIN, THAT'S *YOUR*
WORD FOR IT."

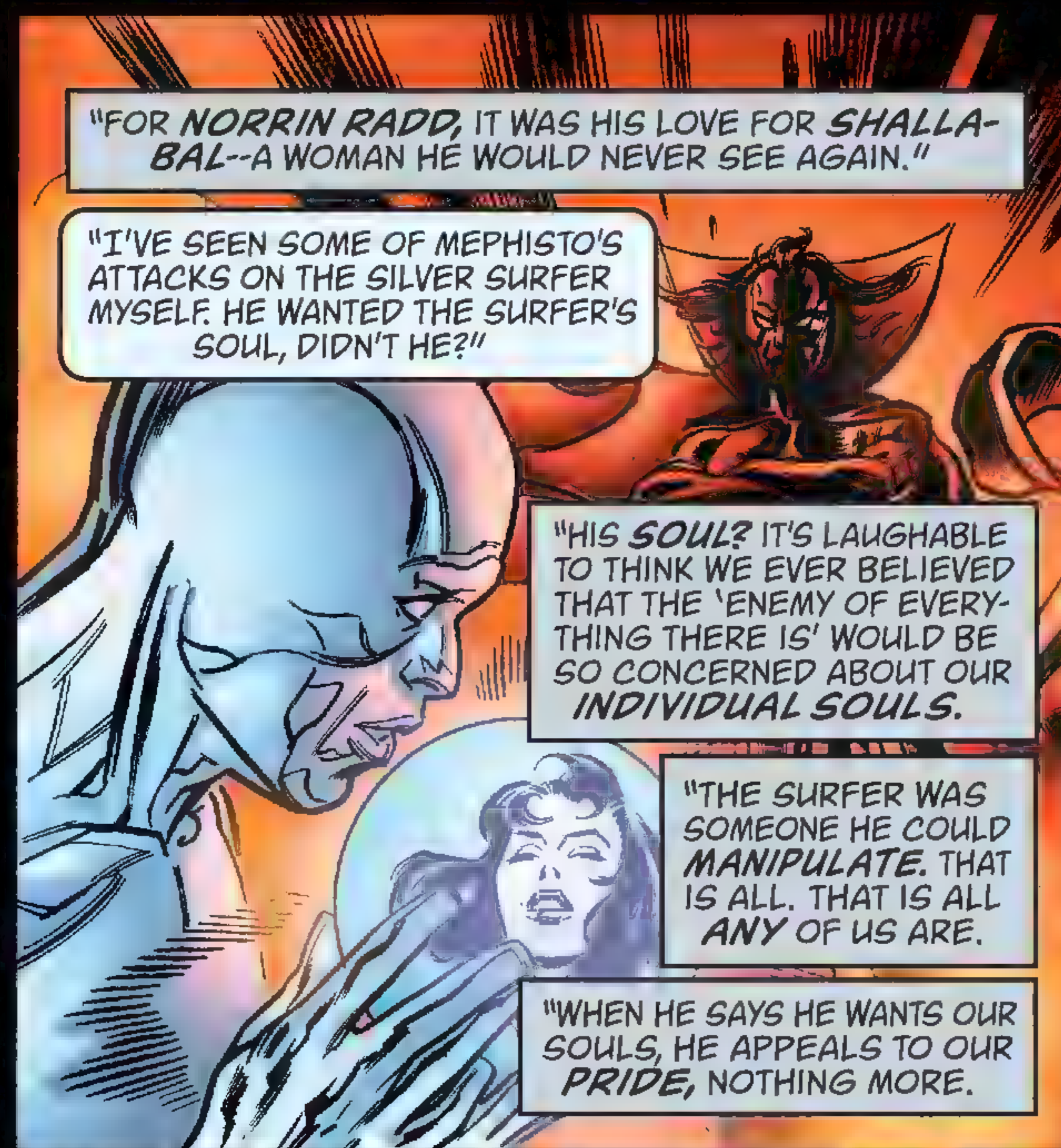


"BUT TRANSFORMING BEINGS INTO HIS SECONDS WAS NOT HIS **ONLY** STRATEGY IN BIRTHING THE SORT OF CHAOS NECESSARY TO CREATE ALTERNATE REALITIES. HE ALSO MANIPULATED THOSE WHOSE **CELESTIAL SEED** HAD ALREADY BEEN TRIGGERED."

"I DON'T UNDERSTAND."

"FOR **BRIAN BRADDOCK** AND THE REST OF THE CAPTAIN BRITAIN CORPS, HE CREATED A WAY TO **TRAVEL** FROM ONE ALTERNATE REALITY TO ANOTHER."

"HE SENT ANOTHER OF HIS SECONDS TO GOVERN THIS CHANNEL BETWEEN WORLDS--**MERLIN**, WHOM ANGLICAN MYTH REFERRED TO AS THE **SON OF THE DEVIL**."



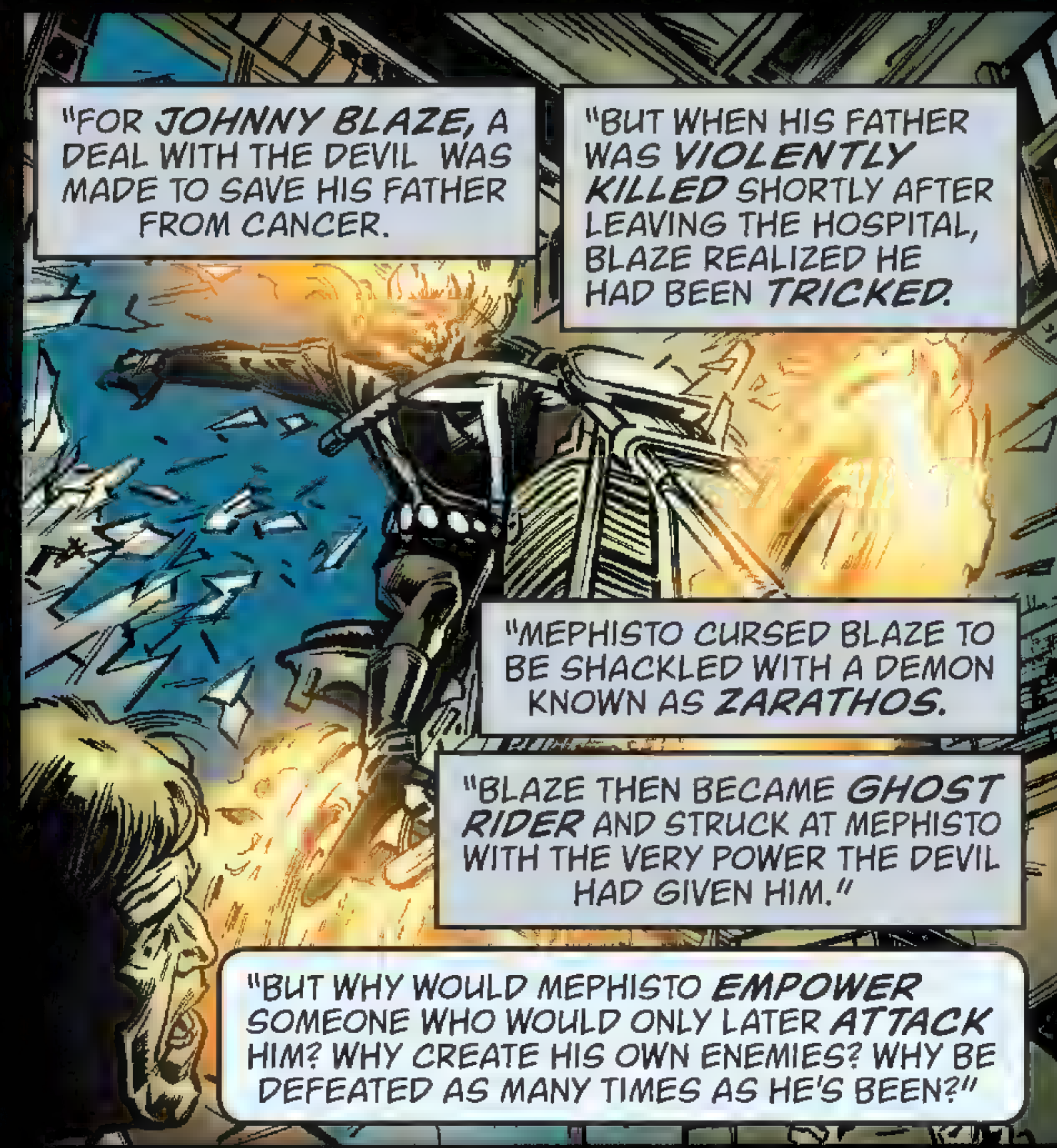
"FOR **NORRIN RADD**, IT WAS HIS LOVE FOR **SHALLA-BAL**--A WOMAN HE WOULD NEVER SEE AGAIN."

"I'VE SEEN SOME OF MEPHISTO'S ATTACKS ON THE SILVER SURFER MYSELF. HE WANTED THE SURFER'S SOUL, DIDN'T HE?"

"HIS **SOUL**? IT'S LAUGHABLE TO THINK WE EVER BELIEVED THAT THE 'ENEMY OF EVERYTHING THERE IS' WOULD BE SO CONCERNED ABOUT OUR **INDIVIDUAL SOULS**."

"THE SURFER WAS SOMEONE HE COULD **MANIPULATE**. THAT IS ALL. THAT IS ALL **ANY** OF US ARE."

"WHEN HE SAYS HE WANTS OUR SOULS, HE APPEALS TO OUR **PRIDE**, NOTHING MORE."



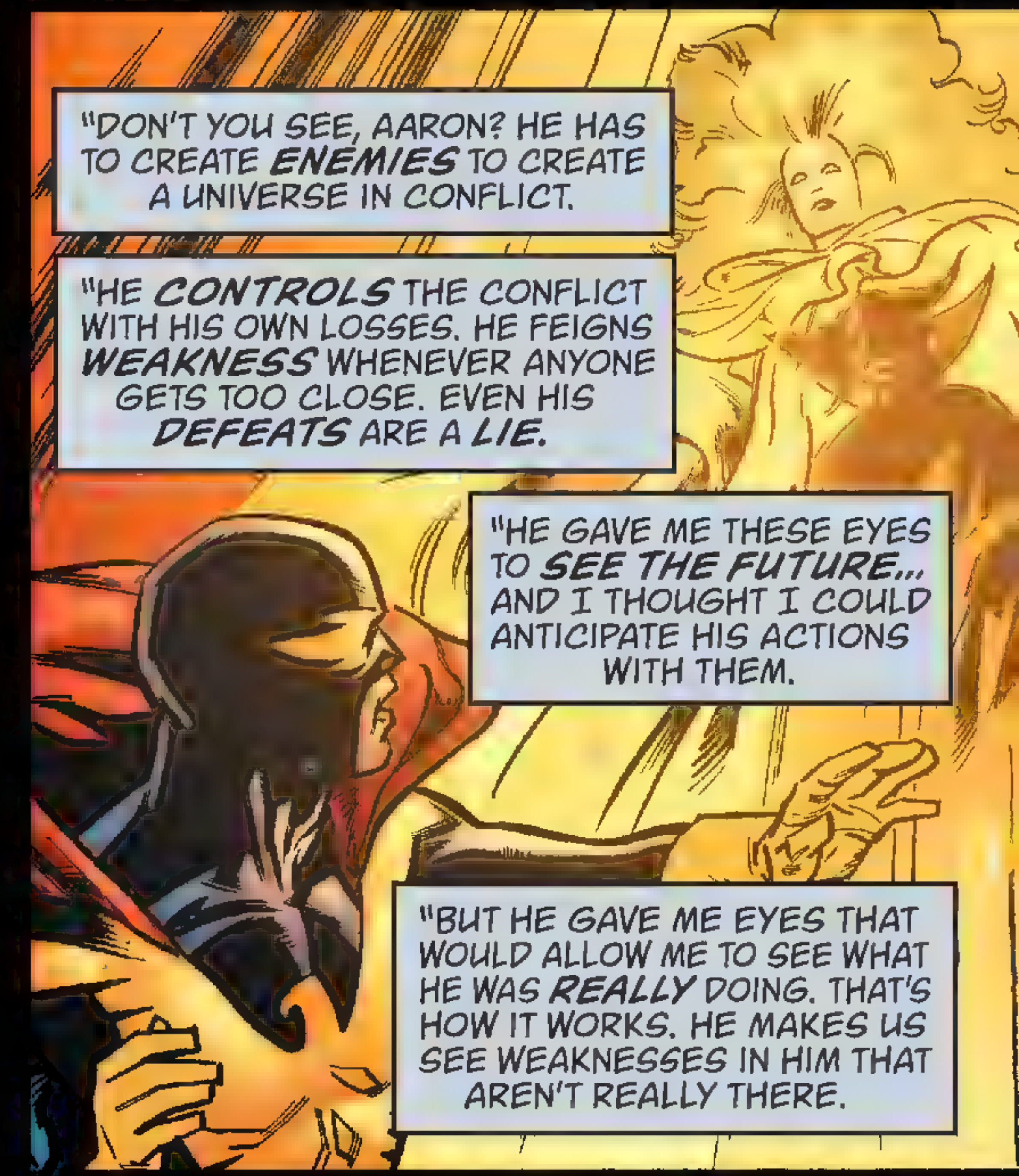
"FOR **JOHNNY BLAZE**, A DEAL WITH THE DEVIL WAS MADE TO SAVE HIS FATHER FROM CANCER."

"BUT WHEN HIS FATHER WAS **VIOLENTLY KILLED** SHORTLY AFTER LEAVING THE HOSPITAL, BLAZE REALIZED HE HAD BEEN **TRICKED**."

"MEPHISTO CURSED BLAZE TO BE SHACKLED WITH A DEMON KNOWN AS **ZARATHOS**."

"BLAZE THEN BECAME **GHOST RIDER** AND STRUCK AT MEPHISTO WITH THE VERY POWER THE DEVIL HAD GIVEN HIM."

"BUT WHY WOULD MEPHISTO **EMPOWER** SOMEONE WHO WOULD ONLY LATER **ATTACK** HIM? WHY CREATE HIS OWN ENEMIES? WHY BE DEFEATED AS MANY TIMES AS HE'S BEEN?"



"DON'T YOU SEE, AARON? HE HAS TO CREATE **ENEMIES** TO CREATE A UNIVERSE IN CONFLICT."

"HE **CONTROLS** THE CONFLICT WITH HIS OWN LOSSES. HE FEIGNS **WEAKNESS** WHENEVER ANYONE GETS TOO CLOSE. EVEN HIS **DEFEATS** ARE A **LIE**."

"HE GAVE ME THESE EYES TO **SEE THE FUTURE**... AND I THOUGHT I COULD ANTICIPATE HIS ACTIONS WITH THEM."

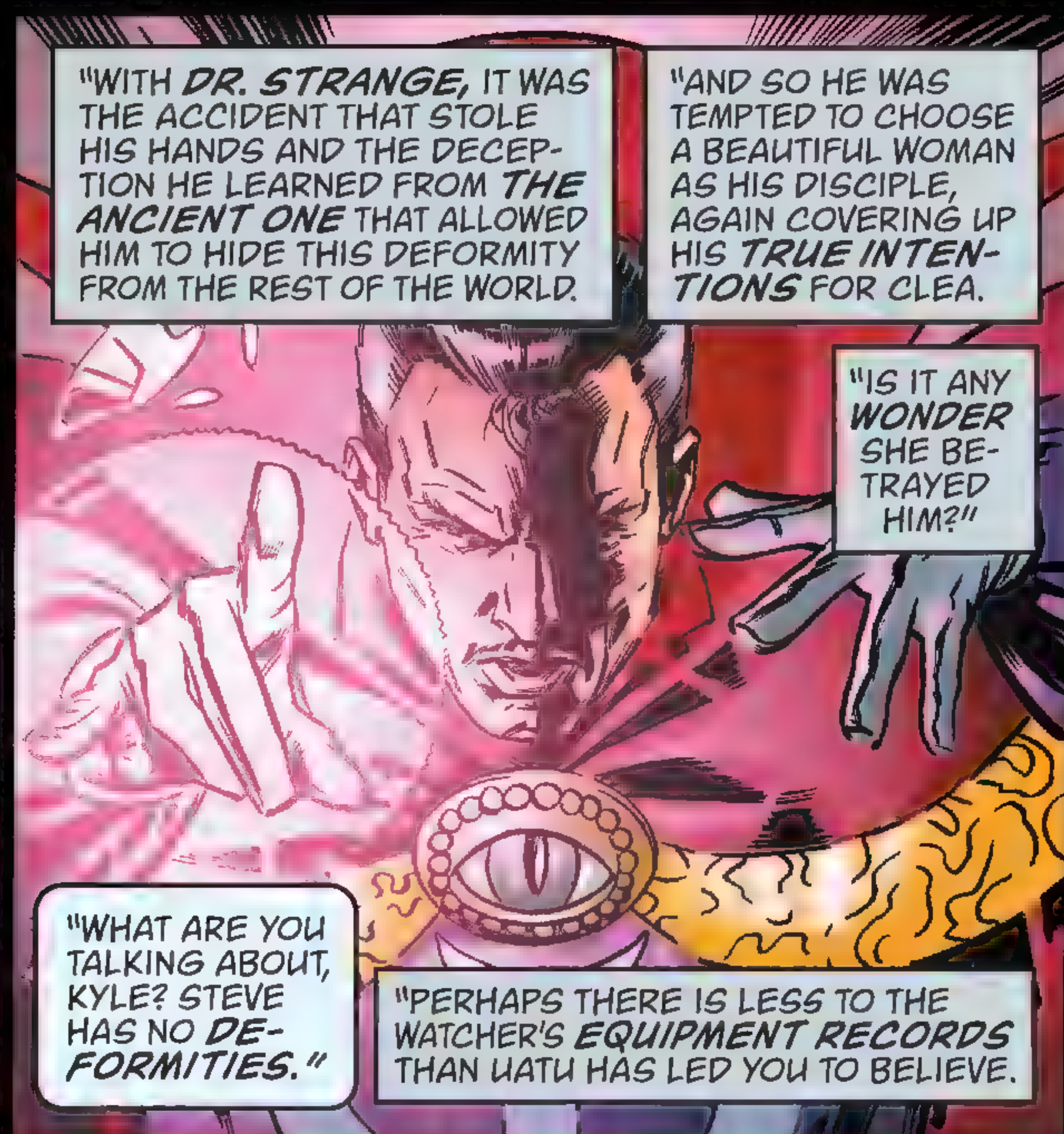
"BUT HE GAVE ME EYES THAT WOULD ALLOW ME TO SEE WHAT HE WAS **REALLY** DOING. THAT'S HOW IT WORKS. HE MAKES US SEE WEAKNESSES IN HIM THAT AREN'T REALLY THERE."



"FOR **MATT MURDOCK**, A BOY WHO SWORE TO HIS FATHER THAT HE WOULDN'T FIGHT, IT WAS THE RIFT BETWEEN LAW AND JUSTICE THAT MEPHISTO TOOK ADVANTAGE OF."

"HE EASILY TWISTED THE THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS IN A BOY WHOSE WORD TO HIS FATHER WAS NOT NEARLY AS STRONG AS HIS NEED TO **AVENGE** THAT FATHER'S DEATH."

"PERHAPS MURDOCK'S BOUTS WITH INSANITY ARE NOT SO UNBELIEVABLE NOW."



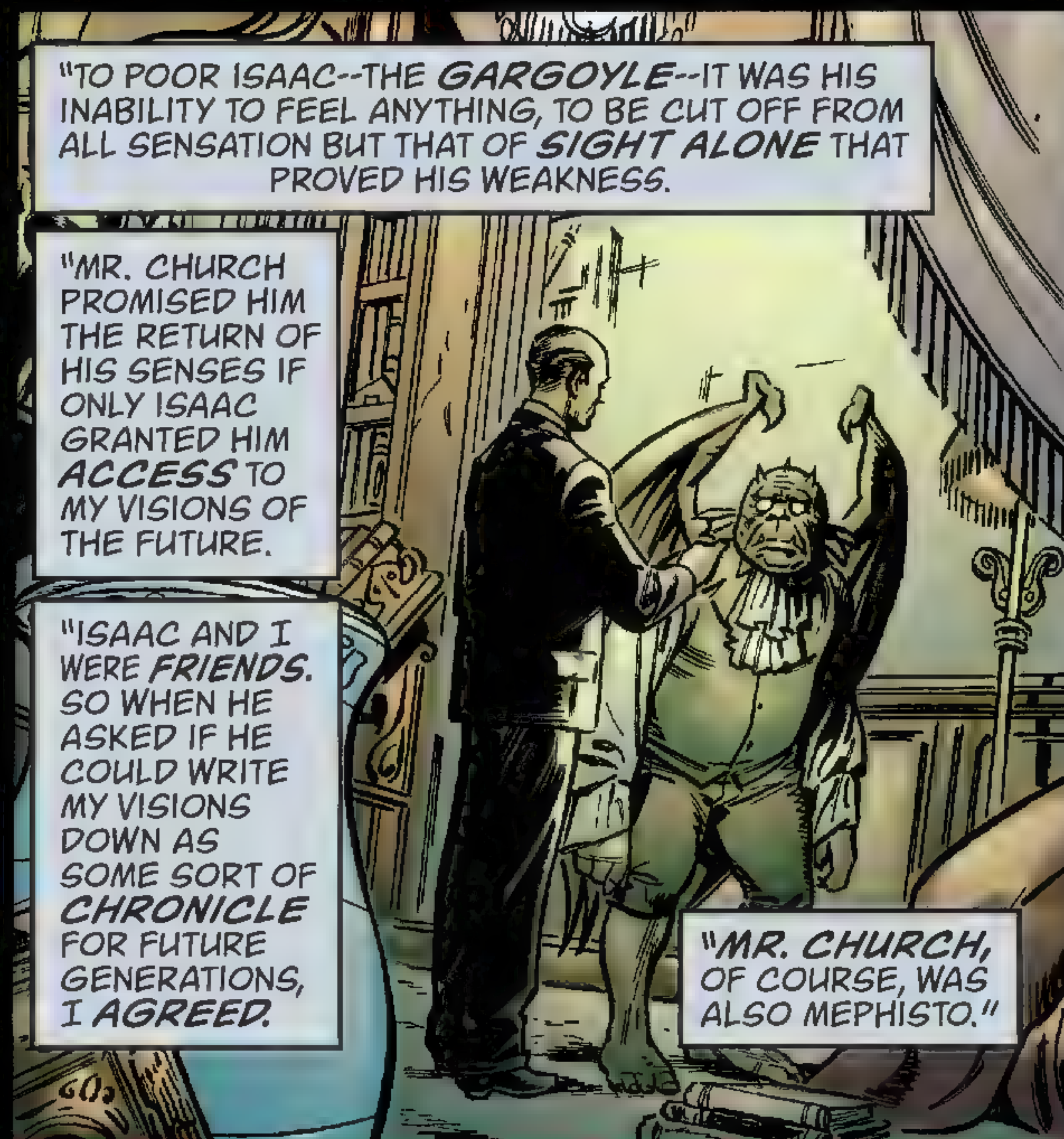
"WITH **DR. STRANGE**, IT WAS THE ACCIDENT THAT STOLE HIS HANDS AND THE DECEPTION HE LEARNED FROM **THE ANCIENT ONE** THAT ALLOWED HIM TO HIDE THIS DEFORMITY FROM THE REST OF THE WORLD."

"AND SO HE WAS TEMPTED TO CHOOSE A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN AS HIS DISCIPLE, AGAIN COVERING UP HIS **TRUE INTENTIONS** FOR CLEA."

"IS IT ANY **WONDER** SHE BETRAYED HIM?"

"WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, KYLE? STEVE HAS NO **DEFORMITIES**."

"PERHAPS THERE IS LESS TO THE WATCHER'S **EQUIPMENT RECORDS** THAN UATU HAS LED YOU TO BELIEVE."



"TO POOR ISAAC--THE **GARGOYLE**--IT WAS HIS INABILITY TO FEEL ANYTHING, TO BE CUT OFF FROM ALL SENSATION BUT THAT OF **SIGHT ALONE** THAT PROVED HIS WEAKNESS."

"MR. CHURCH PROMISED HIM THE RETURN OF HIS SENSES IF ONLY ISAAC GRANTED HIM **ACCESS** TO MY VISIONS OF THE FUTURE."

"ISAAC AND I WERE **FRIENDS**. SO WHEN HE ASKED IF HE COULD WRITE MY VISIONS DOWN AS SOME SORT OF **CHRONICLE** FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS, I **AGREED**."

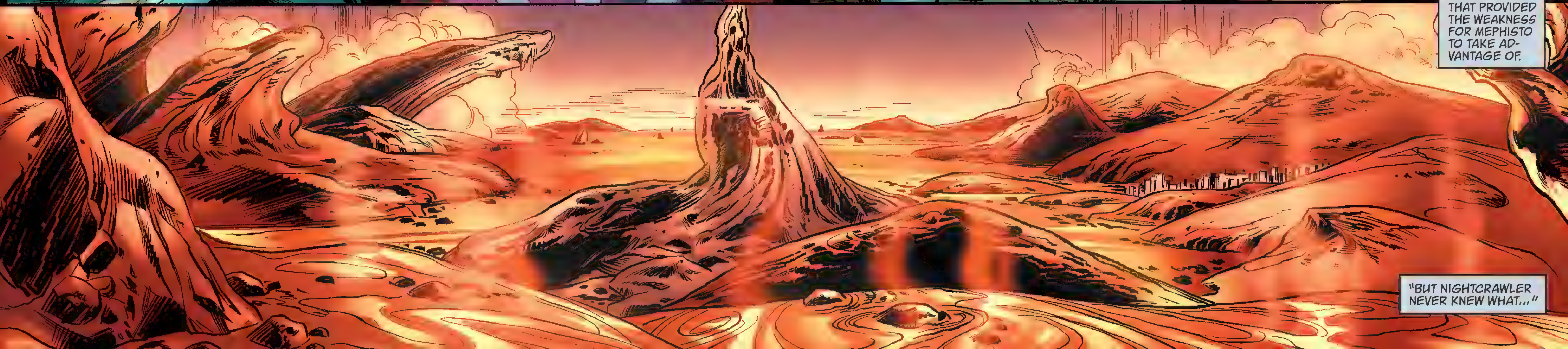
"MR. CHURCH, OF COURSE, WAS ALSO MEPHISTO."



"BUT DIDN'T YOU **SEE** THIS? COULDN'T YOU SEE THAT MR. CHURCH WAS MEPHISTO?"

"NOT UNTIL IT WAS TOO LATE. YOU SEE, THESE EYES DON'T SHOW THE **WHOLE FUTURE**. ONLY **PART** OF IT."

"WITH **KURT WAGNER**, IT WAS HIS OWN DEMONIC FORM THAT PROVIDED THE WEAKNESS FOR MEPHISTO TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF."





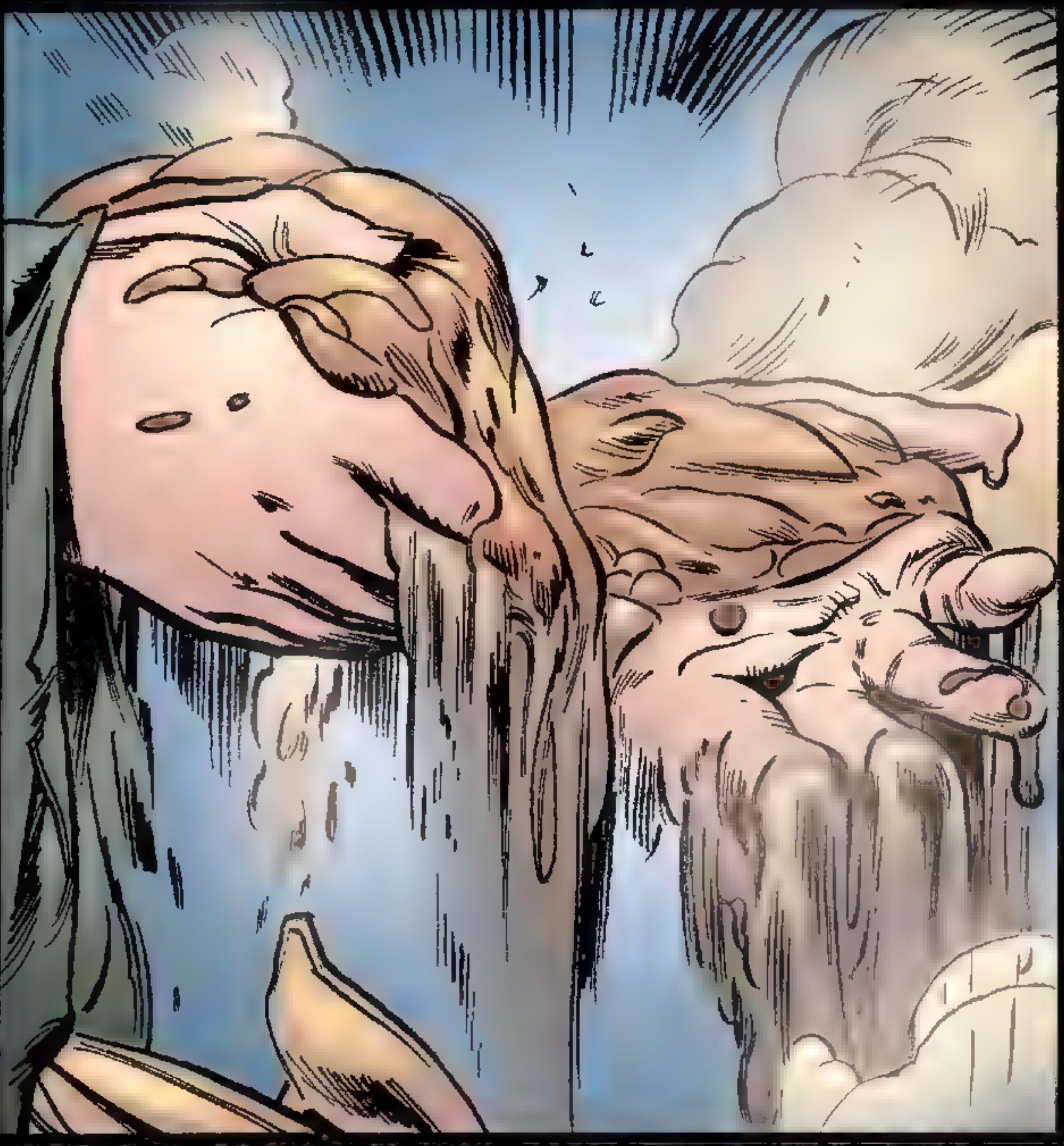
...NIGHT-CRAWLER...
HE NEVER...
KURT...
...HE...



I'M SORRY,
AARON. I CAN'T **SEE**
ANYMORE.
THAT'S NOT THE
WORST
OF IT, KYLE.
I THINK
ISAAC
NEEDS US
RIGHT
NOW.



I WAS...
WRONG...I'M
SORR...





I TOLD HIM HE'D RETURN TO HIS SENSES.



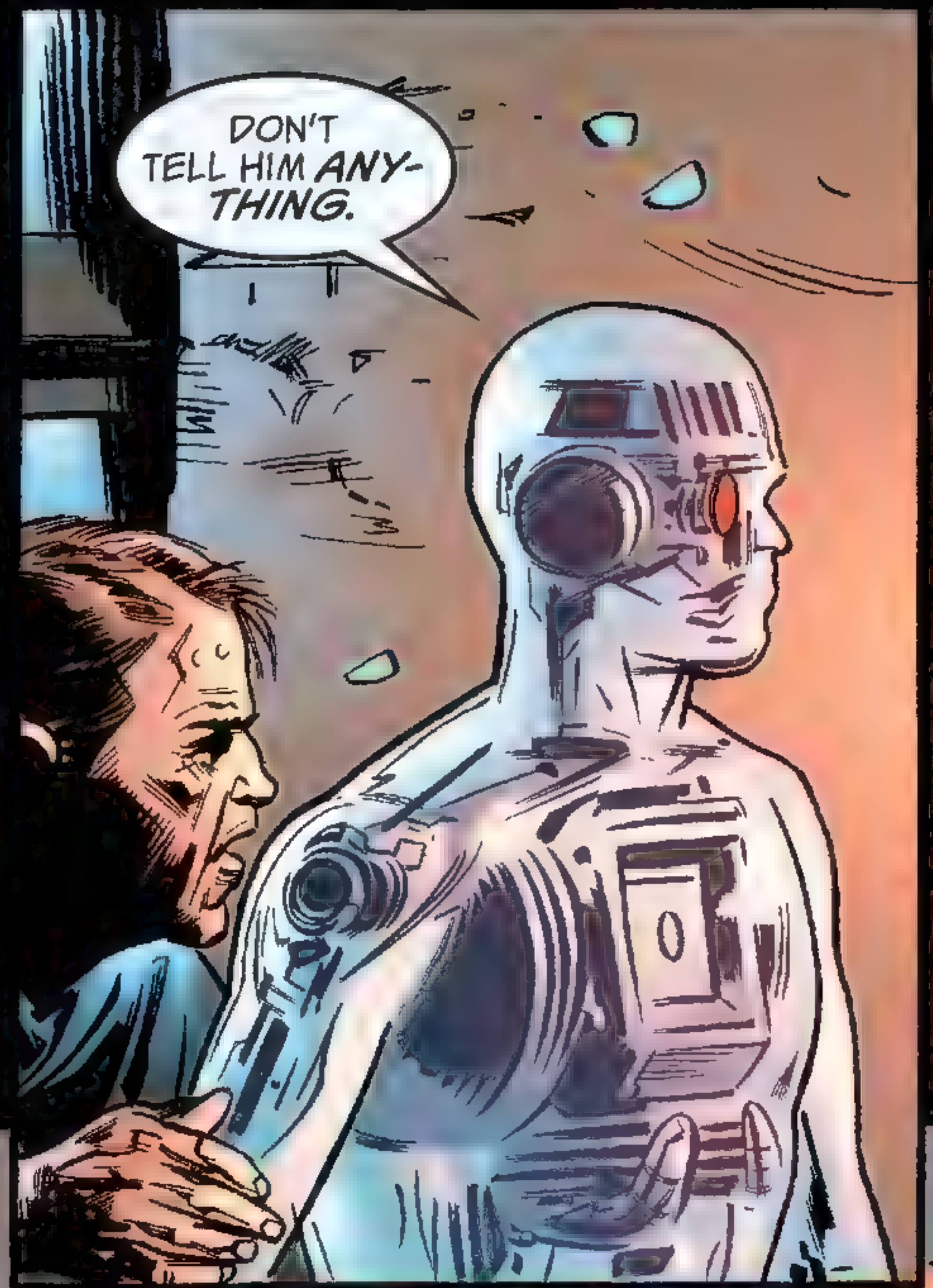
BASTARD!

NO, KYLE. I *KNOW* WHO MY FATHER IS. IT'S MY *MOTHER'S* IDENTITY THAT IS THE MYSTERY.



NOW, MY WATCHERS...I HAVE A QUESTION FOR YOU.

WHERE IS THE MAR-VELL CHILD GOING TO APPEAR NEXT?

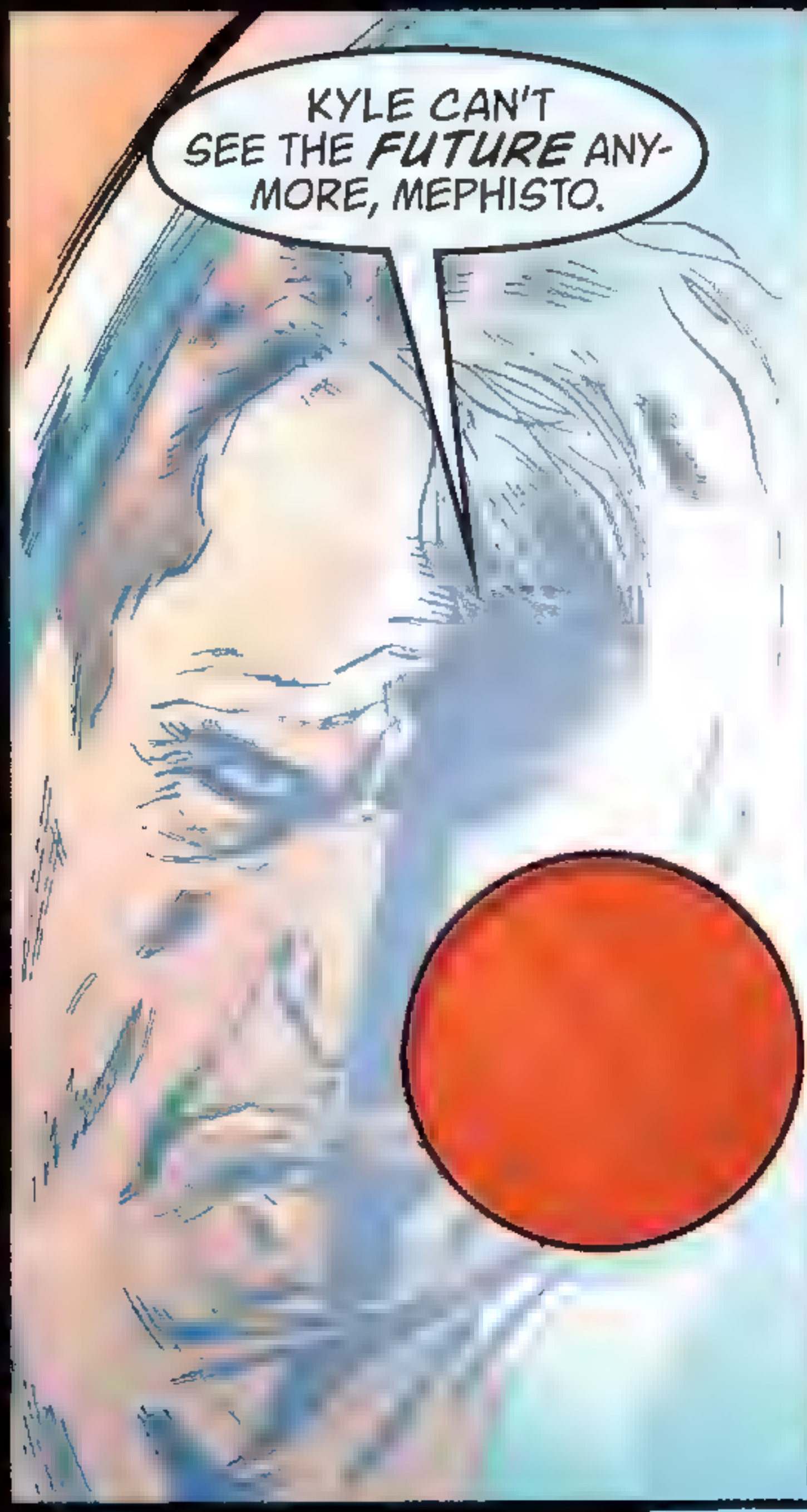


DON'T TELL HIM ANYTHING.



SILLY LITTLE OPERATIONAL MODEL 22P45-9-X-51...YOU'VE BEEN WATCHING TOO MANY *HERO SHOWS* ON TELEVISION.

KYLE KNOWS *BETTER* THAN TO OPPOSE ME. THAT'S WHY HE DIDN'T WARN ISAAC...OH, THE *FUTILITY* OF IT ALL.



KYLE CAN'T SEE THE *FUTURE* ANYMORE, MEPHISTO.



THEN THAT CAN ONLY MEAN HE'S ABOUT TO DIE. HE HAS NO FUTURE.

SEE YOU ON THE OTHER SIDE, KYLE.

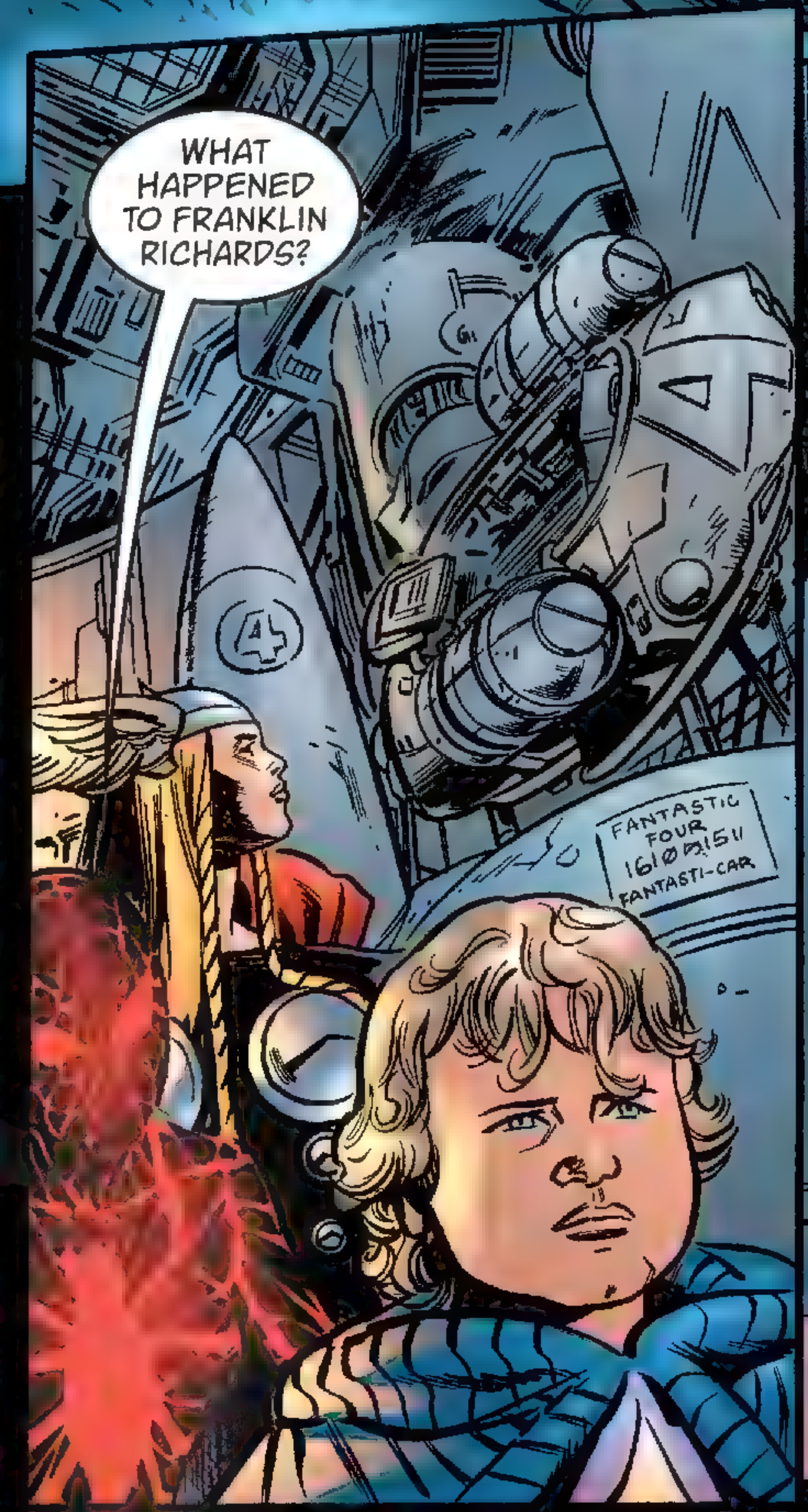


'TIS AS HOT IN HERE AS HELA'S BOSOM!

UH... YOU'RE A GIRL NOW, THOR. WE DON'T SAY THINGS LIKE THAT.

WHAT ARE WE DOING IN WUNDAGORE ANYHOW, MAR-VELL?

AND IF THERE'S ANY WAY **NOT** TO SEE THE WORST PARTS OF MY LIFE EVERY TIME WE TELEPORT THROUGH THAT CLOAK, I'D APPRECIATE IT.



WHAT HAPPENED TO FRANKLIN RICHARDS?



HE BECAME **GALACTUS**, THE DEVOURER OF WORLDS.



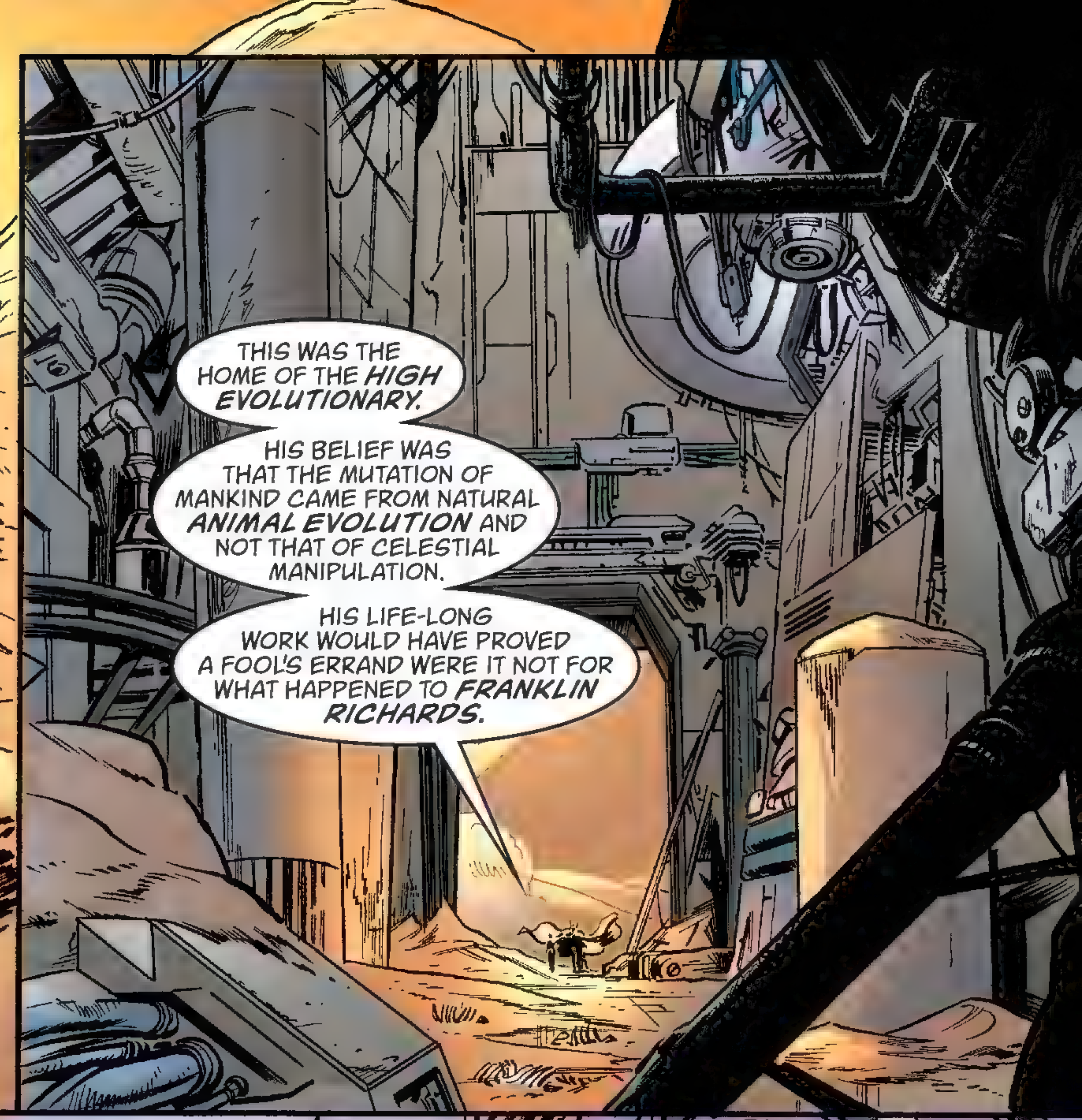
IT IS GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN, MAR-VELL. OUR PATHS HAVE BEEN **DESTINED** TO CROSS TIME AND TIME AGAIN.

ADAM.



WHAT'S THAT THING?

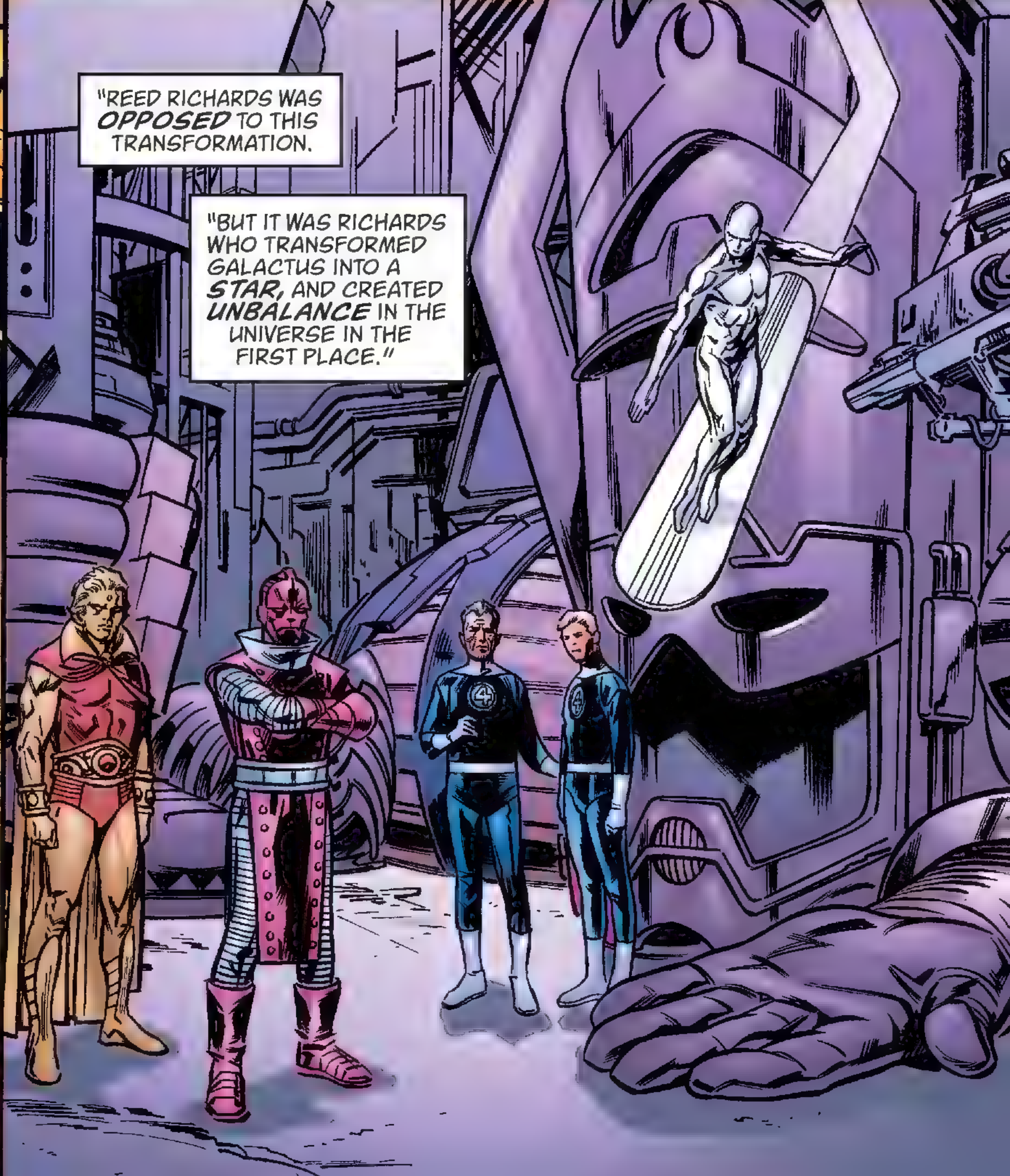
SOME-THING THAT MAKES **ANGELS** FROM MEN.
OR AN **INSATIABLE HUNGER** FROM A CHILD.



THIS WAS THE HOME OF THE **HIGH EVOLUTIONARY**.

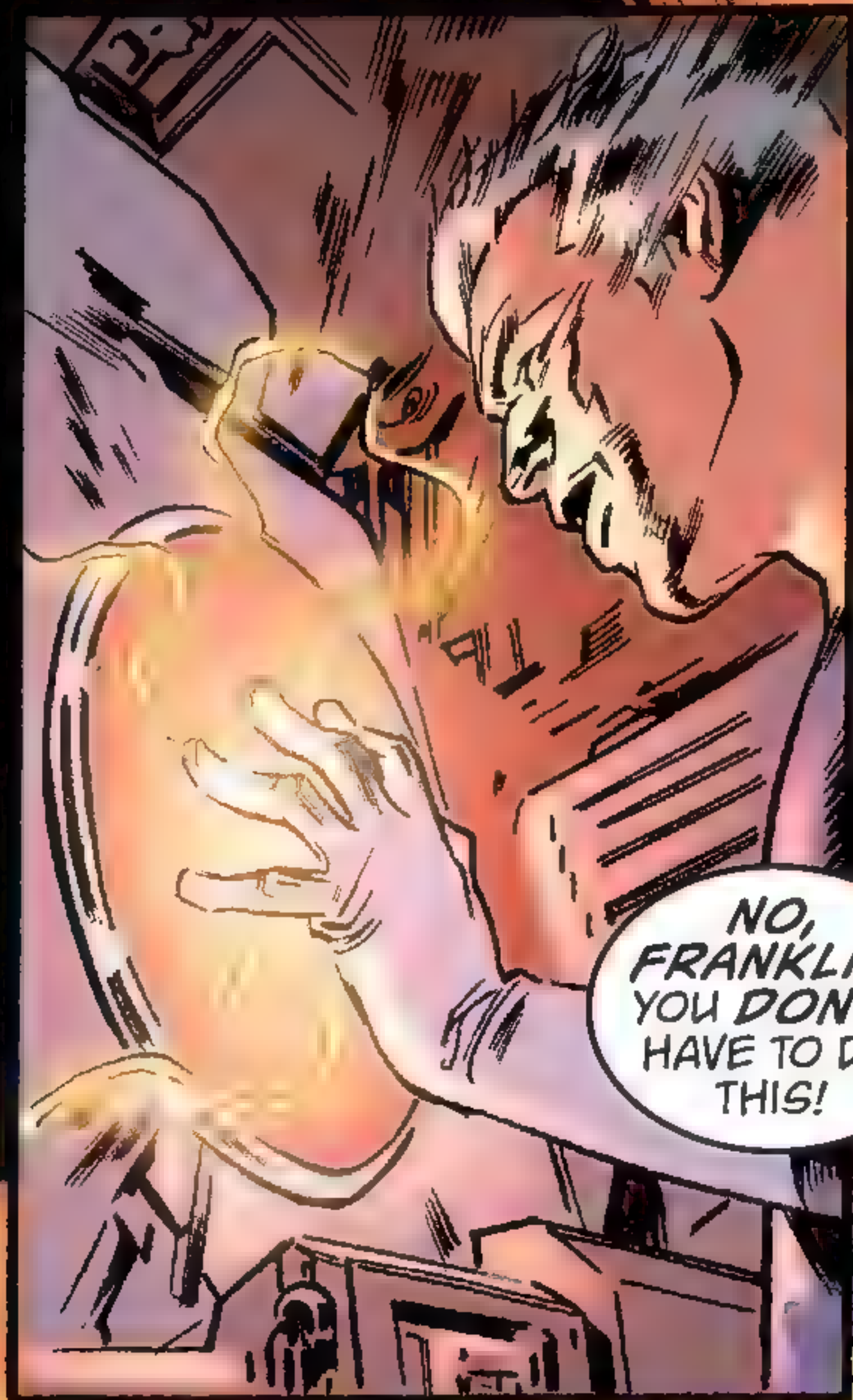
HIS BELIEF WAS THAT THE MUTATION OF MANKIND CAME FROM NATURAL **ANIMAL EVOLUTION** AND NOT THAT OF CELESTIAL MANIPULATION.

HIS LIFE-LONG WORK WOULD HAVE PROVED A FOOL'S ERRAND WERE IT NOT FOR WHAT HAPPENED TO **FRANKLIN RICHARDS**.

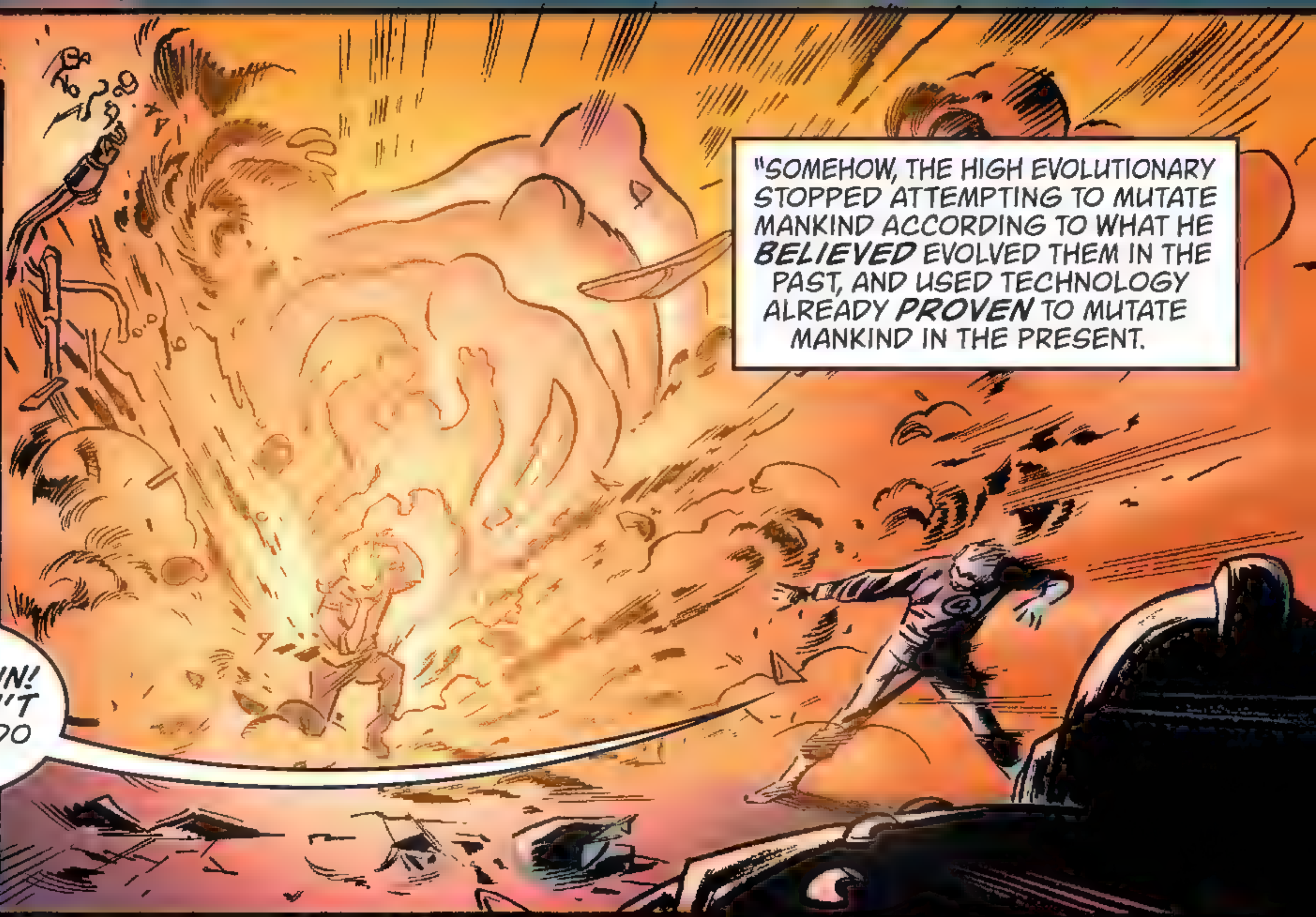


"REED RICHARDS WAS **OPPOSED** TO THIS TRANSFORMATION.

"BUT IT WAS RICHARDS WHO TRANSFORMED GALACTUS INTO A **STAR**, AND CREATED **UNBALANCE** IN THE UNIVERSE IN THE FIRST PLACE."



NO, FRANKLIN! YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO THIS!

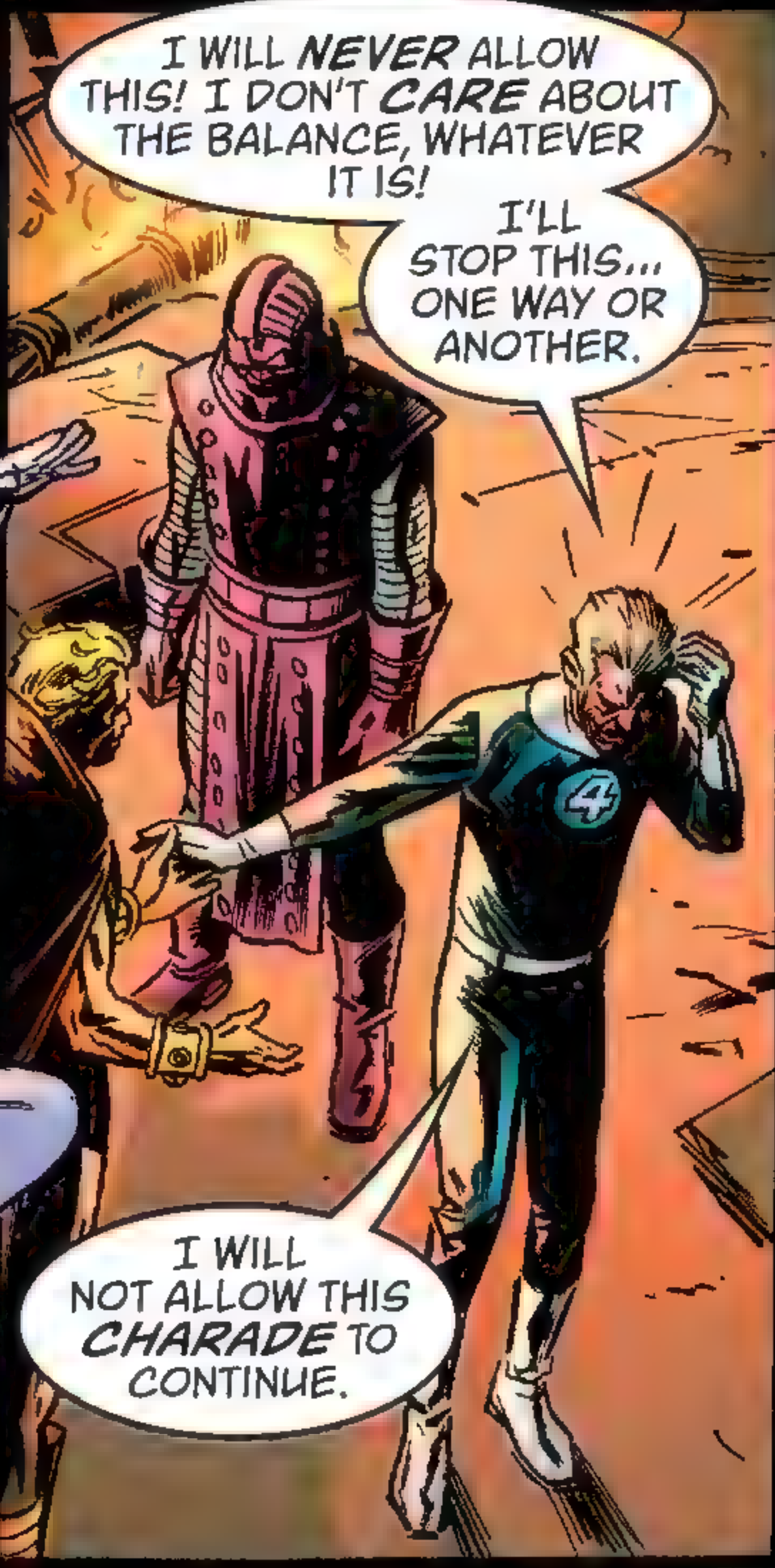
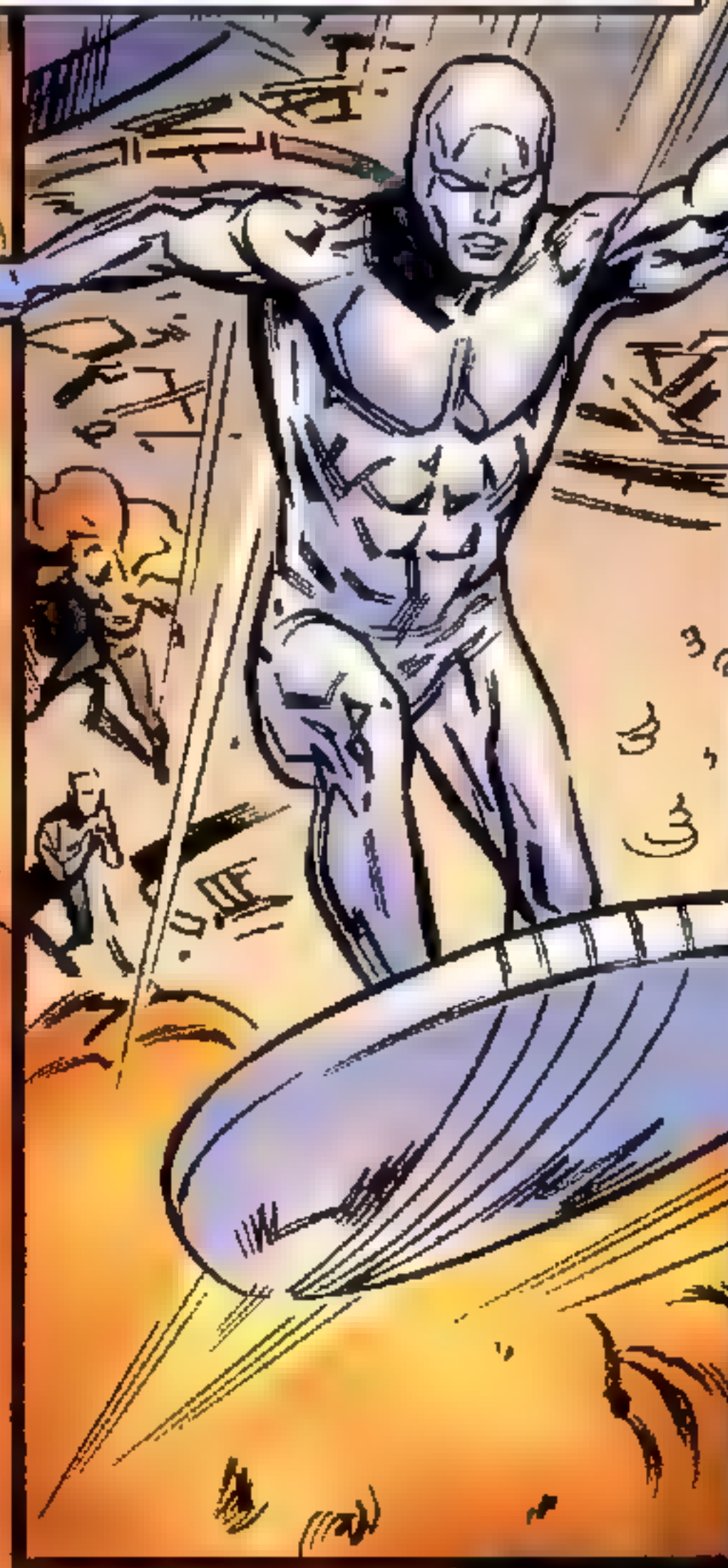


"SOMEHOW, THE HIGH EVOLUTIONARY STOPPED ATTEMPTING TO MUTATE MANKIND ACCORDING TO WHAT HE BELIEVED EVOLVED THEM IN THE PAST, AND USED TECHNOLOGY ALREADY **PROVEN** TO MUTATE MANKIND IN THE PRESENT.

"FRANKLIN WAS MUTATED TO A DEGREE IN WHICH HE BECAME SUSCEPTIBLE TO **SUGGESTION**.



"SO THE SILVER SURFER FOLLOWED AND MADE **CERTAIN** THAT THIS NEW BEING KNEW ITSELF AS **GALACTUS**. GALACTUS THE **MERCIFUL**. GALACTUS THE **KIND**."



I WILL **NEVER** ALLOW THIS! I DON'T **CARE** ABOUT THE BALANCE, WHATEVER IT IS!

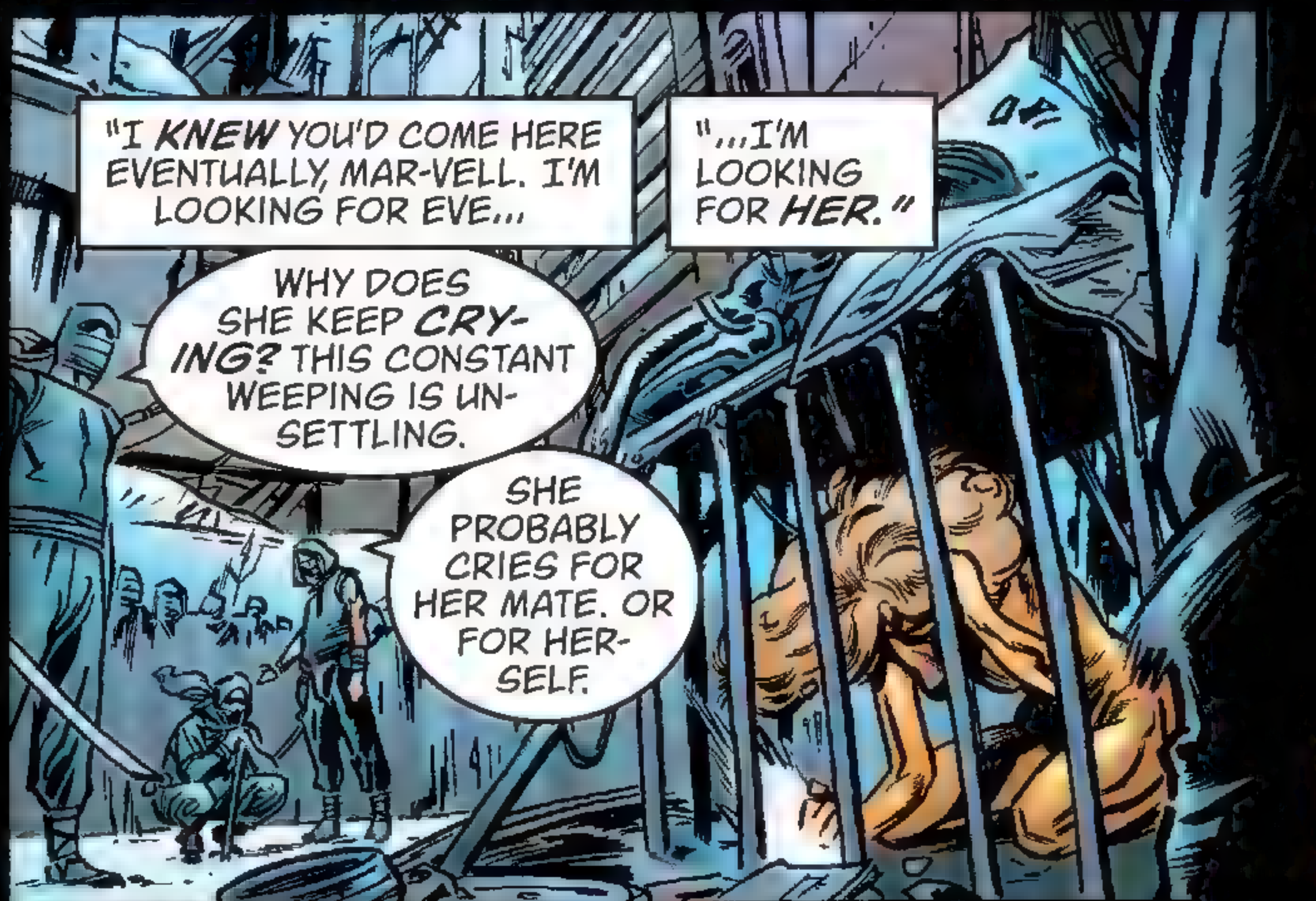
I'LL STOP THIS... ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.

I WILL NOT ALLOW THIS **CHARADE** TO CONTINUE.

BUT HE DID. AS ALWAYS, HE REMAINED THE HERO AND REJECTED HIS **SON** FOR THE SAKE OF THE **UNIVERSE**.

WHY DID YOU COME HERE, ADAM?





"I *KNEW* YOU'D COME HERE EVENTUALLY, MAR-VELL. I'M LOOKING FOR EVE..."

"...I'M LOOKING FOR *HER*."

WHY DOES SHE KEEP *CRY-ING*? THIS CONSTANT WEEPING IS UN-SETTLING.

SHE PROBABLY CRIES FOR HER MATE. OR FOR HER-SELF.



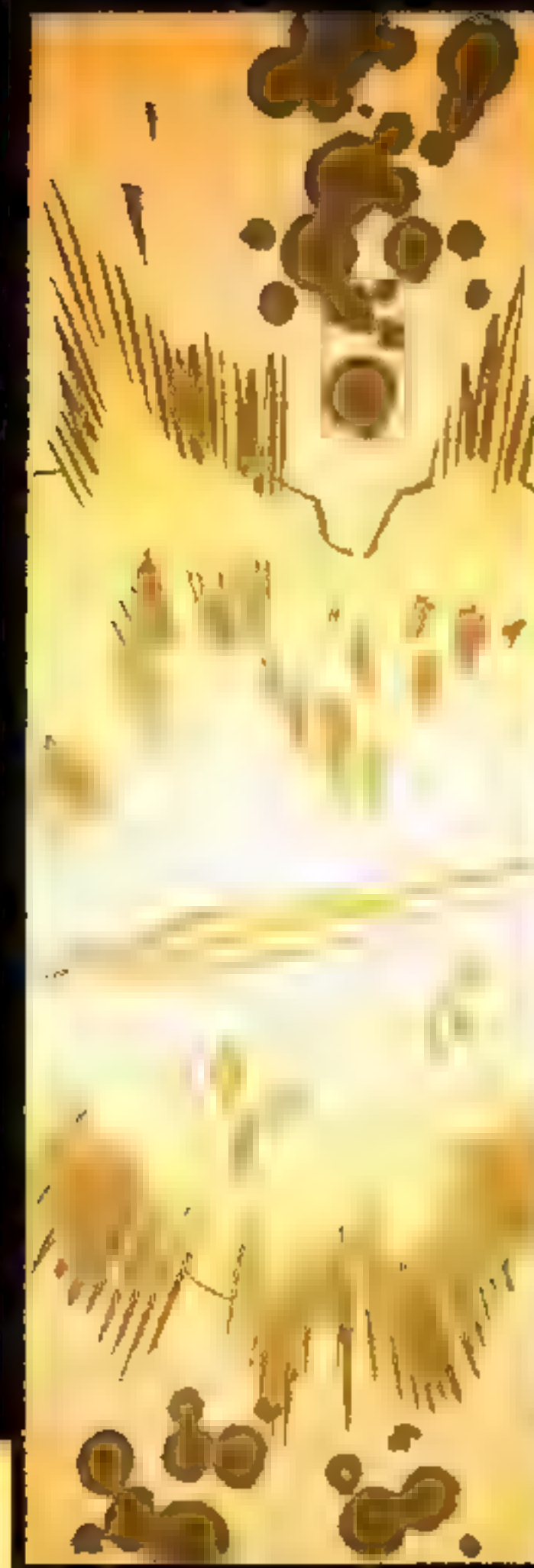
YOU *IDIOTS!* I'M CRYING FOR YOU!

YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT ADAM IS CAPABLE OF!

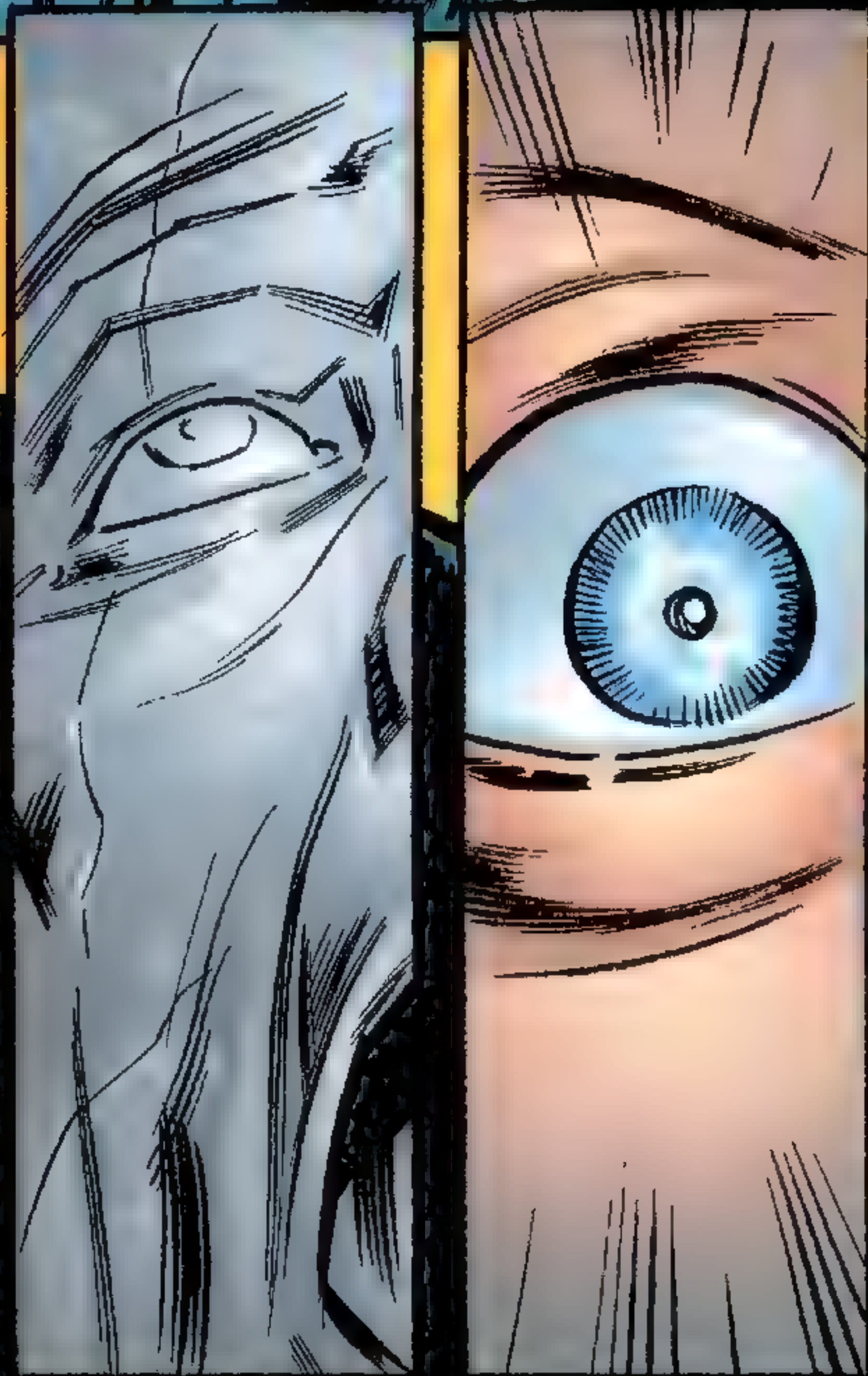
PLEASE, LET ME GO. FOR YOUR SALES. PLEASE.



DON'T YOU THINK YOU SHOULD DROP THE TONG OF CREEL DISGUISE?



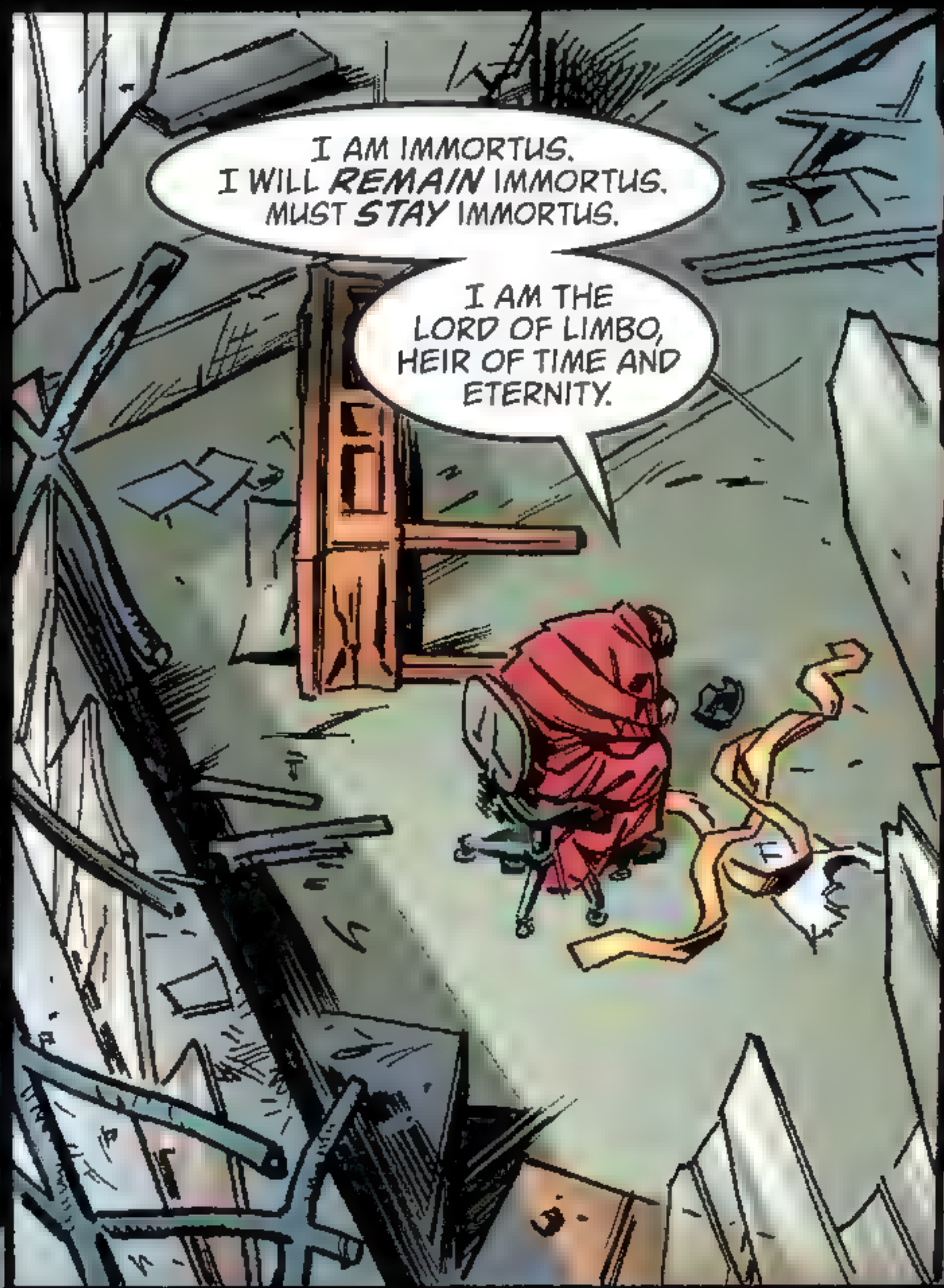
I KNOW WHO YOU ARE AND WHO YOU SERVE...



...YOU SERVE DEATH.

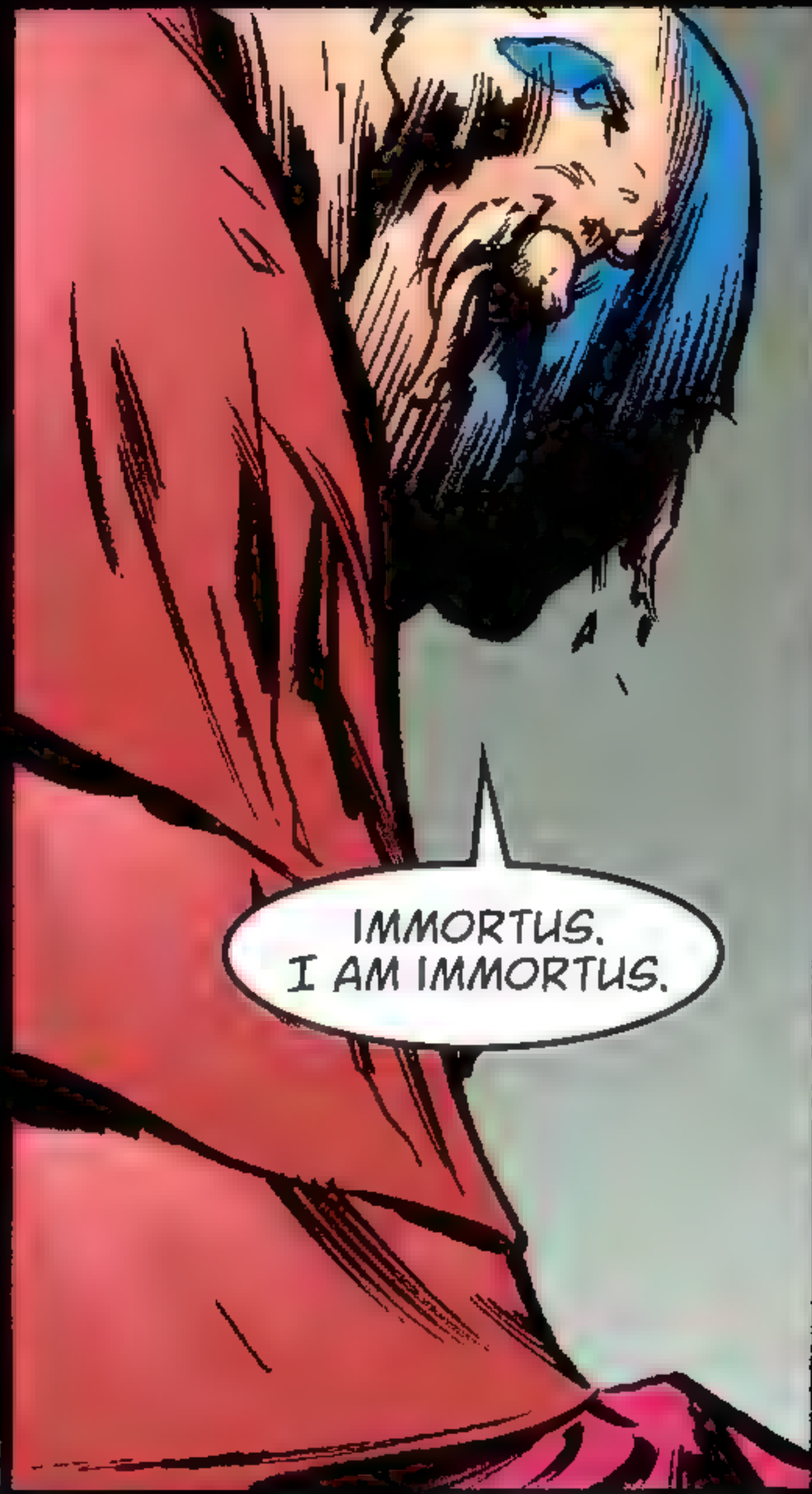
AND THAT IS WHY YOU'VE BROUGHT THE *GREATEST MURDERER* THE EARTH HAS EVER KNOWN *BACK TO LIFE*.





I AM IMMORTUS.
I WILL *REMAIN* IMMORTUS.
MUST *STAY* IMMORTUS.

I AM THE
LORD OF LIMBO,
HEIR OF TIME AND
ETERNITY.



IMMORTUS.
I AM IMMORTUS.



IMMORTUS.
MUST REMEMBER, ALL
OF *TIME* BELONGS TO ME.
I WAS GOING TO LEAD MAN-
KIND TO ITS *DESTINY*!
I WAS...



HOW
COULD I HAVE BEEN
CONQUERED?



"I WAS LOCKED OUT OF
LIMBO. I WAS BANISHED
FROM *ETERNITY*!"

"WHO DID THIS
TO ME? WHO?"



"I MUST *LEAVE* THIS PLACE. AND WARN MR. CHURCH
THAT THERE IS A *BETRAYER* AMONGST US.

"MR. CHURCH MIGHT
BE IN *TERRIBLE*
DANGER."





WHAT'N
SAM HILL---? THEY'RE
LEAVING!



MAYBE
THEY'RE AFRAID
OF ME.



SOMEONE
BETTER **WAKE UP**
DRAKE AND TELL HIM
TO **RE-ICE** THIS
WALL!

WHAT
HAVE YOU **DONE**
TO ME?

US?

THIS JUST
GETS **BETTER** AND
BETTER, DOESN'T IT? EVEN
RICHARDS' UNSTABLE-MOLECULED
COSTUME IS **REPLI-**
CATING!

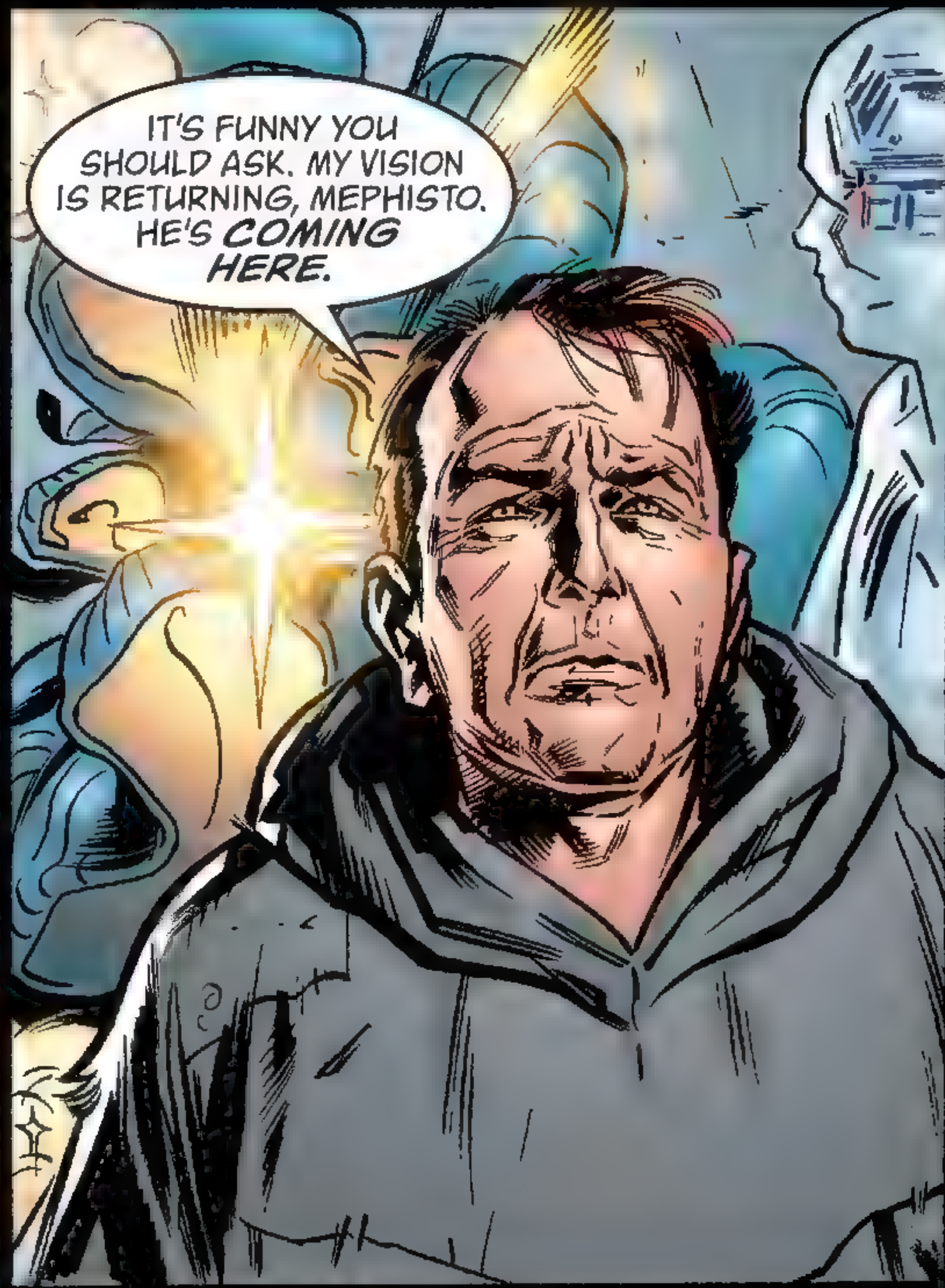
NOW
WE'RE THE SIZE OF OUR
AUDIENCE?

WHERE'S MR.
CHURCH?

THE **DEVILS**
WANT A WORD WITH
HIM.



WHERE
IS THE MAR-VELL
CHILD GOING *NEXT*,
RICHMOND?

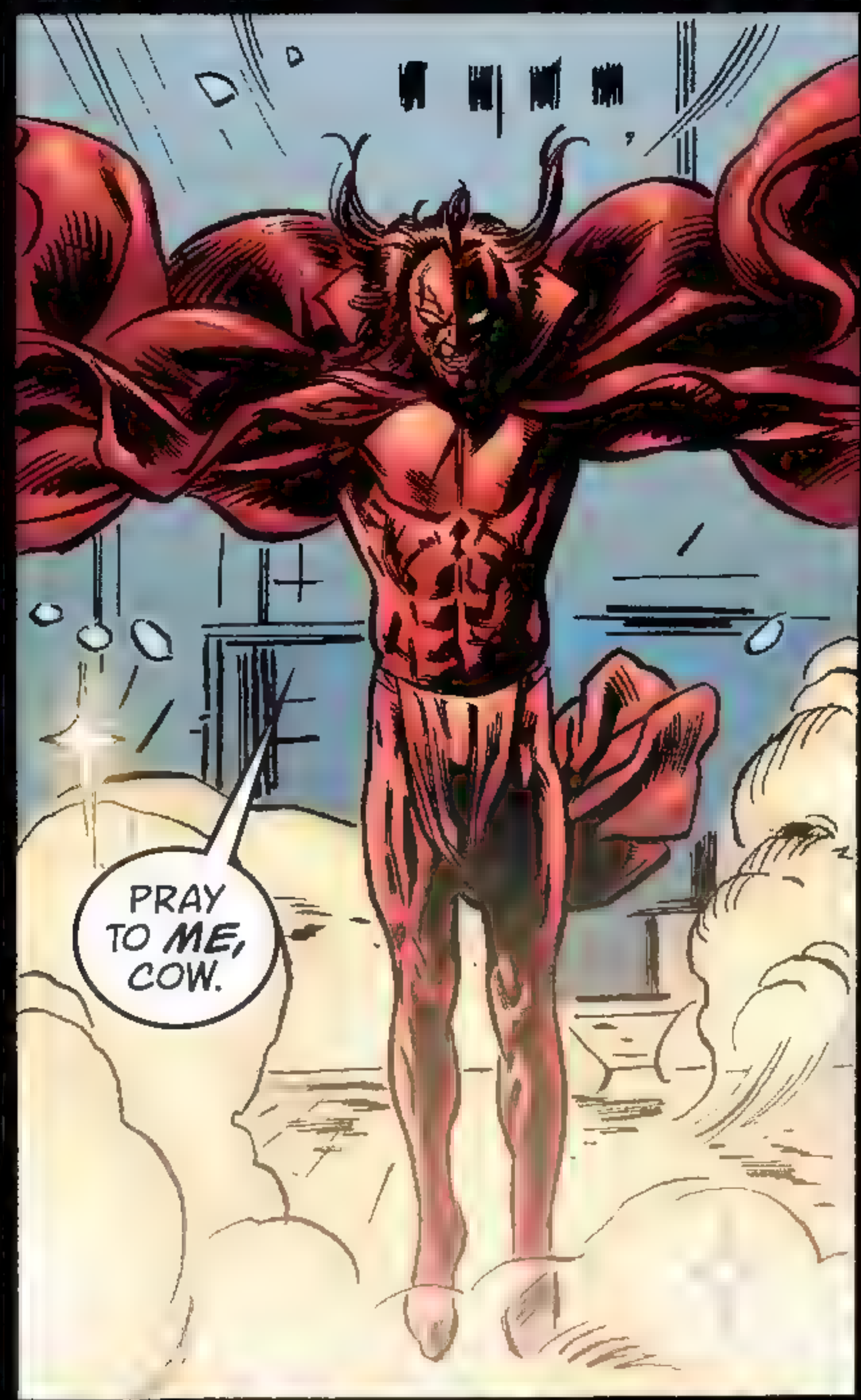


IT'S FUNNY YOU
SHOULD ASK. MY VISION
IS RETURNING, MEPHISTO.
HE'S *COMING*
HERE.



YOUR
DAYS ARE
NUMBERED,
IMMORTAL
ONE.

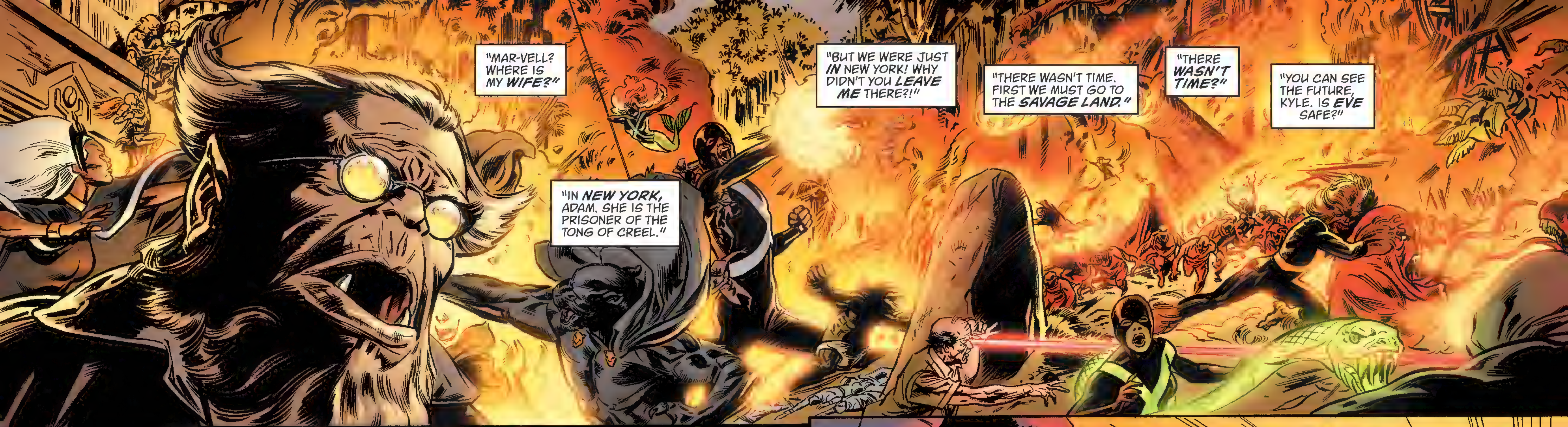
PERHAPS
IT IS NOT TOO
LATE TO *PRAY*,
FOUL ONE.



PRAY
TO *ME*,
COW.



PRAY
THAT I DON'T
UNDO YOUR
VERY *EXIS-*
TENCE.



"MAR-VELL?
WHERE IS
MY WIFE?"

"BUT WE WERE JUST
IN NEW YORK! WHY
DIDN'T YOU LEAVE
ME THERE?!"

"THERE WASN'T TIME.
FIRST WE MUST GO TO
THE SAVAGE LAND."

"THERE
WASN'T
TIME?"

"YOU CAN SEE
THE FUTURE,
KYLE. IS EVE
SAFE?"

"IN NEW YORK,
ADAM. SHE IS THE
PRISONER OF THE
TONG OF CREEL."

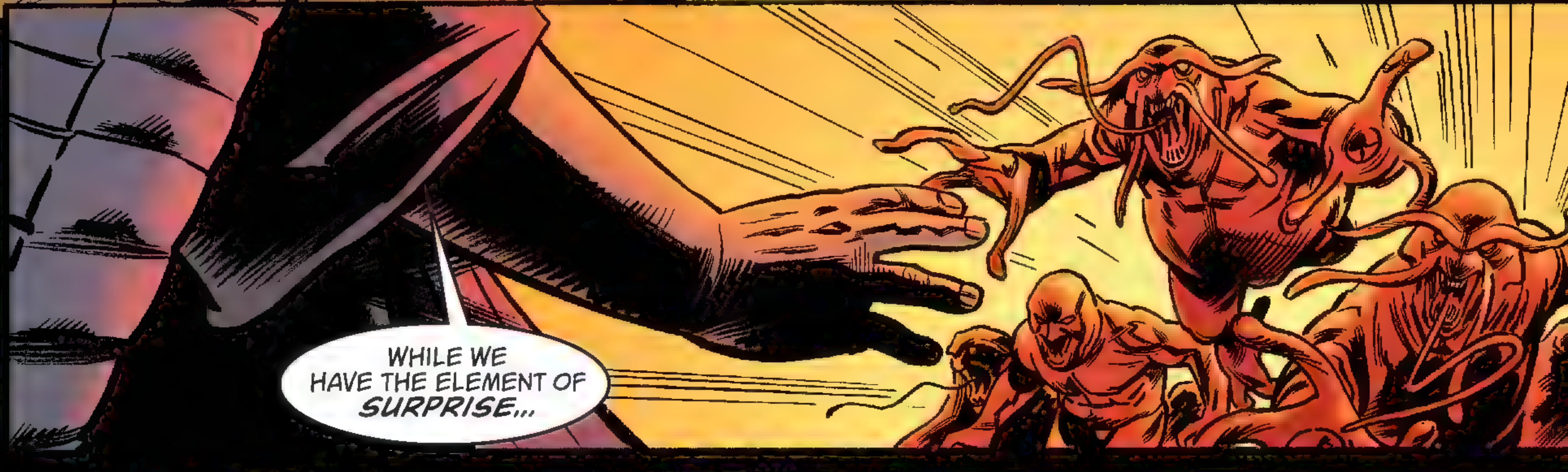


YES,
AS FAR
AS I CAN
SEE, MAR-
VELL.

GOOD, BECAUSE
A LOT OF OUR FRIENDS ARE
ABOUT TO DIE IF WE DON'T
HELP THEM!



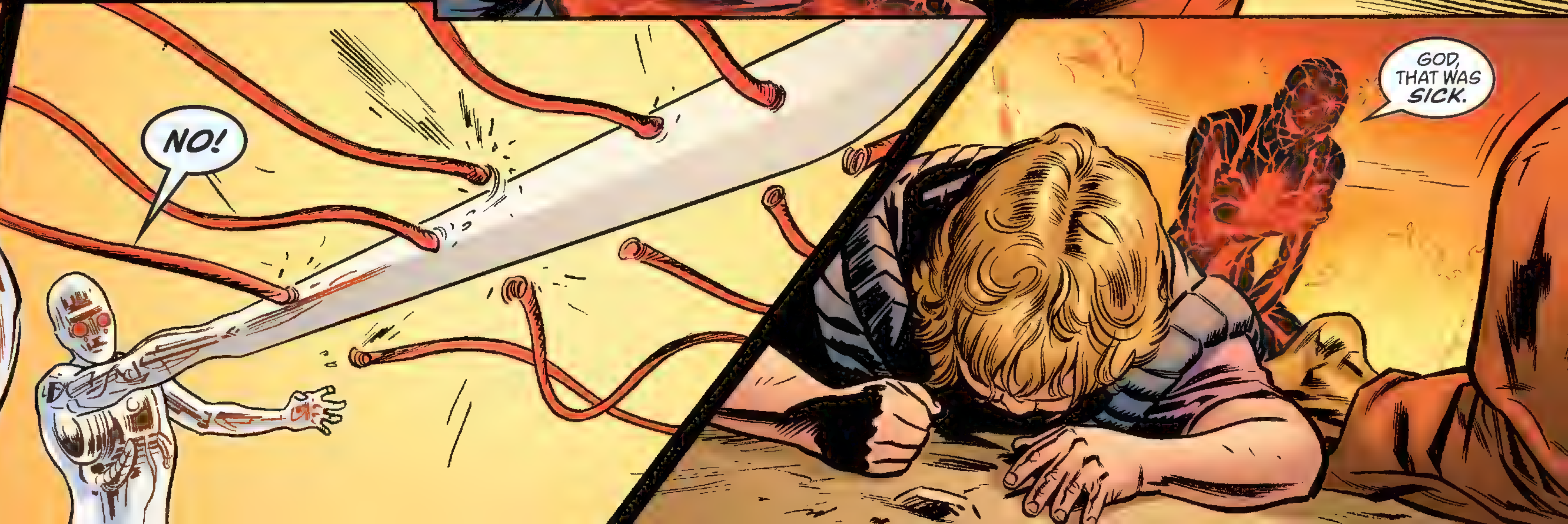
I WANT
THEM TO JOIN
US.



WHILE WE
HAVE THE ELEMENT OF
SURPRISE...

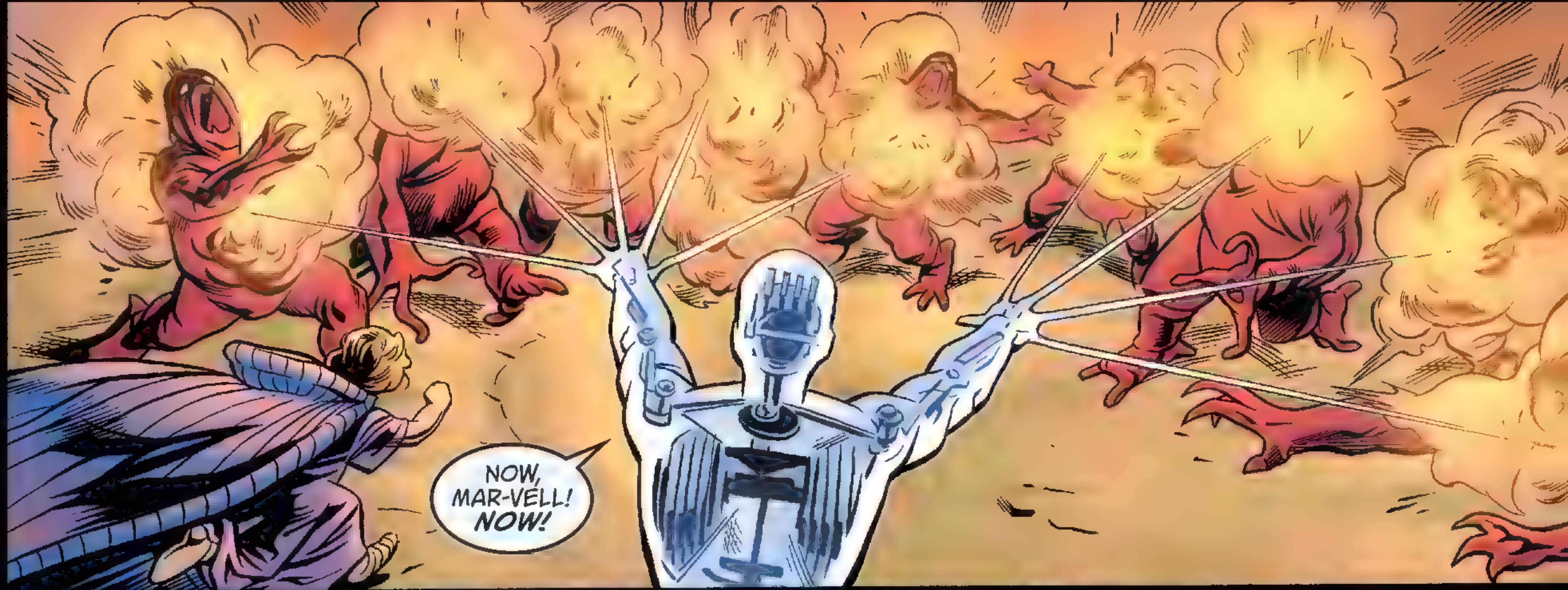


GOOD. TAKE
THEIR FORM. MEPHISTO
HAS PLANS FOR YOU
ALL.

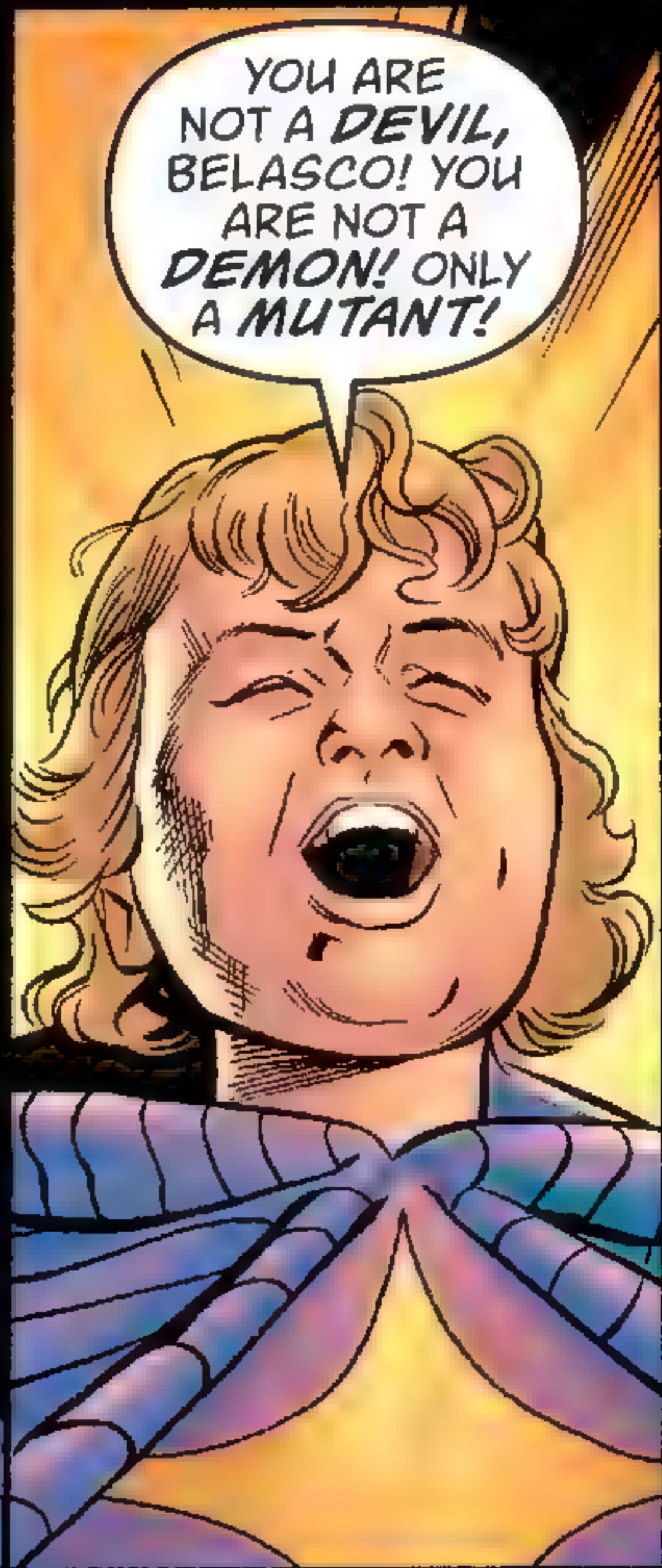


NO!

GOD,
THAT WAS
SICK.



NOW,
MAR-VELL!
NOW!



YOU ARE
NOT A **DEVIL**,
BELASCO! YOU
ARE NOT A
DEMON! ONLY
A **MUTANT**!



I AM
THE BELOVED OF
BEATRICE. I AM
THE SERVANT OF
THE **DARK ONES**.
I AM--



YOU ARE NOT
BELASCO.



YOU
ARE **KURT
WAGNER**.



I AM
NOTHING OF THE
SORT! WHAT *IS* THIS
PLACE?

IT'S A
DOORWAY TO
DEATH'S REALM. IT'S
ALSO A MIRROR TO
THE **SOUL**.

ARE YOU
WILLING TO SEE YOUR-
SELF FOR WHAT YOU
TRULY ARE?

ARE YOU
WILLING TO LEARN
THE **TRUTH** ABOUT
THE **MASTER** YOU
SERVE?



THIS
MEANS **NOTHING**
TO ME.

THE **GRAY**
GARGOYLE TURNED
YOUR TEAM TO **STONE**. YOU
ESCAPED USING YOUR ABILITY
TO **TELEPORT**. BUT YOU
DIDN'T ESCAPE COM-
PLETELY.



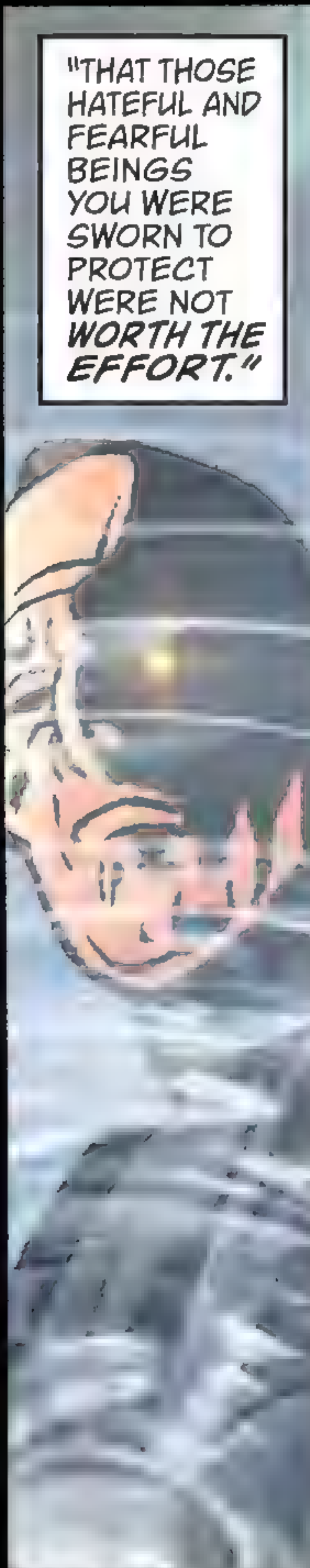
"WHEN YOU REAPPEARED, YOU WERE NOT AS YOU
HAD BEEN. PART OF YOU WAS **LEFT BEHIND**. YOU
WERE HUMAN FOR THE **FIRST TIME** IN YOUR LIFE.

"YOU HAD HOPED FOR HUMANITY
TO LEARN SOMETHING, BUT THEY
LEARNED **NOTHING**. NOW
THEY WERE THE **MUTANTS** AND
YOU WERE A NEW MINORITY.



"THEY **KILLED** YOU, OR
SO THEY **THOUGHT**.

"BUT **MEPHISTO**
CAME AND SHOW-
ED YOU WHAT
YOUR **HEART**
ALWAYS TEMPT-
ED YOU TO
BELIEVE...



"THAT THOSE
HATEFUL AND
FEARFUL
BEINGS
YOU WERE
SWORN TO
PROTECT
WERE NOT
WORTH THE
EFFORT."



THE **DEVIL**
EXISTS, KURT, TO
PUNISH THE **GUILTY**.
TO TEACH THEM A LES-
SON, JUST LIKE THE
LESSONS LEARNED IN
XAVIER'S SCHOOL.
THIS IS MY **TRUE FORM**.
I WAS MADE IN
GOD'S IMAGE,
TOO.

"**MEPHISTO** **BRAINWASHED**
YOU, KURT. HE TRICKED
YOU INTO SEEING YOUR
LIFE IN WAYS YOU **NEVER**
HAD BEFORE.

"HE TOLD YOU THAT
EVERYONE THOUGHT
OF YOU AS A **DEMON**.
THE **X-MEN... EVERYONE**.

"EVEN YOUR GIRLFRIEND
AMANDA SEFTON HAD
A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOU
ONLY AT HER MOTHER'S
BIDDING. SHE LOVED YOU
FOR **POWER**, **MEPHISTO**
TOLD YOU. SHE WAS A
WITCH, AFTER ALL."



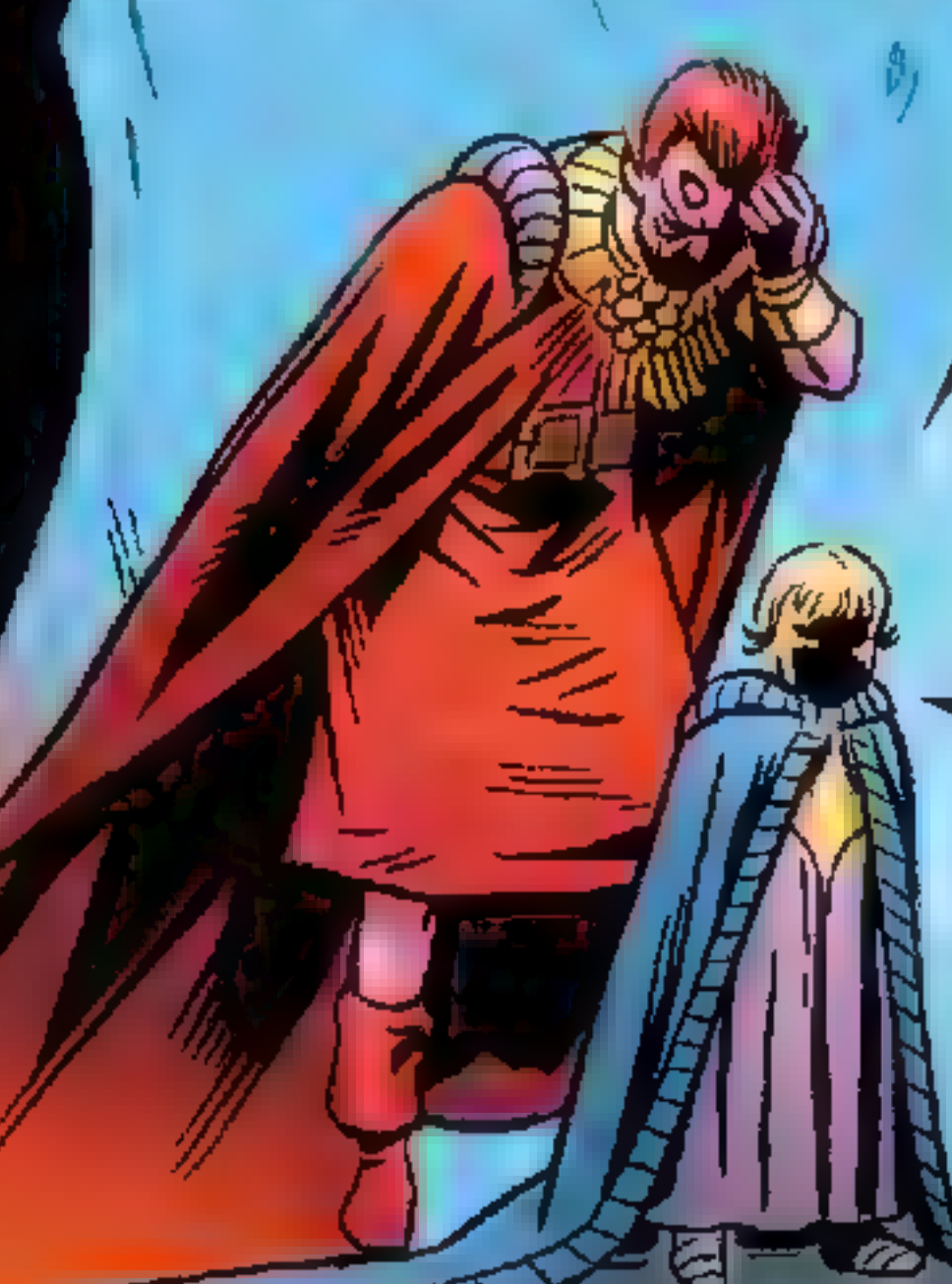
IT'S ALL ABOUT **BIGOTRY**, KURT WAGNER. THEY ALL THINK YOU'RE A **DEMON**. I WANT TO TEACH THEM A **LESSON**. HOW WILL THEY KNOW THEIR **OWN GUILT** IF WE DO NOT **SHOW** IT TO THEM?

YOU WILL REMEMBER **NOTHING**.



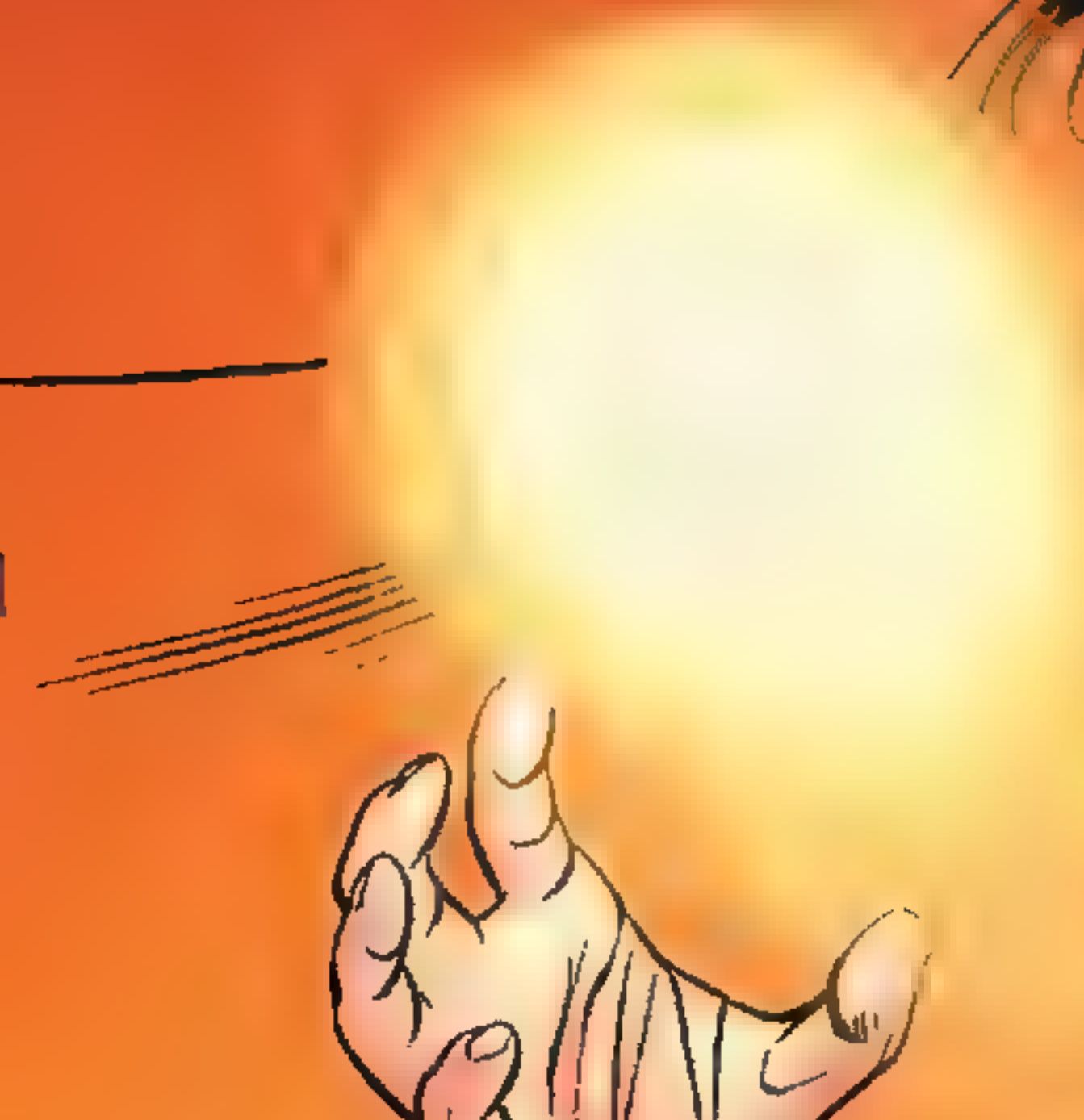
WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?

BELASCO WAS ACCIDENTALLY REVIVED WHEN KA-ZAR AND SHANNA CAME UPON SOMETHING THEY THOUGHT WAS AN **ATLANTEAN THEME PARK** LONG BEFORE THE MUTATION OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION.



IT WAS ALL PART OF **MEPHISTO'S TRAP**.

YOU WERE REVIVED FROM THE ICE, NOT BELASCO. OR MAYBE, THERE **NEVER** WAS A BELASCO AT ALL. IT WAS **ALWAYS** YOU, KURT WAGNER.



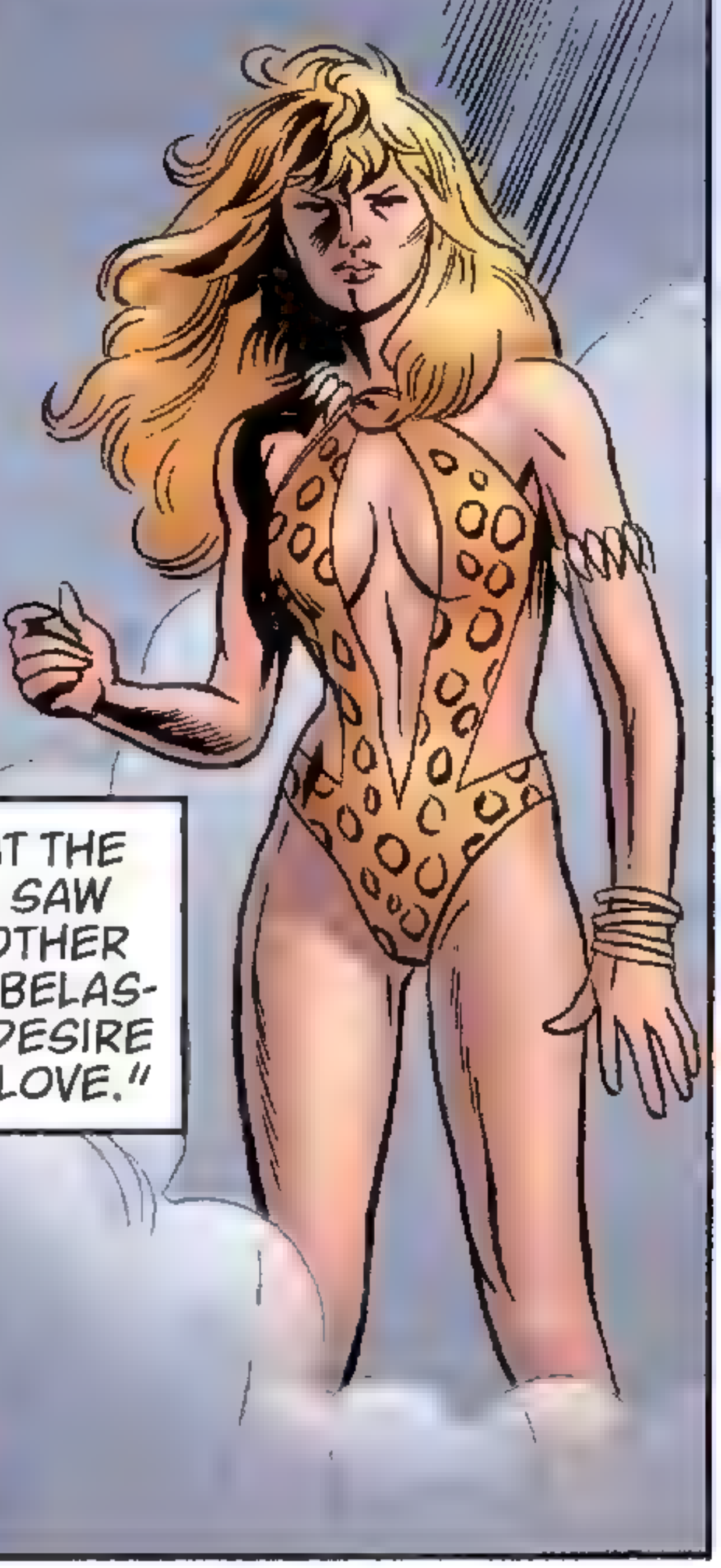
"WHEN OFFERED A **DEVICE** THAT WOULD ALLOW HIMSELF TO ESCAPE **LIMBO**, CAPTAIN AMERICA REJECTED MEPHISTO'S TEMPTATION.

"OR, WAS **TEMPTED** BY MEPHISTO TO REJECT IT.

"THE DEVICE STRUCK YOUR FROZEN BEING, SENDING YOU BACK TO A POINT **JUST PRIOR** TO YOUR DISCOVERY BY KA-ZAR AND SHANNA. LIMBO WAS THE **OUTGROWTH** OF **DOOM'S TIME MACHINE**. IT COULD TAKE YOU **ANYWHEN**.



"MEPHISTO HAD DONE HIS BRAINWASHING WELL. YOU WERE **CONVINCED** THAT YOU WERE THE BELASCO OF DANTE'S WRITINGS.

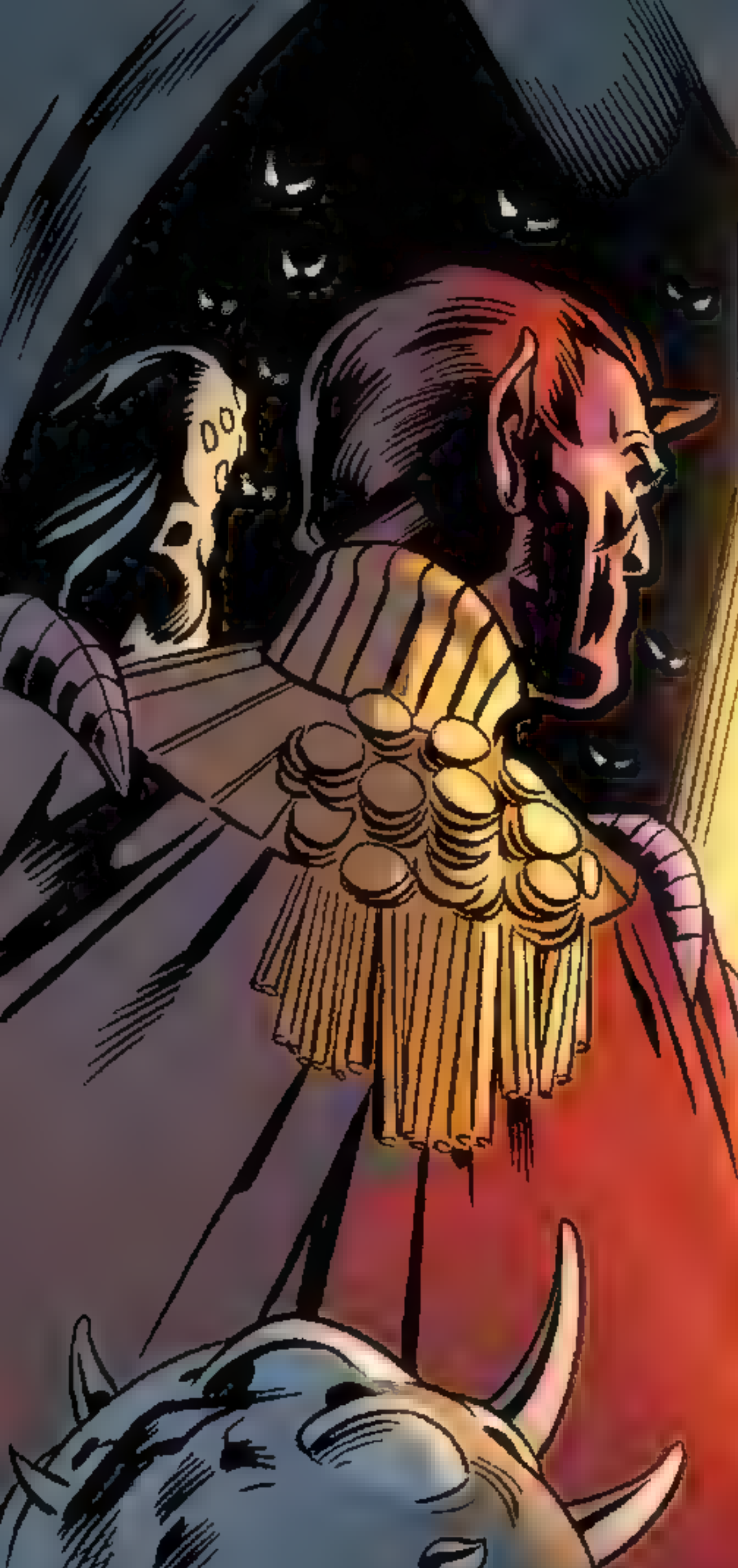


"SO MUCH SO THAT THE FIRST WOMAN YOU SAW HAD TO BE NONE OTHER THAN **BEATRICE**, BELASCO'S OBJECT OF DESIRE AND UNREQUITED LOVE."

I CAN'T SAY I APPROVE OF YOUR MANNER OF **DRESS**. STILL, **SACRIFICES** MUST BE MADE.



"I DON'T KNOW MEPHISTO'S RELATIONSHIP WITH DEATH, BUT THIS WAS A **TRAP** TO FORCE CAPTAIN AMERICA TO TRUST IN HIS OWN ABILITIES TO A FAULT. HE DIED SHORTLY AFTER, ADDING HIS SPIRIT TO DEATH'S POWER.



"YOU ATTACKED THE X-MEN AGAIN AND AGAIN, NOT BECAUSE THEY WERE YOUR **ENEMIES**, BUT BECAUSE YOU WERE **ONE OF THEM**. MEPHISTO COULD NOT TAKE THAT AWAY FROM YOU."

"YOU STOLE THE SISTER OF **PETER RASPUTIN** IN AN ATTEMPT TO MAKE HER YOUR **DISCIPLE**. BUT I WONDER, IF PERHAPS YOU WERE GIVING THEM A REASON TO **RETURN**?"

"WHY WOULD I WANT THEM TO RETURN?"

"PERHAPS YOU UNKNOWINGLY WANTED THEM TO **RESCUE** YOU."

"AFTER ALL, YOU HATED AND FEARED THEM. AND **THAT** WOULD BE REASON ENOUGH FOR THE X-MEN TO **SAVE** YOU."



LIKE **EVERY HUMAN** WHO EVER PREYED ON THE MUTANT X-MEN.

WHY WOULD MEPHISTO DO THIS TO **NIGHT-CRAWLER** OF ALL X-MEN?

"AND WHEN THEY DID, YOU MOVED THEM BACKWARDS AND FORWARDS AND BACKWARDS THROUGH TIME, CREATING TEAM AFTER TEAM OF X-MEN FOR YOU TO **MANIPULATE**. YOU **KILLED** THOSE YOU'D UNCONSCIOUSLY HOPED WOULD **SAVE** YOU."

BECAUSE YOU LOOKED LIKE A DEMON... BUT YOU **NEVER** LOST YOUR **FAITH**. YOU MADE THE **DEVIL** LOOK BAD. YOU SHOWED HIM THERE WAS **ANOTHER WAY**. ONE HE **HADN'T TAKEN**. THAT OF THE **REDEEMED DEMON**.

AND AFTER DISCOVERING THAT EVERY MANIPULATION OF TIME ALLOWED HIM TO **ESCAPE JUDGEMENT** ALL THAT MUCH MORE, THE **LAST THING** HE NEEDED WAS SOMEONE TO SHOW HIM THE WAY HE SHOULD HAVE LIVED.



IT'S A LIE! I AM **BELASCO**!

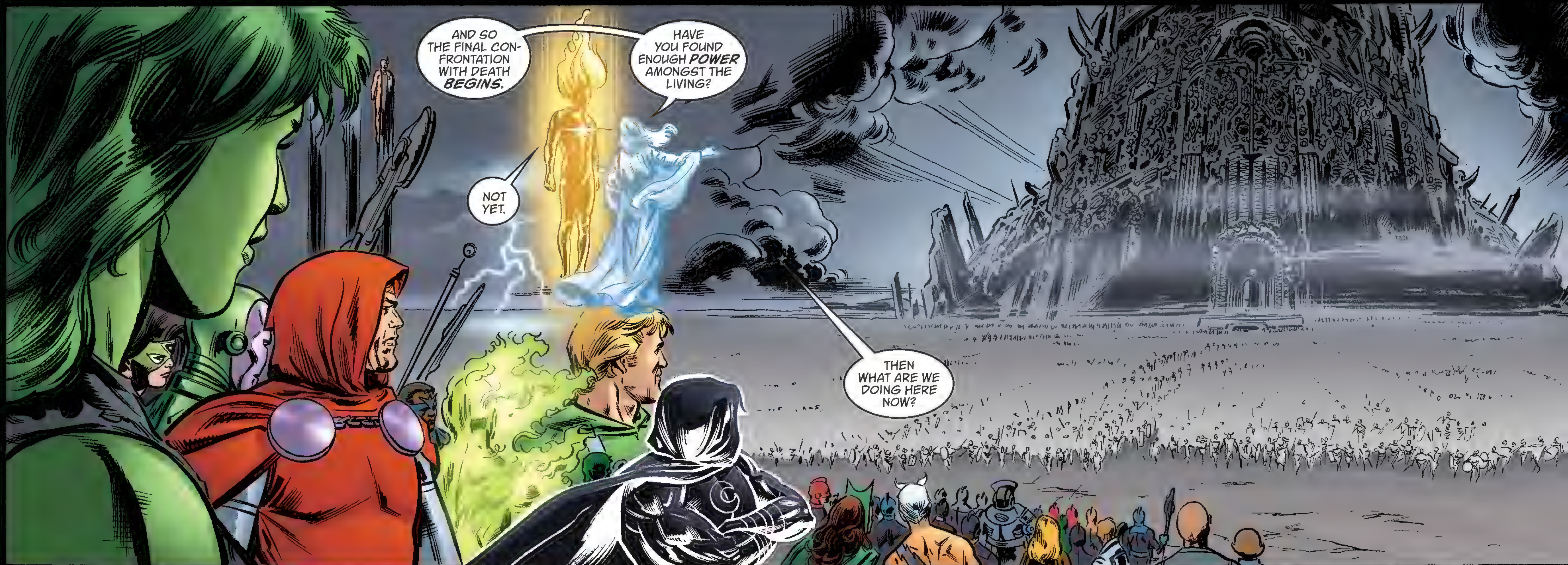
KURT? IT'S ME... **ORORO**.

I AM **NOT KURT, WITCH!**

TAKE **ONE MORE STEP** AND I KILL THE BRAT.

JUST LIKE I'VE **ALREADY DONE** TO ALL OF YOU.





AND SO
THE FINAL CON-
FRONTATION
WITH DEATH
BEGINS.

HAVE
YOU FOUND
ENOUGH **POWER**
AMONGST THE
LIVING?

NOT
YET.

THEN
WHAT ARE WE
DOING HERE
NOW?



BECAUSE I AM
AFRAID FOR OUR ALLIES. I
FEAR WE WILL **LOSE** NOW IF WE
DON'T ATTACK. MANY IN OUR
RANKS ALREADY FEAR FOR
THEIR LIVES.

BUT
THEY **KNOW**
THEY ARE
DEAD.

THEY FEAR FOR
THEIR LIVES BECAUSE THEY
INNATELY KNOW THAT THEY **STILL**
LIVE, THOUGH THEY CANNOT
GUESS THAT IT'S ONLY IN
ONE OF THE ALTERNATE
REALITIES.

THIS "**FEELING**"
DISTRACTS THEM AND
ALLOWS **HER** TO CONTROL
THEM. IF WE LOSE THEM,
WE **LOSE THE**
WAR.



THERE IS A **CIVIL**
WAR OF SORTS WITHIN THEIR
RANKS. THEY ARE LOSING
PERSPECTIVE AS I TOLD YOU
THEY WOULD.

THANOS,
AS EVER YOU
ANTICIPATE **TOO**
MUCH.



AND
HOW GOES THE **WAR**,
DAUGHTER?

"For Halloween,
Oyster Boy decided
to go as a human."
- Tim Burton, *The
Melancholy Death
Of Oyster Boy &
Other Stories*

U N I V E R S E X



APPENDIX TO CHAPTER TEN

W R I T T E N B Y J I M K R U E G E R

"I am a machine. And still, I tire. The clothes and face of a man hang on this wire hanger skeleton. I am the Machine Man. Aaron Stack. The Watchman of Earth. I have seen more than any other man has. I am aware of the invisible forces at work in this world.

"And so at last, I understand the truth. At least, most of it. Mephisto, the devil, in an effort to escape the judgement that awaits him at the end of time, has devised a way to escape that judgement. By making time cyclical, by creating a blockade at some point before the said judgement, he has changed time, rerouted it in such a way that rather than move forward towards a possible destiny, it is now forced back, to repeat itself. No. Not repeat itself. History never repeats itself. Not really.

"History recreates itself. Over and over again. And this was his plan.

"Mephisto seems patterned after the devil of old. Which must mean then that he, in his attempts to raise himself to godhood, has found a way to not only create one world, but millions. This plan of his is not merely an attempt to escape judgement, but to thumb his nose at that judge.

"In many ways, he is far worse than the Celestials. He meets with us, speaks with us, tries to lead humanity to a point of such depression and misery that mankind will seek to do anything to recreate his lot, even if it means changing all of history itself. We are not germs to him. We are a creation he seeks to manipulate to stick it to his creator. He attacks us through spite, not procreation like the Celestials. And yet, are they not the same in that this is a matter of life and death whether it was the life of a new Celestial or the end of the life of Mephisto?

"I suppose the biggest question is what relationship exists between Mephisto and the Celestials. Did Mephisto arrive here first? If he was on



Earth before the Celestials came, than he must have had some sort of prior knowledge of what the Celestials were capable of.

"There is a relationship between them. There has to be. Or why else would Mephisto have given Kurt Wagner a vision of the Celestials when he brainwashed Wagner into believing he was, indeed Belasco.

"Whether Wagner comes to believe what Mar-Vell revealed to him or not, it is obvious that Mephisto is using the Celestials for his own means.

"And what of this assertion Richmond keeps babbling about that Death is actually Mephisto's daughter.

"Legend has it that Mephisto is the father of rebellion, that he indeed brought Death into the world. But what is this saying about Thanos?

"From what I can piece together of the events surrounding Mephisto's involvement during the events of Thanos' acquisition of the Infinity Gauntlet, both Mephisto and Death feigned weakness before the self-appointed God, Thanos.

"Of course, in retrospect, this mock humility merely served to push Thanos to one day manipulate time again, creating yet another world for Mephisto to manipulate.

"How far can this possibly go? How many worlds are enough for Mephisto to believe he has actually escaped judgement? How can the devil have such a crisis of faith?

"He of course, must be looking at the creation of each new Earth as another victory over his judge and maker. Will it require an eternal number of recreated worlds to stave his eternal foe?

"Death then seems to be his weapon. What he cannot use for his own escape, he kills and ravages.

"Each world must hold interest for Mephisto until he moves, like a child done with a plaything, on to the next world.

"I suppose then, that this is why Creel has been brought to life.

"Mephisto tires of this Earth.

"He will kill it, and the rest of us with it.

"But what will be his scythe?

"Will it be Creel?

"Or the new polarization of the planet?

"Perhaps the army of Immortus?

"Or some new threat that has not yet been revealed?

"There will be no Franklin Richards to save us this time. There will be no Galactus to balance this cosmic wrong.

"I fear that we have run out of heroes. And the villains have at last, won their day.

"Perhaps we will find a way to defeat them in the next world.

"What alternative do we have?"



UNIVERSE



KRUEGER
BRAITHWAITE
REINHOLD

“So everything that’s happened has been an attempt to push humanity — or *mutanity* in this instance — so far that they’d be willing to do anything to undo their pasts? This has all been about regret?”

“I believe so, X-51. The pain caused by Reed Richards’ not saving his wife from the ship that killed both her and Dr. Doom. The regret Immortus feels at being trapped away from limbo and being forced to mutate by way of the Terrigen Mists. The regret of Cap not being a member of The Avengers the day they were killed. The regret Isaac Christians felt from not being able to feel any longer. The regret of fighting to protect a world that hates and fears you only to find that bigotry against mutants is a battle that can’t be won. Mephisto builds regret upon regret until there is a mountain of ‘should have’ wishes that overwhelm both sense and reason. You once wondered what purpose suffering had in this world. This is it. It’s a catalyst.”

“But a catalyst for what?”

“Mephisto waited for the power that the Celestials forced upon mankind to germinate so that mankind would master the secrets of time. Now, regret is at a loss, for past mistakes can truly be undone.”

“I think I understand. In Mephisto’s multiple worlds, there is no need for forgiveness, because there is no sin that cannot be made right. And that means there is no need for God. There is no need for law. And every alternate world created to undo the past creates one more step for Mephisto...one more step away from the judgement that awaits him at the end of time.”

“But everyone regrets something, Mar-Vell. Even the Devil.”

“Does he, though? For our sakes, let us hope we can remind him of what that regret is... and damn him with it.”

UNIVERSE X

ISSUE 11

JIM KRUEGER
story and script

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"BUT ACCORDING TO WHAT YOU'VE SAID, KYLE, **MEPHISTO** HAS BEEN REVEALED TO BE THE FATHER OF **DEATH**, THE VERY BEING THAT MAR-VELL IS TRYING TO KILL IN THAT REALM. HOW CAN THAT BE? WHAT HAS THIS TO DO WITH MAR-VELL?"

"LET ME SPEAK FIRST, X-51, OF WHAT THIS HAS TO DO WITH **HIM**, THE ARTIFICIAL BEING ONCE KNOWN AS **WARLOCK**."

"HE WAS CREATED IN A LABORATORY KNOWN AS **THE BEEHIVE**. THE ONLY LIVING WITNESS TO HIS BIRTH WAS **ALICIA MASTERS**, BUT THIS WAS LONG BEFORE SHE MARRIED THE THING."

"AND SO THEY **KILLED** HIM."

"BUT IT WOULD NOT LAST. **WARLOCK** WAS **REBORN** JUST DAYS LATER."

"THIS SOUNDS JUST A LITTLE TOO **COINCIDENTAL** FOR COMFORT, KYLE."

"WHY DID YOU SAY THAT COUNTER-EARTH WAS ONLY **PERCEIVED** AS ARTIFICIAL?"

"BECAUSE THE HIGH EVOLUTIONARY, WHEN CHOOSING THIS MOON TO CREATE HIS WORLD UPON, ONLY LOOKED AT THE **SURFACE**. ANY TRACES OF CIVILIZATION WERE **LONG GONE** BY THAT POINT. HE NEVER LOOKED AT THE **HEART** OF THE PLANET."

"IF HE HAD, HE WOULD HAVE SEEN SOMETHING **LIVING**, ANOTHER **CELESTIAL EMBRYO**."

"THAT IS WHY **GALACTUS** ULTIMATELY CAME TO THIS COUNTER-EARTH TO CONSUME IT."

"THE ORIGINAL PEOPLE OF THIS WORLD, LIKE EARTH, HAD BEEN **MANIPULATED** BY THE CELESTIALS--"

"HIM WAS CREATED...BUT FOR WHAT **PURPOSE**? WHAT **UTILITY**?"

"THE **HIGH EVOLUTIONARY**, AFTER TERRA-FORMING AND REPOPULATING A WORLD WITH BEINGS OF HIS OWN DESIGN, SOON FOUND HIS **COUNTER-EARTH** POLLUTED BY THE **SAME VICES** THAT HAD MADE HIM SO JUDGMENTAL OF THE PEOPLE OF EARTH BEFORE."

"HE ALSO FOUND HIM, **LOST** AMONG THE STARS."

"THE HIGH EVOLUTIONARY FASHIONED HIM INTO A **HERO**, GAVE HIM **POWER** AND A NEW COSTUME."

"AND A **SOUL GEM** THAT WOULD PROTECT HIM FROM THE TEMPTATIONS OF THIS ARTIFICIAL WORLD."

"SO AN **ARTIFICIAL MAN** WALKED ON WHAT ALL BELIEVED TO BE AN **ARTIFICIAL WORLD**."

"BUT HE WAS NOT LIKE THEM. HE WAS **PROTECTED** FROM THAT WHICH CORRUPTED THE POPULACE OF THIS WORLD."

"--AND GIVEN ALL THE POWER TO PROTECT THE PLANET FROM EVERY DANGER IN THE UNIVERSE, EXCEPT **EACH OTHER**."

"THEY DESTROYED THEIR WORLD IN A **NUCLEAR HOLOCAUST**."

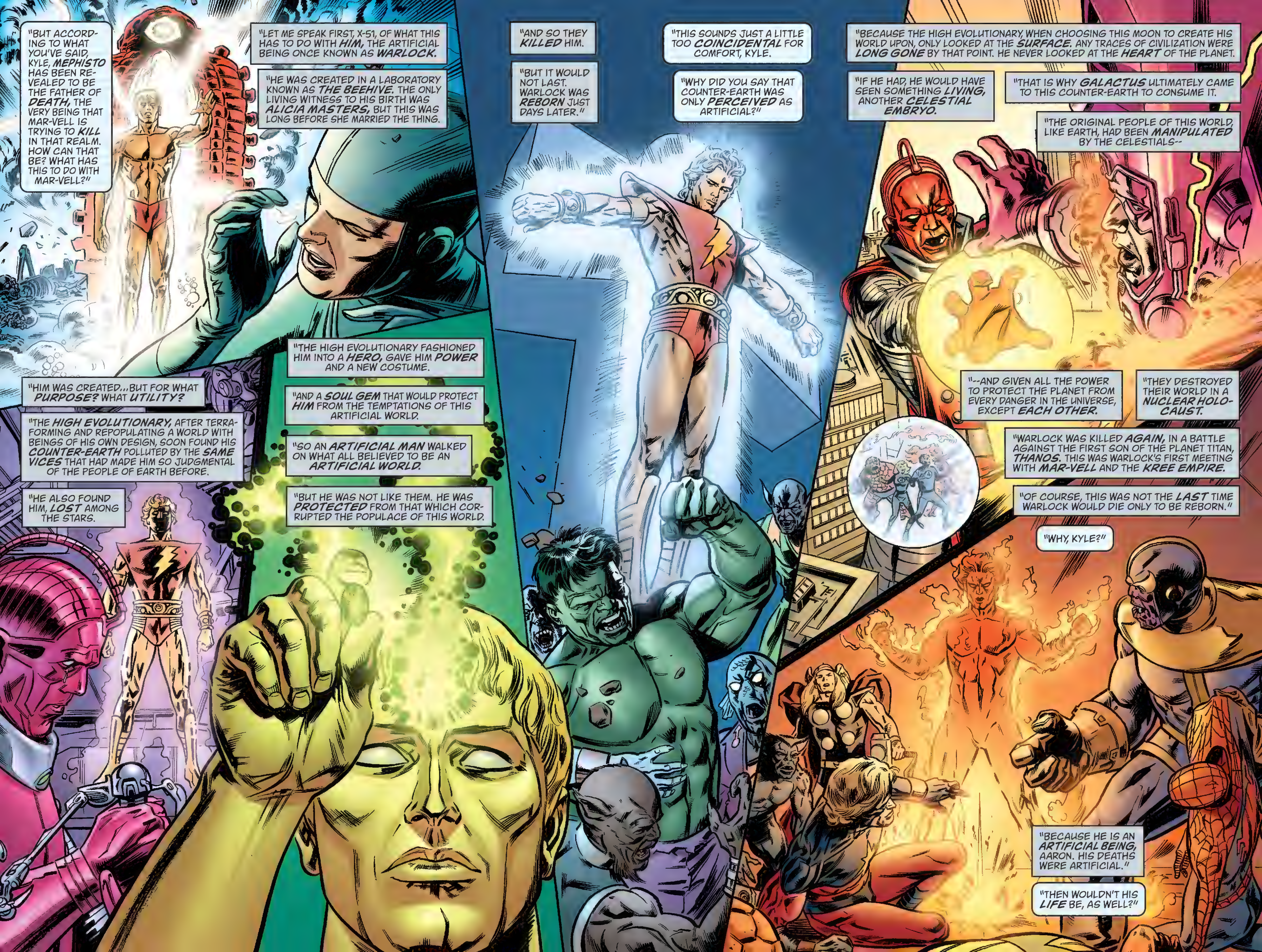
"WARLOCK WAS KILLED **AGAIN**, IN A BATTLE AGAINST THE FIRST SON OF THE PLANET TITAN, **THANOS**. THIS WAS WARLOCK'S FIRST MEETING WITH **MAR-VELL** AND THE **KREE EMPIRE**."

"OF COURSE, THIS WAS NOT THE **LAST TIME** WARLOCK WOULD DIE ONLY TO BE REBORN."

"WHY, KYLE?"

"BECAUSE HE IS AN **ARTIFICIAL BEING**, AARON. HIS DEATHS WERE ARTIFICIAL."

"THEN WOULDN'T HIS **LIFE** BE, AS WELL?"



"BUT IN THESE TIMES OF *DEATH* AND *REBIRTH*, ANOTHER ARTIFICIAL BEING WAS CREATED TO BE THE *MATE* OF HIM.

"SHE *RESURRECTED* HIM, BUT BELIEVED THAT BECAUSE THE SOUL GEM NO LONGER RESTED UPON HIS BROW, SHE HAD BEEN *UNSUCCESSFUL*.

"SHE LEFT HIM THERE ON THAT ROCK, NOT KNOWING THAT HE HAD BECOME SO *DEPENDENT* UPON THAT GEM THAT SHE HAD ACTUALLY *SUCCEEDED* IN REVIVING HIM.



"WHEN ADAM LATER REGAINED CONSCIOUSNESS, HE FOUND HIMSELF STANDING BEFORE THE *SUPREME INTELLIGENCE*."

"LET ME EXPLAIN IT TO AARON, KYLE."

"GO AHEAD, MAR-VELL. THIS IS YOUR COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS TALKING IN ME, ANYHOW."

"A *PIECE* OF IT, ANYWAY. LISTEN, AARON. THIS IS PART OF WHY THE MANIPULATION OF TIME OCCURRED.

"MEPHISTO MADE A *DEAL* WITH SUPREMOR. OF ALL THE RACES IN THE UNIVERSE, ONLY *MANKIND* HAD DISCOVERED THE SECRET OF *TIME MANIPULATION*.

"MEPHISTO'S CONCERN WAS THAT THE REST OF THE UNIVERSE WOULD TRY TO *UNDO* HUMANITY'S VIRGINAL FUMBLINGS WITH TIME.



"AND SO A *GUARD* AGAINST THE REST OF THE UNIVERSE WAS NEEDED. MEPHISTO CHOSE THE SUPREME INTELLIGENCE, KNOWING FULL WELL THAT SUPREMOR WANTED TO *EXPAND* THE KREE EMPIRE.

"*CAPTAIN MARVEL*--THAT IS, I WAS CHOSEN TO BE ONE OF THOSE *GUARDS*."

"BUT *WHY*, MAR-VELL? WHAT WAS THE SUPREME INTELLIGENCE GETTING OUT OF THIS?"

"EVERY TIME AN ALTERNATE HUMANITY ON *EARTH* WAS CREATED, AN ALTERNATE RACE OF *KREE* WAS CREATED..."



"...AND WITH THE DEATH OF EACH OF THESE ALTERNATE KREE PEOPLES, THE SUPREME INTELLIGENCE *ABSORBED* THEM INTO HIS *CONSCIOUSNESS*.

"HE BECAME STRONGER AND EVEN *STRONGER* STILL... UNTIL HE HOPED TO JOIN MEPHISTO, DEATH AND THANOS AS AN *EQUAL*.

"BUT DESPITE HIS POWER, SUPREMOR WAS *MORTAL*. AND TO CHANGE THAT, HE DEFENDED EARTH FROM ALL *TRUE THREATS*.

"AND *THIS* IS WHY I KILLED HIM. FOR WHAT HE DID TO MY *PEOPLE*.

"AND FOR WHAT HE *WOULD HAVE DONE* TO *YOURS*. I CAN ONLY ASSUME THAT MEPHISTO KNEW I WOULD DO THIS.

"GO AHEAD, KYLE. YOU CAN EXPLAIN THE REST OF IT."

"BECAUSE ADAM WARLOCK WAS ABLE TO VISIT DEATH'S REALM AND RETURN SO EASILY, SUPREMOR WANTED HIM TO BE HIS *LIAISON* TO THIS UNHOLY TRINITY.

"BUT WHEN ADAM REFUSED, SUPREMOR KILLED HIM... UNTIL THE *NEXT TIME* HE WOULD RETURN TO THE LAND OF THE LIVING.

"IN TIME, ADAM RETURNED AND WAS JOINED BY *HER*, THE BEING CREATED TO BE HIS PERFECT MATE.

"AND THEN THE *DREAMS* BEGAN. THE DREAMS OF *MAR-VELL'S RETURN* IN THE FORM OF A *CHILD*, BORN OF THE TWO OF THEM.



"ALICIA MASTERS THEN HELPED THEM UNDERSTAND HOW SUCH A THING MIGHT BE POSSIBLE..."

"...BY IMPARTING A PORTION OF HER ABILITY TO *BRING LIFE* TO THE LIFELESS INTO HIM AND HER.

"IT WAS NOT UNTIL HE GAVE REED RICHARDS THE *SOUL GEM* THAT HE REALIZED HE POSSESSED THE SAME FEELINGS THAT *HER* HAD FOR HIM."

"WHY WOULD THAT BE? I DON'T UNDERSTAND."

"BECAUSE THE SAME GEM THAT KEPT HIM FROM TEMPTATION KEPT HIM FROM LOVE, AS WELL. ALL HE KNEW WAS *SADNESS* UNTIL THIS POINT. BUT NOW HE KNEW SOMETHING *COMPLETELY NEW*."

"HE KNEW *LOVE*. AND WHEN *HER* WAS TAKEN FROM HIM, HE LEARNED *RAGE*."



"AS A RESULT OF MEPHISTO'S LIES, THEY WERE ATTACKED AT EVERY TURN. BUT *REED RICHARDS* FOUND THEM AND GAVE THEM SHELTER.

"THE CHILD WAS THEN BORN AND *HER* WAS *KIDNAPPED* SHORTLY THEREAFTER.

"AND YET, *HIM* DID NOT FOLLOW.



"I DON'T UNDERSTAND, MAR-VELL. WHY DON'T YOU JUST **TAKE** THE CONSCIOUSNESS FROM ME NOW? TAKE THESE **EYES** MEPHISTO GAVE ME?"

"BECAUSE WE WOULD **LOSE** THE ABILITY TO **SEE THE FUTURE**. ITS PROPERTIES WOULD **CHANGE** IF IT WERE JOINED TO THE REST OF OMNISCIENCE.

"AND IF IT WERE JOINED, DEATH WOULD **IMMEDIATELY** KNOW MY WHEREABOUTS IN HER REALM. I AM **SORRY**, KYLE, BUT YOU WILL HAVE TO CARRY THIS BURDEN A **WHILE LONGER**."

"I UNDERSTAND. BUT THE **ICE-WALL** THAT PROTECTS THE TORCH IN NEW YORK IS **BREAKING**, MAR-VELL. I CAN'T SEE IT YET, BUT THE TORCH IS GOING TO **FALL**."

"NO, IT ISN'T. A **PROMISE** WAS MADE.

"A PROMISE FROM A **GRIEVING HUSBAND** TO MYSELF AND MULDOON."



**"HE'S BACK, MAR-VELL!
CREEL IS BACK!"**

**"THEY PIECED HIM
TOGETHER!"**



**"THE ABSORBING
MAN LIVES AGAIN!"**



WE NEED TO GET TO **NEW YORK!** GET OUT OF THE SAVAGE LAND!

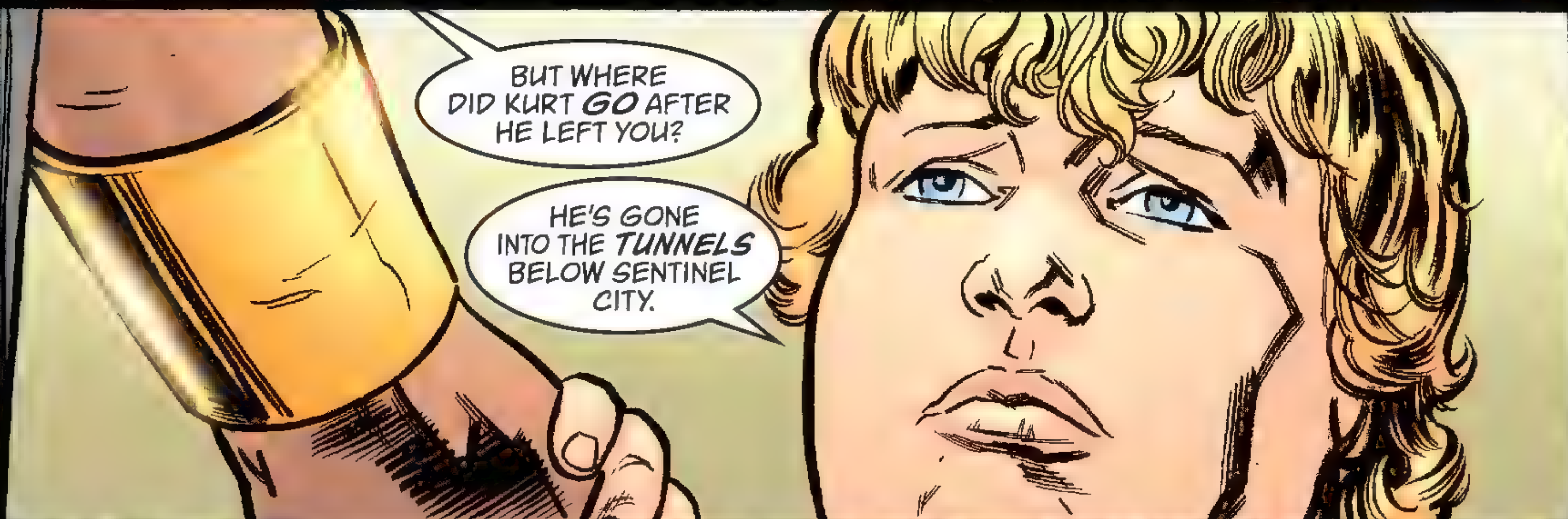
NOT YET, AARON. WE NEED TO KNOW THAT **BELASCO** WON'T USE LIMBO TO TRAVEL BACK THROUGH TIME AND CREATE YET ANOTHER ALTERNATE REALITY.

BUT HE ALMOST **KILLED YOU**, MARVELL.



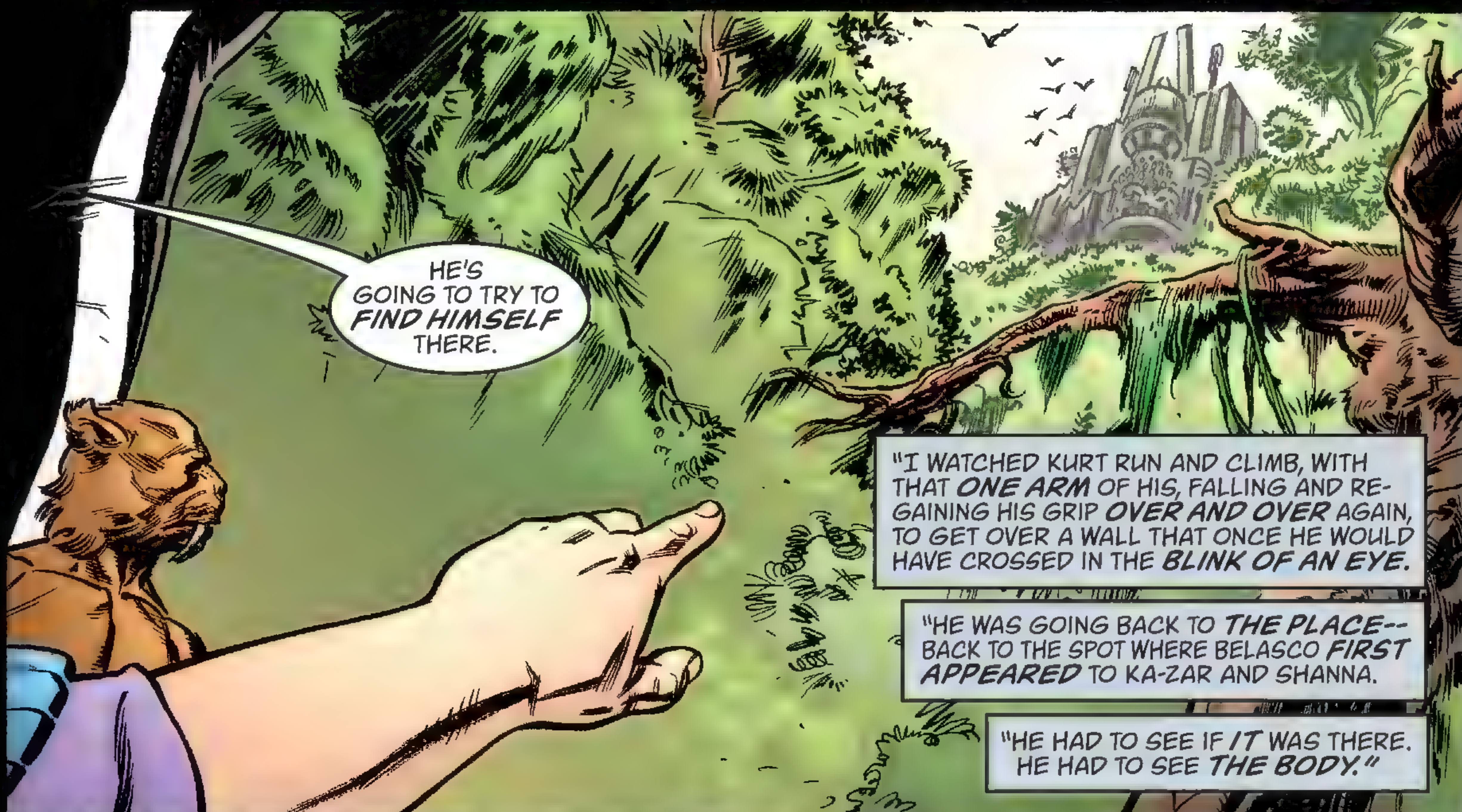
COULD YOU ALL STOP TALKING ABOUT THE END OF THE WORLD LONG ENOUGH TO TELL ME HOW **BELASCO** WAS **KURT WAGNER** ALL THIS TIME?

MEPHISTO **TRICKED** KURT INTO BECOMING THE VERY DEMON MOST MEN FEARED HIM TO BE, **ORORO**.



BUT WHERE DID KURT **GO** AFTER HE LEFT YOU?

HE'S GONE INTO THE **TUNNELS** BELOW SENTINEL CITY.

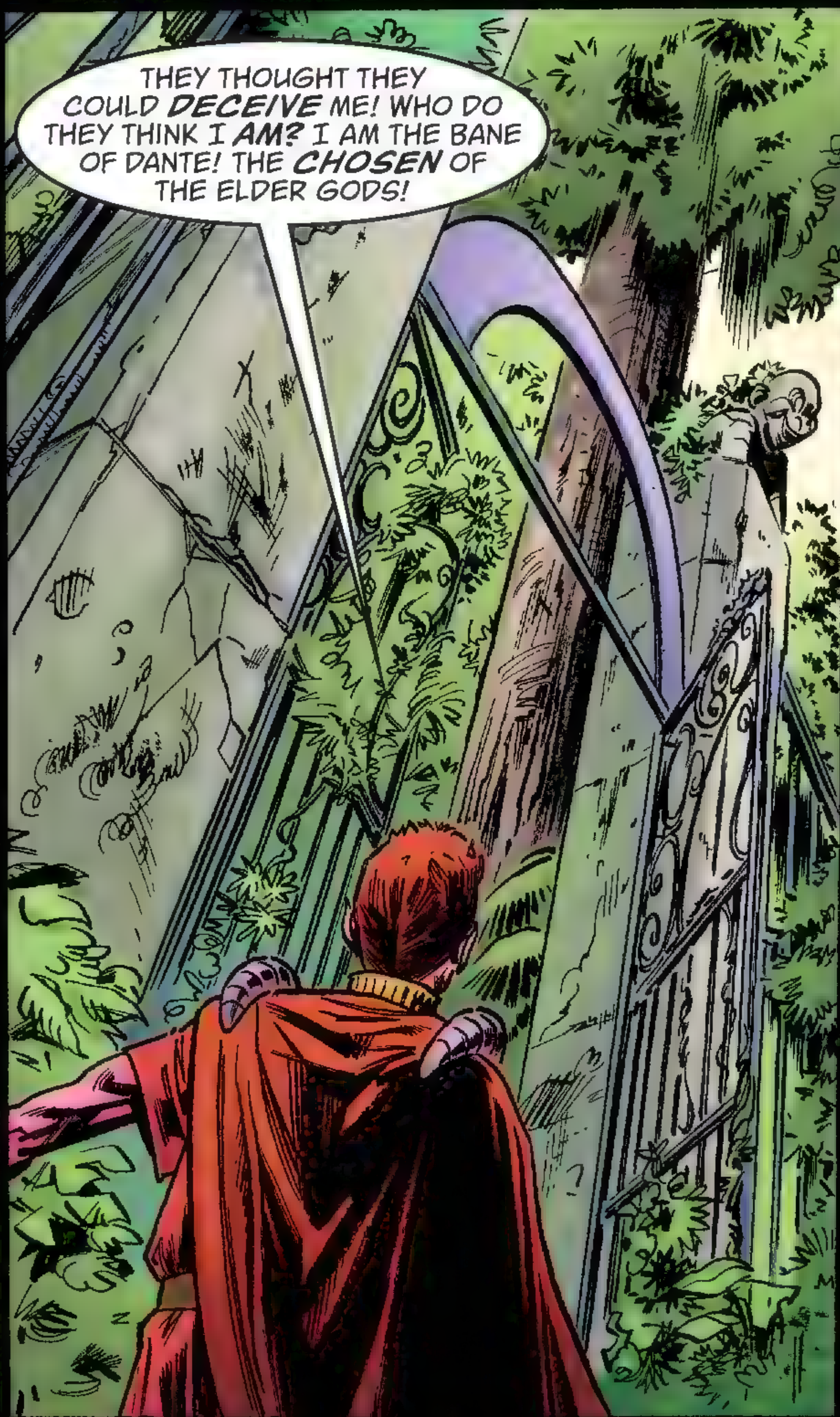


HE'S GOING TO TRY TO **FIND HIMSELF** THERE.

"I WATCHED KURT RUN AND CLIMB, WITH THAT **ONE ARM** OF HIS, FALLING AND REGAINING HIS GRIP **OVER AND OVER** AGAIN, TO GET OVER A WALL THAT ONCE HE WOULD HAVE CROSSED IN THE **BLINK OF AN EYE**."

"HE WAS GOING BACK TO **THE PLACE**-- BACK TO THE SPOT WHERE **BELASCO** FIRST **APPEARED** TO KA-ZAR AND SHANNA."

"HE HAD TO SEE IF **IT** WAS THERE. HE HAD TO SEE **THE BODY**."



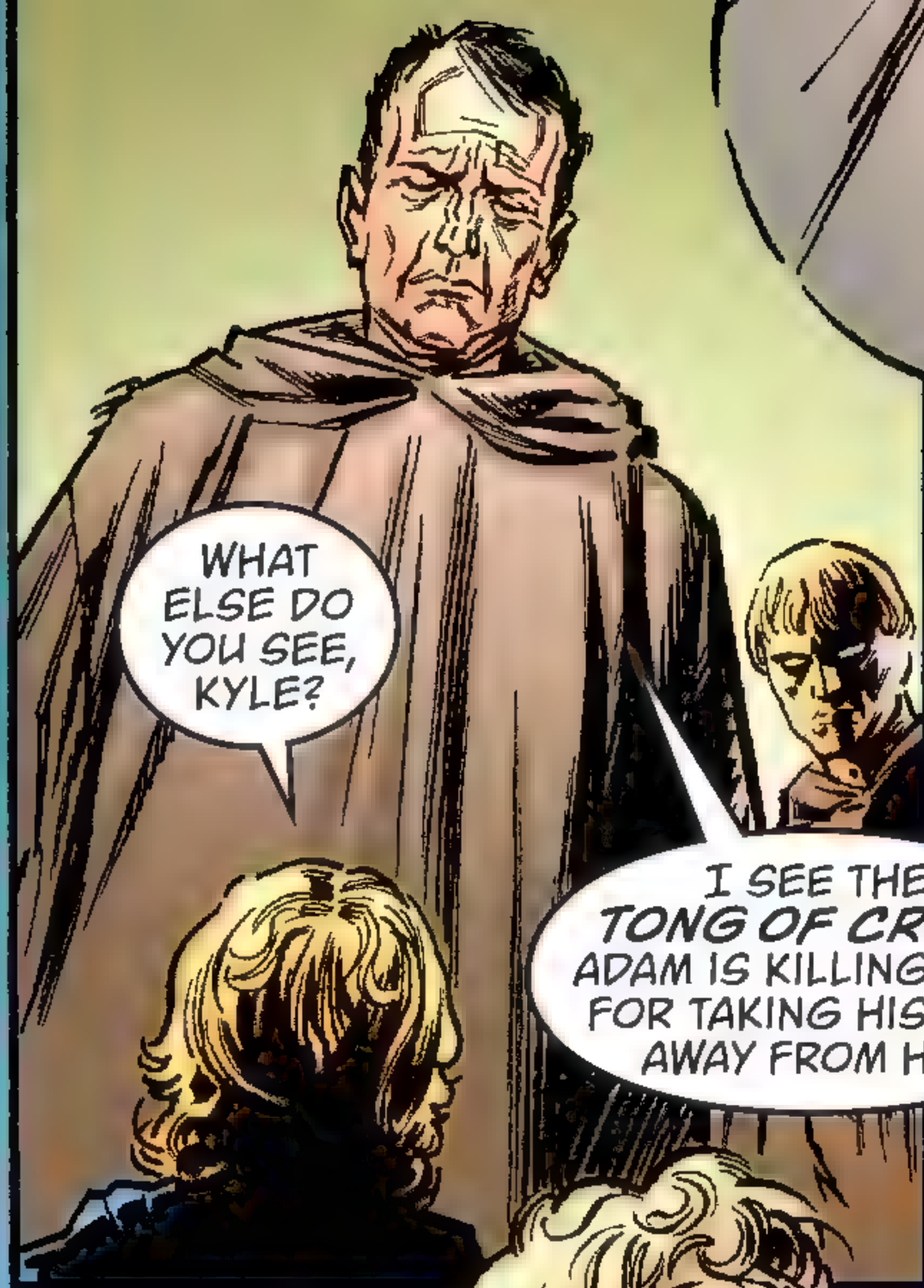


NICHTS!

"HE JUST TOOK IT *ON FAITH* THAT HE WAS A DEMON, JUST AS THE X-MEN HAD."



YOU HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR FROM BELASCO ANYMORE, ORORO.



WHAT ELSE DO YOU SEE, KYLE?

I SEE THE TONG OF CREEL. ADAM IS KILLING THEM FOR TAKING HIS WIFE AWAY FROM HIM.



DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT YOU'VE DONE?

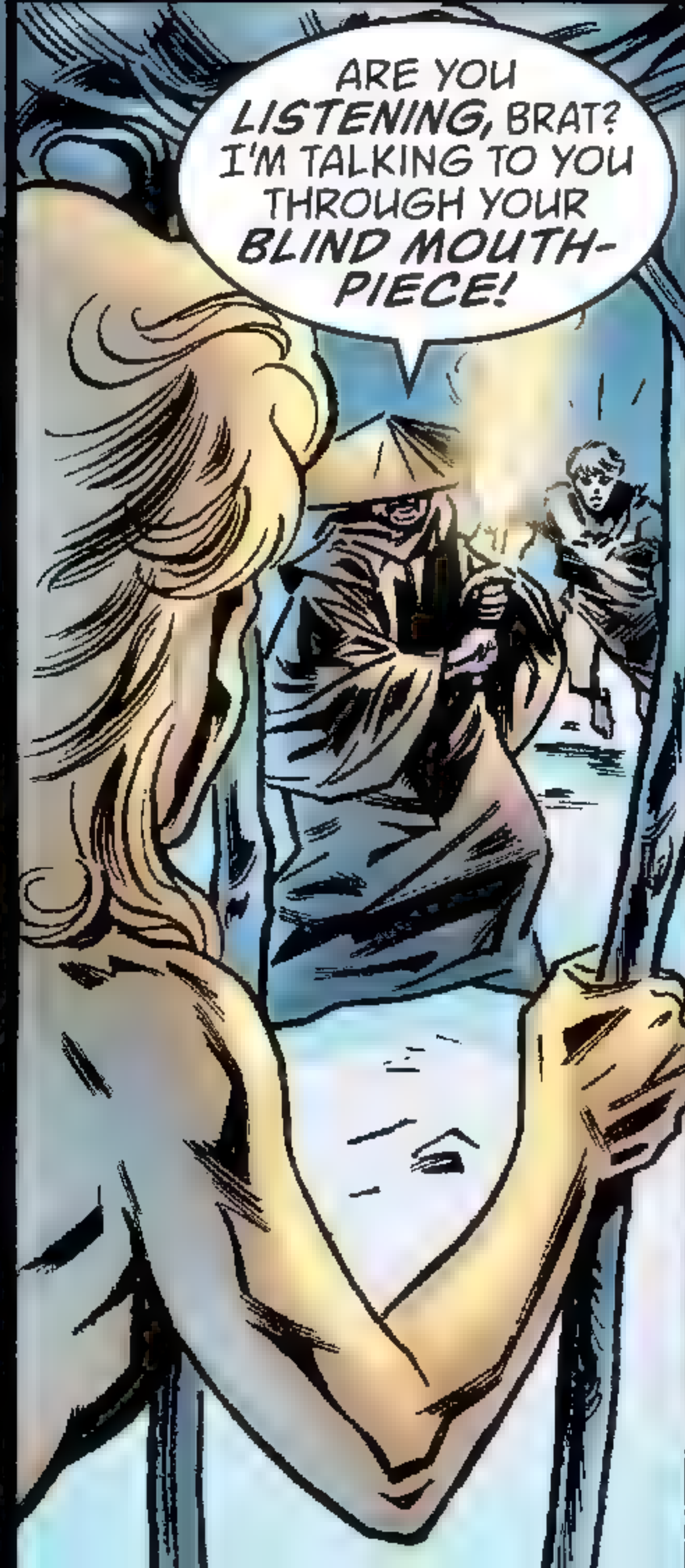
ADAM!

SHE'S NOT WORTH THE EFFORT, ADAM!

SHE'LL BETRAY YOU IN THE END, JUST AS CLEA DID STRANGE!



YOU SHOULD THANK ME, ADAM! YOU SHOULD ALL THANK ME FOR ENDING YOUR CRUSADE BEFORE YOU LEARNED THE TRUE NATURE OF DEATH!



ARE YOU LISTENING, BRAT? I'M TALKING TO YOU THROUGH YOUR BLIND MOUTH-PIECE!



YOU SEE, I'VE LEARNED SOMETHING OF MAGIC OVER THE YEARS...



"MAR-VELL, I-I HAVE NO IDEA HOW RONIN KNOWS I CAN SEE HIM!"

"WHAT ELSE DO YOU SEE, KYLE?"

"REED RICHARDS THOUGHT HE'D WON A VICTORY IN LAT-VERIA WHEN THE MONSTER GENERATION AND THE DEVIANT KNOWN ONLY AS THE REJECT SAVED HIM AND HIS FAMILY."

"BUT HE WAS WRONG."

"IMAGINE THAT, REED RICHARDS *WRONG* ABOUT SOMETHING."

I CAN'T LOSE YOU AGAIN, SUSAN. I WON'T. WE CAN'T WIN THIS ONE.

AND I CAN'T FORCE THIS ON THE REST OF THE WORLD...I'M NOT SURE I WANT TO LIVE HERE ANYMORE.

THIS MIGHT BUY US A FEW MORE DAYS, AT LEAST...SOME PEACE.

IF MY CALCULATIONS ARE CORRECT, THE RE-POLARIZATION OF THE WORLD AND MELTING OF THE POLAR ICE-CAPS WILL DESTROY ALL LIFE ON EARTH WITHIN MONTHS AS IT IS.

I LOVE YOU, REED.

"THE MOMENT THE TORCH'S FLAME DIES, THE MUTANTS *PULL AWAY* FROM THE CASTLE. RICHARDS AND THE OTHERS ARE NOT CONSUMED IN THEIR ATTACK."

"AND THEN THE MUTANTS BEGIN TO *TURN* ON EACH OTHER."

I HAVE NO CHOICE, SUSAN. ALL BUT NEW YORK'S TORCH HAVE BEEN PUT OUT.

I CAN'T BELIEVE IT! THIS ISN'T THE "BIG BRAIN" POP TOLD US ABOUT! WISH POP WOULD GET BACK HERE FROM MULLDOON'S "SECRET" PROJECT! THEN WE'D SEE SOME REAL HEAD-CRACKIN'!

I STILL SAY THE REJECT CAN PROBABLY TAKE 'EM ALL!

THIS IS SO WRONG! WE STOPPED THEM! I THOUGHT WE SAVED THE DAY!

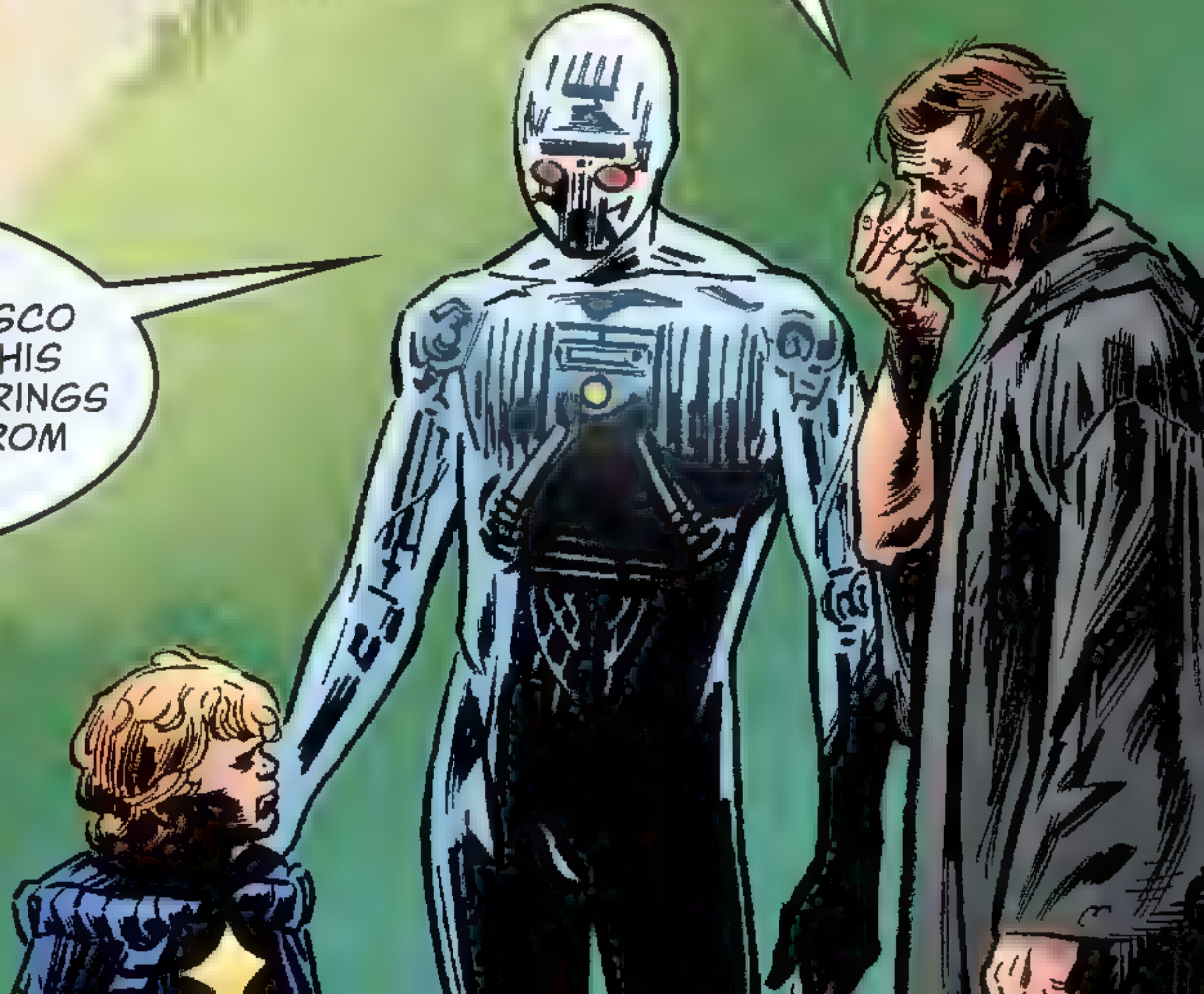


DON'T WORRY, AARON. IF BELASCO DOES RETURN WITH MORE WRAITHS, HE'LL HAVE TO DEAL WITH THE **IRON AVENGERS** FIRST.

THEY'RE COMING AT THE **BLACK KNIGHT'S** COMMAND TO SETTLE THE **WAR** BETWEEN TOAD AND MAGNETO.

IT'S TIME TO GO BACK TO NEW YORK, KYLE. LET'S GO. BRING THE **X-MEN** AND THE **HULK**, AS WELL.

I'M SORRY, MAR-VELL, BUT **HOW** CAN WE GO? WHAT IF BELASCO **ATTACKS** T'CHALLA AND HIS PEOPLE AGAIN? WHAT IF HE BRINGS MORE **DIRE WRAITHS** FROM LIMBO? PERHAPS I SHOULD **STAY**.

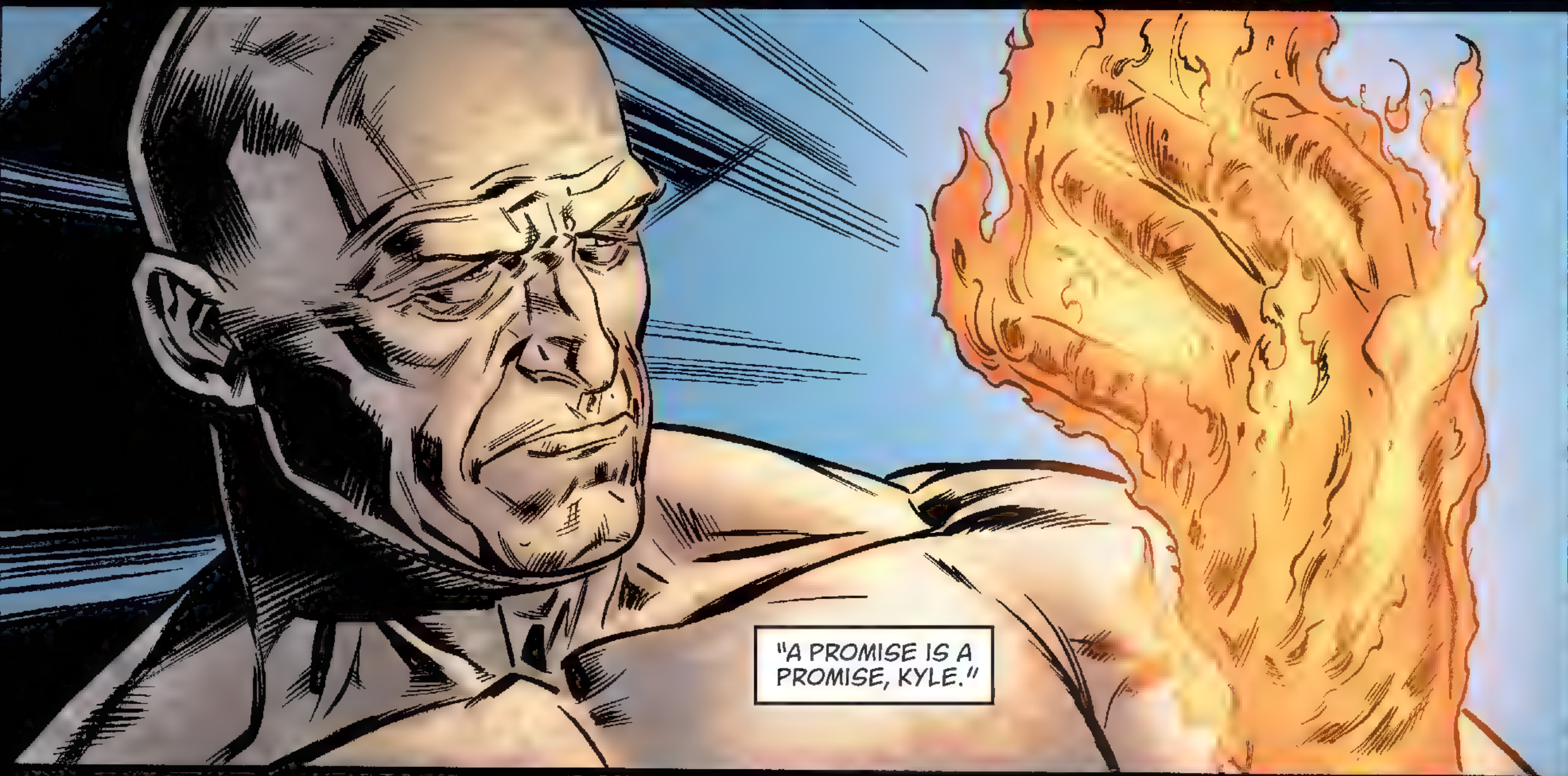




"WE'RE NOTHING TO HIM. HE'S GOING TO PINCH OUT THE TORCH LIKE A CANDLE."



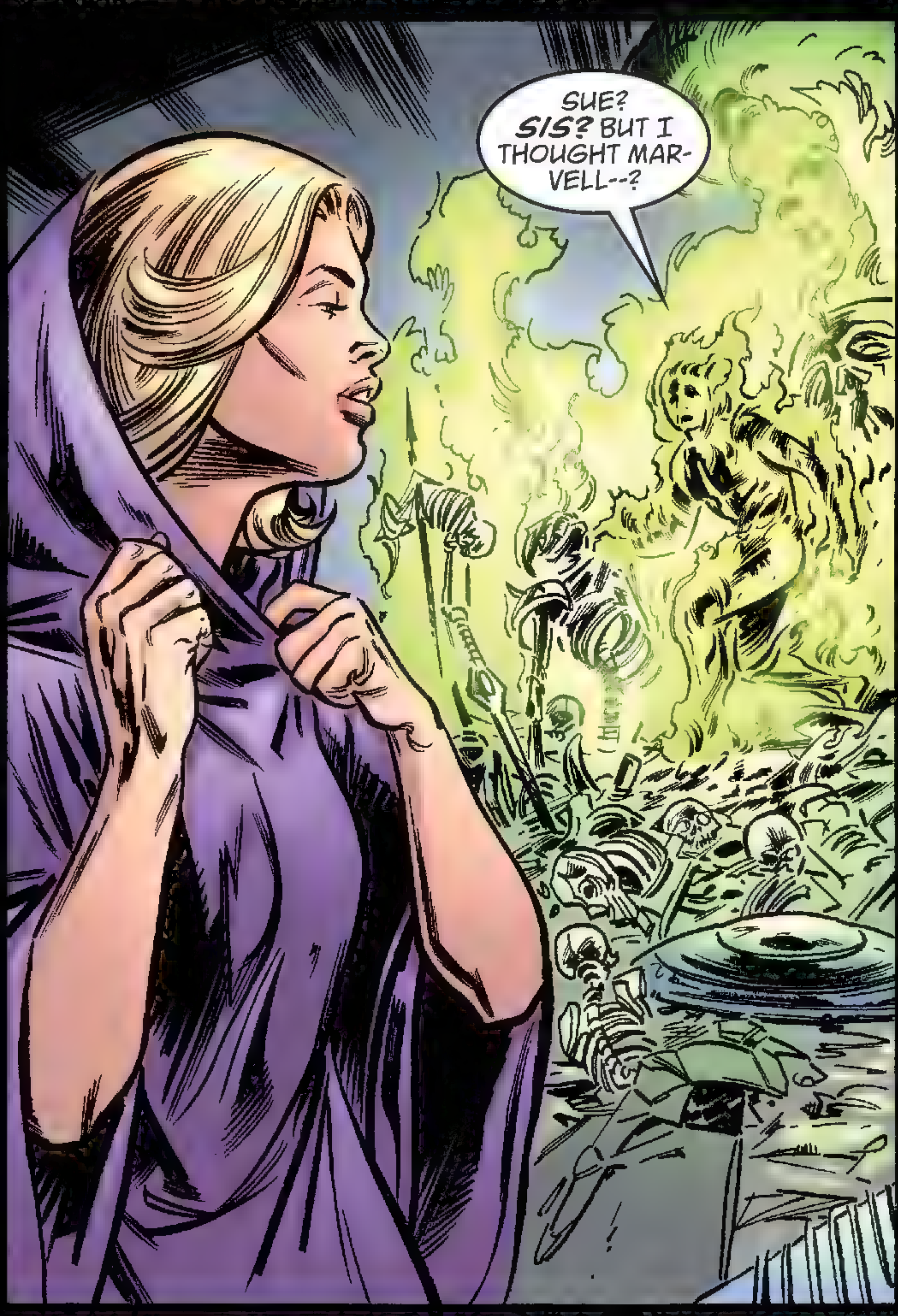
"HE'S...MAR-VELL, CREEL *ISN'T* ABLE TO DOUSE THE FLAME...!"

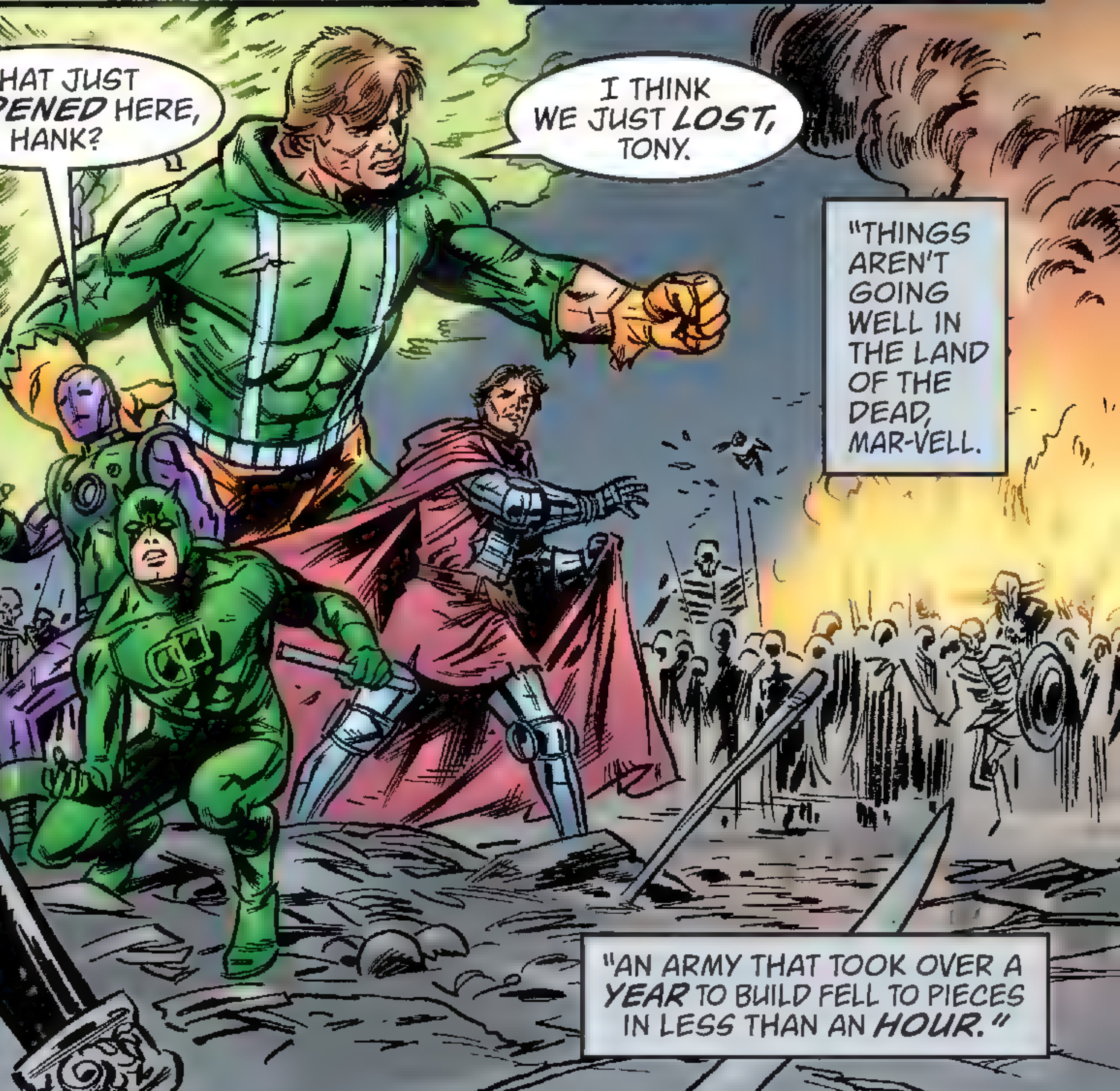
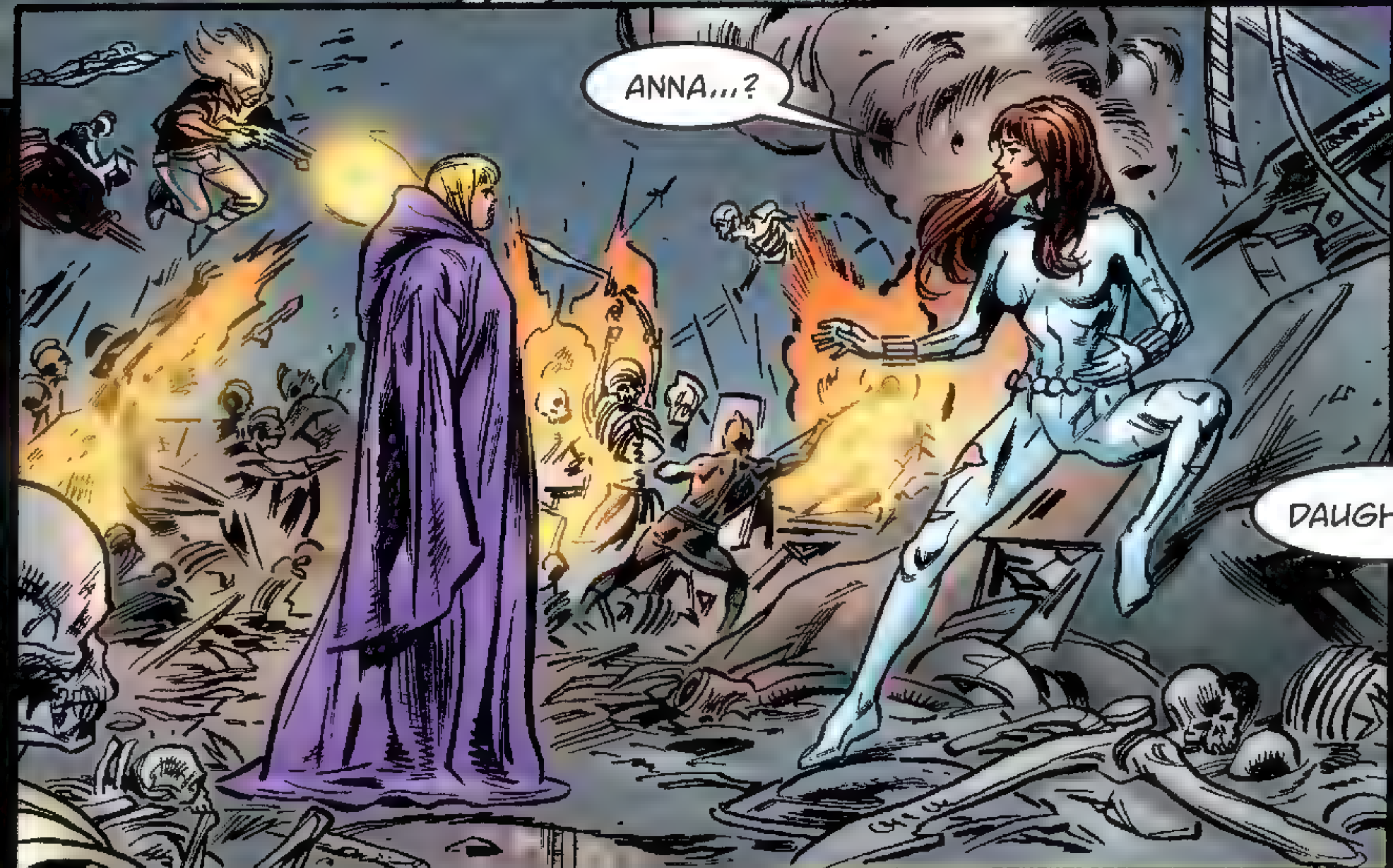


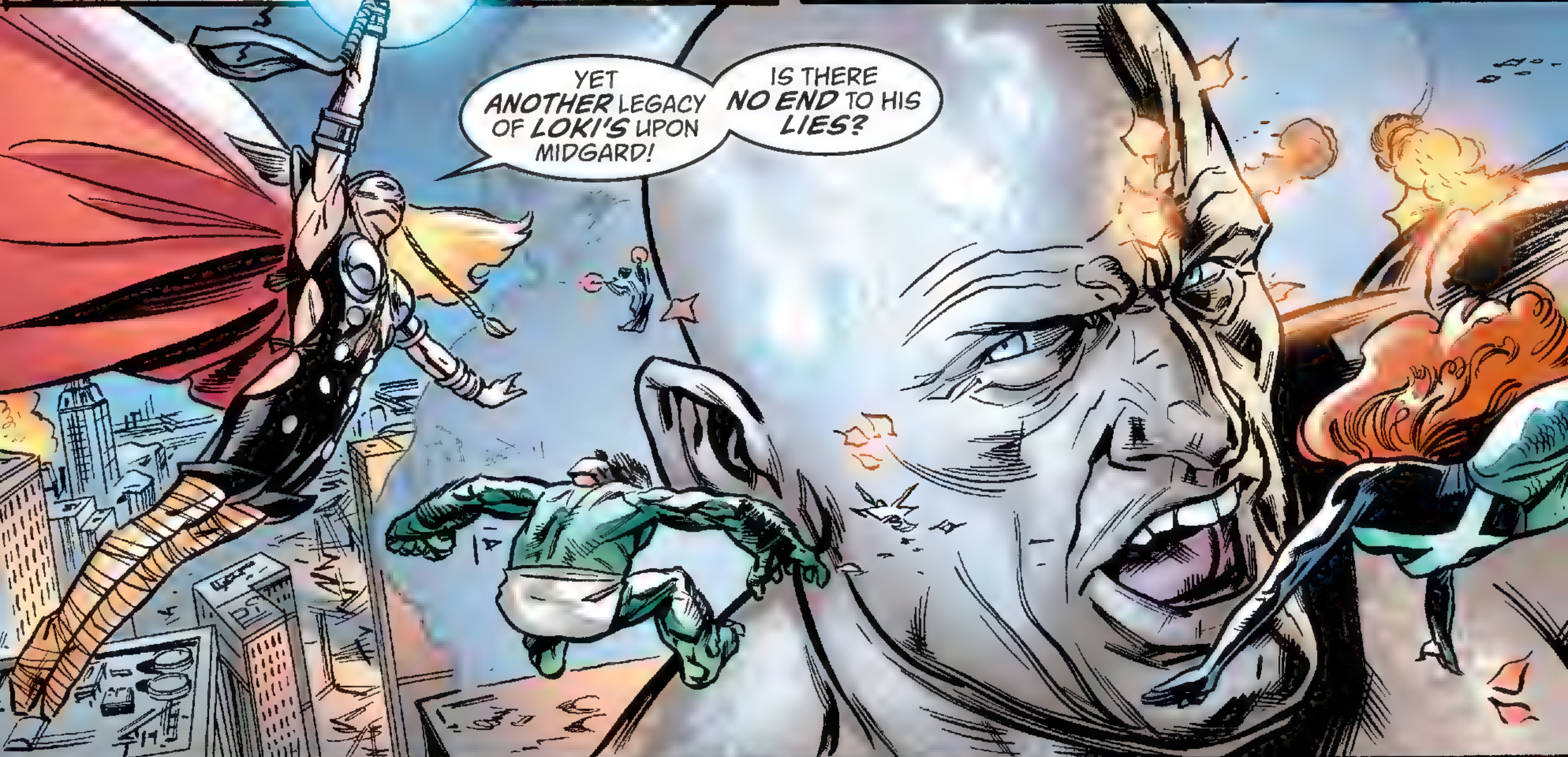
"A PROMISE IS A PROMISE, KYLE."

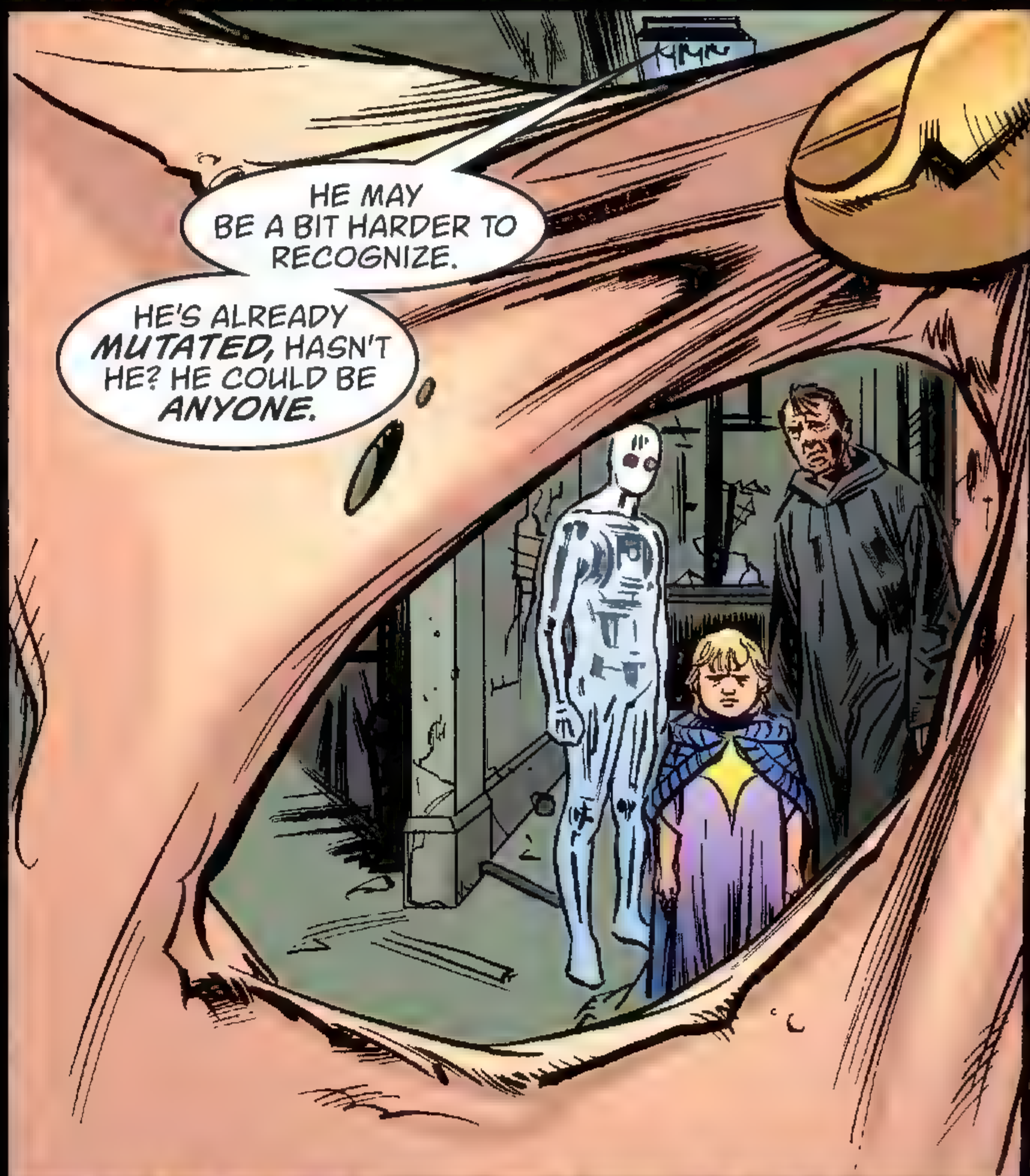


"I SWEAR TO YOU,
STEPHEN! DEATH
WILL DIE!"



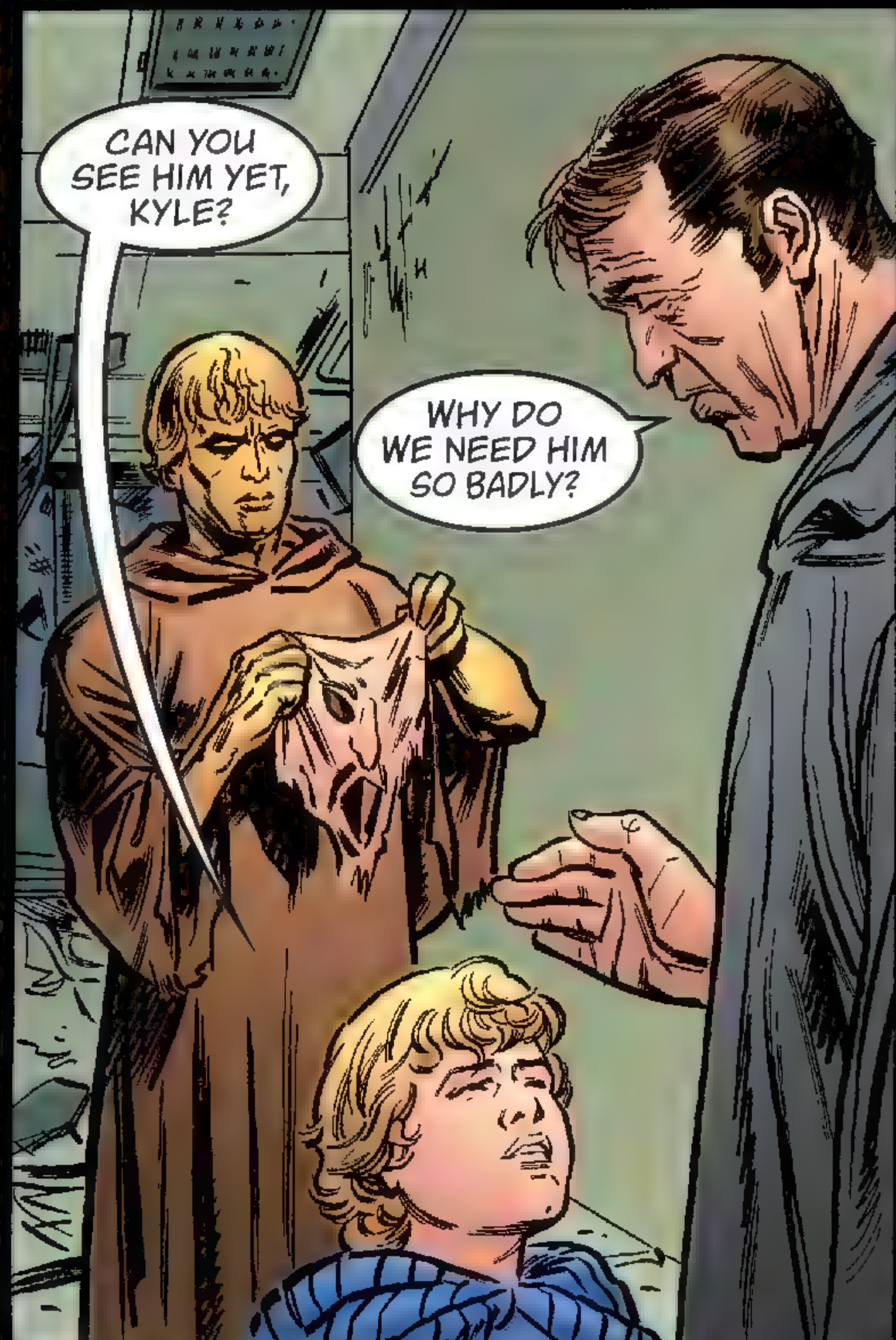






HE MAY BE A BIT HARDER TO RECOGNIZE.

HE'S ALREADY **MUTATED**, HASN'T HE? HE COULD BE **ANYONE**.



CAN YOU SEE HIM YET, KYLE?

WHY DO WE NEED HIM SO BADLY?



IMMORTUS'S WISH FOR MANKIND'S FUTURE DESTINY, HIS FORMING A CHURCH TO ATTACK THE CHURCHES, HIS BEING LOCKED OUT OF LIMBO, HIS MUTATION--IT'S ALL BEEN TO TEACH HIM **REGRET** AND **HOPELESSNESS**.

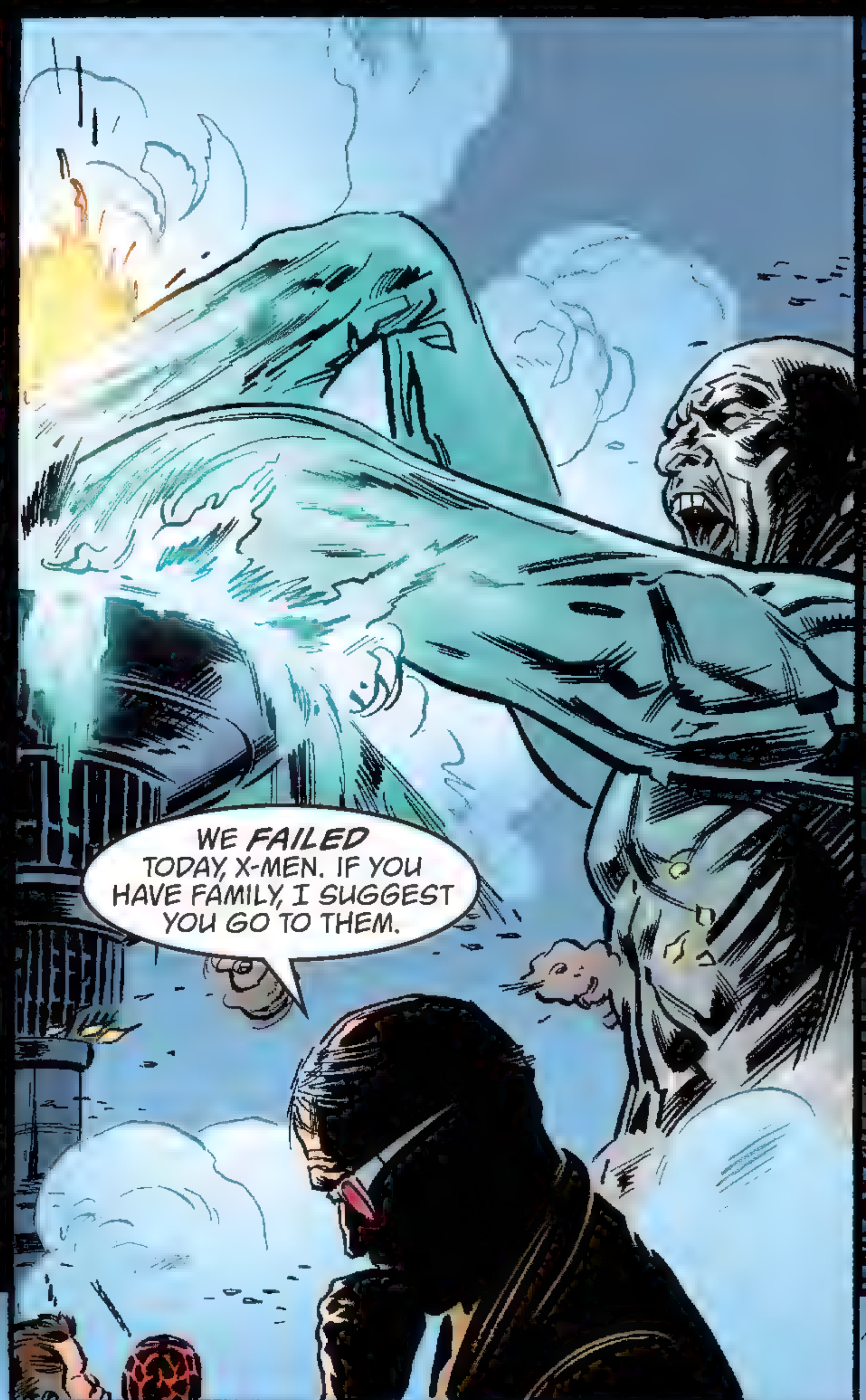
IT'S ALL BEEN FOR TRYING TO FIND ANOTHER WAY TO MANIPULATE TIME, AND CREATE **ONE MORE** ALTERNATE REALITY FOR MEPHISTO TO ESCAPE INTO.

MAR-VELL, I'VE FOUND HIM, BUT I DON'T THINK "**IMMORTUS**" IS THE NAME YOU WANT TO CALL HIM!



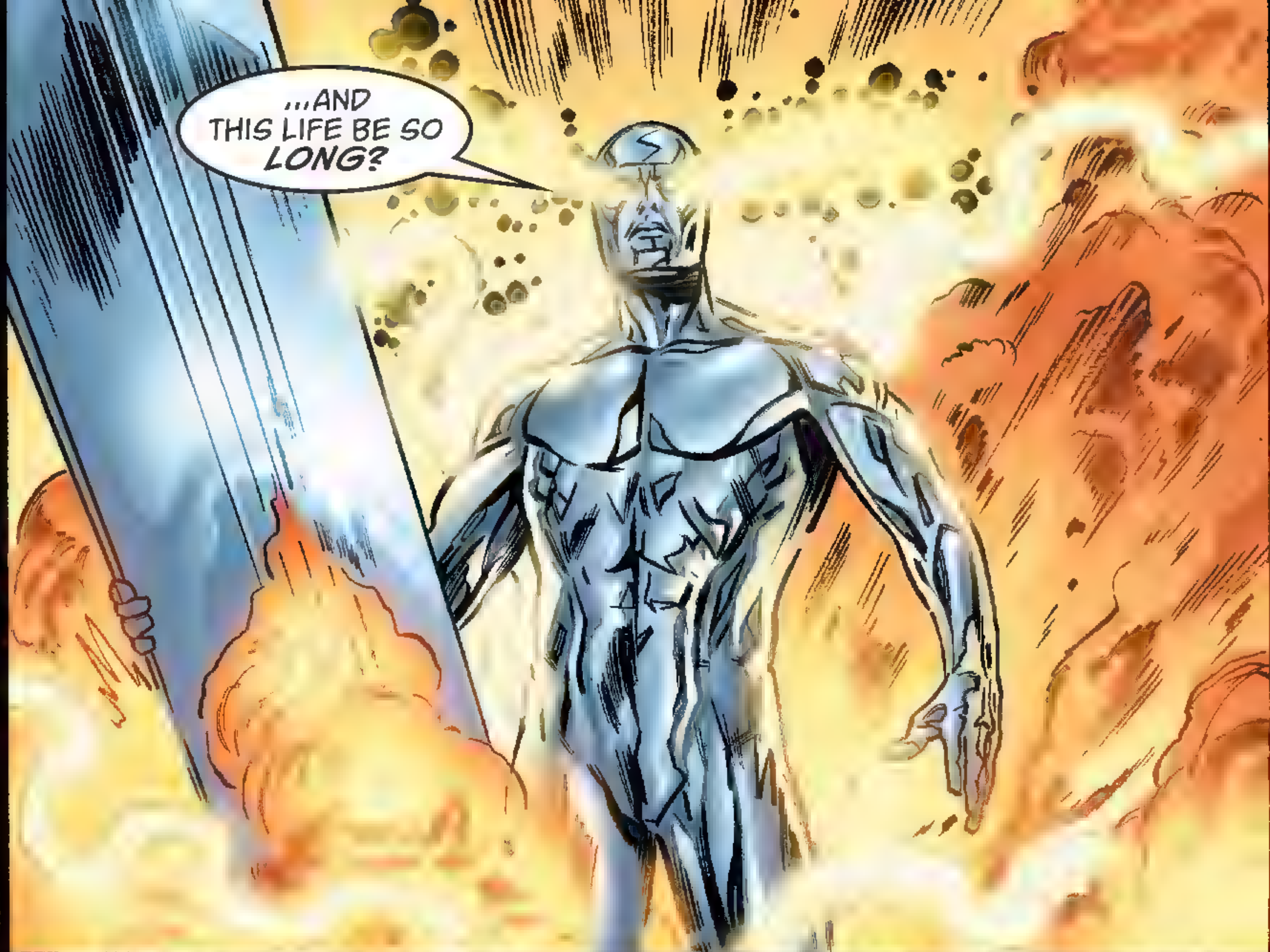
NO. **NOT** ANYMORE. HELLO... **KANG, THE IMMORTAL**.

MR. CHURCH GAVE ME **DOOM'S TIME MACHINE**, CHILD. DO NOT FEAR. EVERYTHING THAT'S **WRONG** WILL BE MADE **RIGHT** AGAIN.





WHY MUST
THE GRIEVING BE
SO *SHORT*,...



...AND
THIS LIFE BE SO
LONG?



YOUR
POWER IS DERIVED
FROM THE *EARTH*,
MONSTER--



--BUT
MINE IS ROOTED
IN THE *COSMOS*
ITSELF!

"Anarchy wears two
faces, both creator and
destroyer." - Alan Moore,
V For Vendetta

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER ELEVEN

W R I T T E N B Y
J I M K R U E G E R

"My model number is X-51. I was chosen by a race of aliens to witness the end of the Earth. The Watcher chose me because I am a machine programmed to believe himself... itself a man. Uatu chose me because my mind could be changed with a finger-punched command.

"He was wrong. Uatu was wrong. My mind has not changed. If anything, my resolve to look away from my appearance as a machine is all the stronger. I will be a man. Whatever it takes. I will be a man in thought. In action. In the choices I make.

"And so I will not go back to the moon to wait for the battle to end, to watch the death of the Silver Surfer at the hands of Creel. To fulfill an alien and foreign will for my life. I will stay here. With Richmond. And Mar-Vell. And Immortus.

"It would be far better to die with my people upon the Earth and that is why I am here. What is coming to destroy us I will not watch from objectivity. I may not even see it coming as well, unlike Richmond who is the bearer of that unique damnation. I choose blindness to knowledge. I choose manhood. And wait to hope in ignorance rather than despair in truth.

"Creel will kill us. All of us. I'm certain of it. "But there is world after world after this one. The villains won this place. This is the devil's world now. But perhaps the next they won't win. Perhaps, though we seemed to win all the battles and lost the war, things will be different. And Mephisto will lose.

"And though Creel will kill everyone, I will hope that there is knowledge to gleam beyond the fall of this world. There is something to know beyond what can be recorded from Uatu's equipment.

"After all, what will happen now, almost happened years ago. Creel could have killed us then.

"It was not the death of the



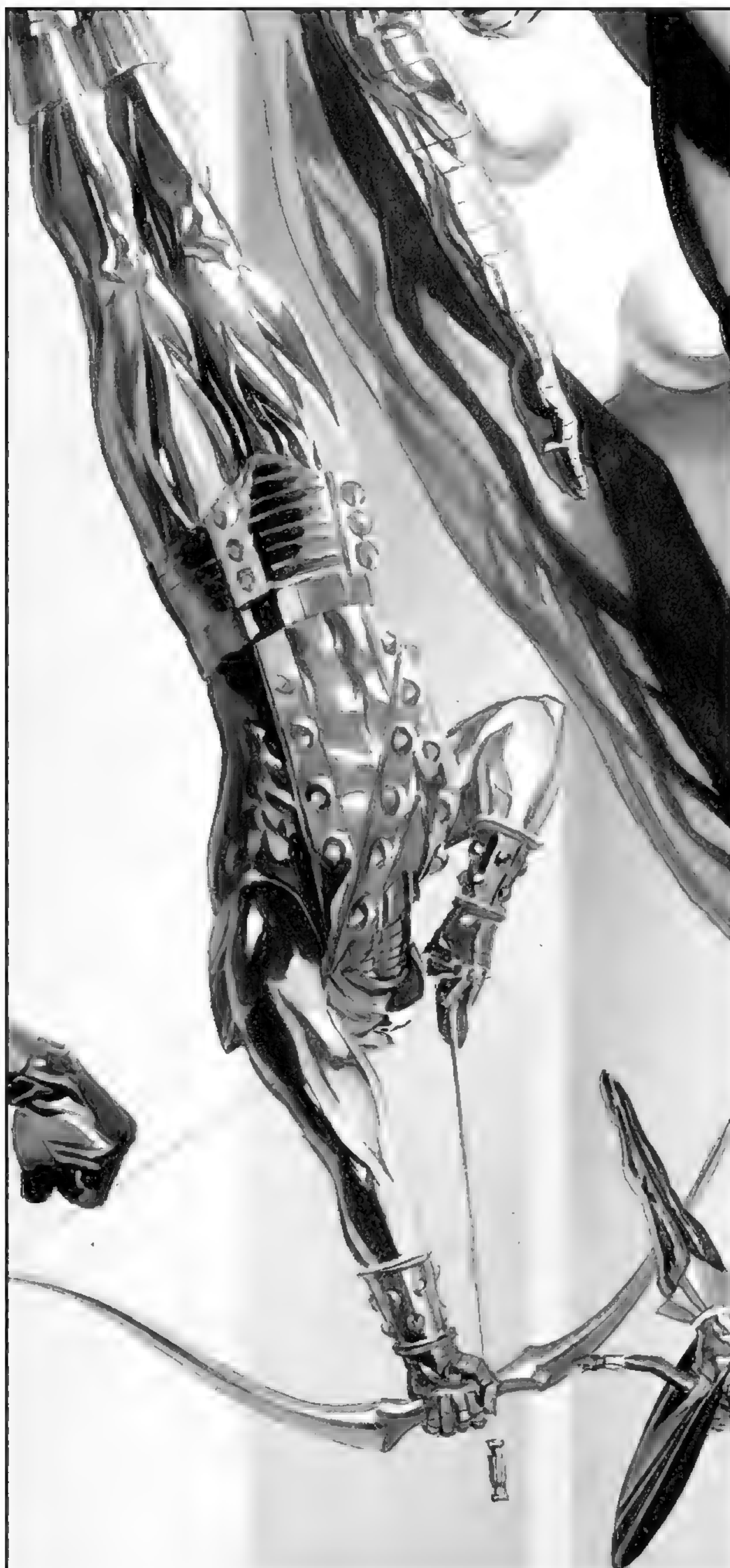
Avengers that changed Creel's reputation from an unthinking fool into a killer.

"It was the germ he became-- the germ that like the plagues prophesied to strike at the end of the world, killed a third of the world's population overnight. These deaths were kept secret by the Avengers, and with their deaths, is kept now only by the Vision. The lie was upheld out of the fear that if any one knew that the Absorbing Man was capable of killing everyone on Earth in such a way, the mass hysteria would lead to social and ethical breakdown. The hope of the Avengers had been to somehow hide the

suggestion that this much power had been given to any one being. If one man could kill a third of the population, why not two? Why not ten? Why not a hundred?

"Scott Summers had once said that this world was at last made equal when everyone upon it had become a mutation. But time has shown this belief to be naïve at best. The King of the Inhumans mutated the entire inhabitation of Earth in hopes of protecting his people from the prejudiced attacks on those believed to be mutants.

But this hope was in vain. If anything, the bias between one man and another is a prejudice against power. Those with the most power create the rules that determine society.



"Those with the least amount of power are the currency by which those with power trade. The weak resent the powerful. The powerful fear the weak and their numbers. "The germ Creel became upon the world led to the belief that the mutation of the remaining two-thirds of the population might be some sort of vengeance of God upon the sin and debauchery of the people of this world.

"Creel might have killed us all were it not for the known super-villain Titania, the woman he loved, changing his mind, begging him to stop.

"Titania later led a raid against one of the ration silos and in battle with the Avengers, was struck on the head. The doctors said she'd never come out of her coma.

"Creel killed them by absorbing the super-computer Ultron, and learned and took advantage of their weaknesses, blaming them for striking at his.

"This was his vengeance.

"And now, it will continue."



A UNIVERSE X SPECIAL

APPROVED
BY THE
COMICS
AUTHORITY

IRON MAN

MARVEL
COMICS

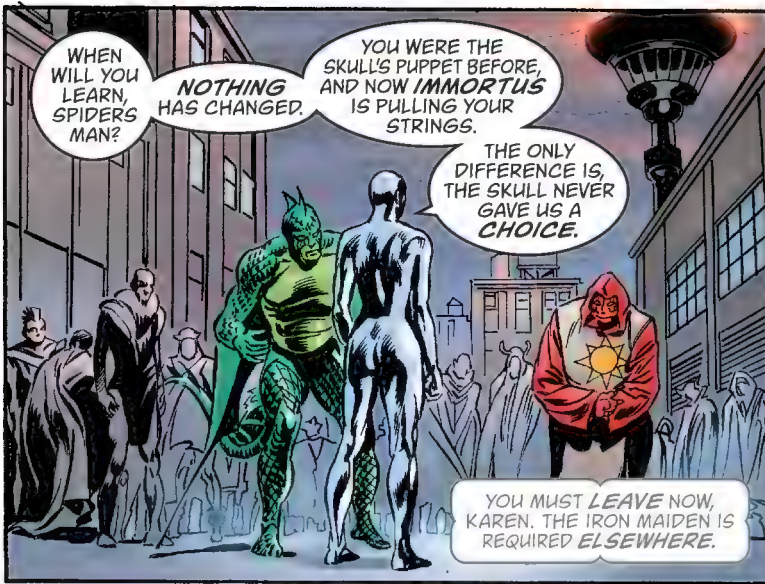


KRUEGER
ANDERSON
PALMER

MARVEL



UNIVERSE X: IRON MEN



WHEN
WILL YOU
LEARN,
SPIDERS
MAN?

**NOTHING
HAS CHANGED.**

YOU WERE THE
SKULL'S PUPPET BEFORE,
AND NOW **IMMORTUS**
IS PULLING YOUR
STRINGS.

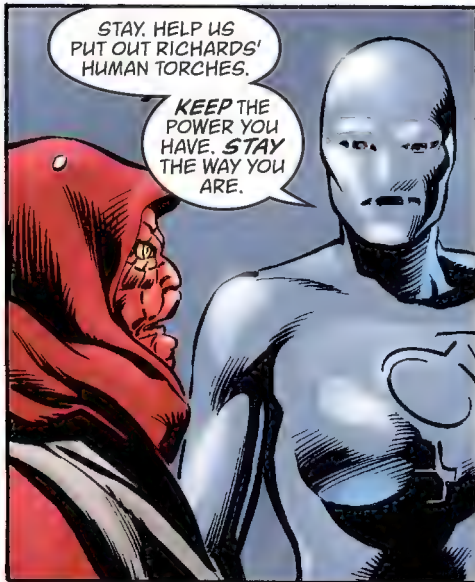
THE ONLY
DIFFERENCE IS,
THE SKULL NEVER
GAVE US A
CHOICE.

YOU MUST **LEAVE NOW**,
KAREN. THE IRON MAIDEN IS
REQUIRED **ELSEWHERE.**



YOU'VE GOT IT
WRONG, MAIDEN.
IMMORTUS IS SHOWING
US **THE WAY**. WE WILL
LEAVE HERE AS A RACE
DESTINED TO SPREAD
THROUGHOUT THE
STARS.

YOU ONCE
WORKED FOR **REED
RICHARDS**, NO? I THINK
YOUR LAST EMPLOYER
HAS CLOUDED YOUR
THINKING.



STAY. HELP US
PUT OUT RICHARDS'
HUMAN TORCHES.

**KEEP THE
POWER YOU
HAVE. STAY
THE WAY YOU
ARE.**



DO YOU THINK
I **WANT** TO STAY THIS
WAY? I'M **TRAPPED** IN
THIS BODY! WE ALL ARE!
WHAT'S **WRONG** WITH
YOU?

YOU WILL NOT
SAVE HIM BY
REMAINING IN
NEW YORK. I
WILL **GUIDE**
YOU TO WHERE
I AM.

THE FLIGHT IS VERY
LONG, YOU MUST
LEAVE NOW.

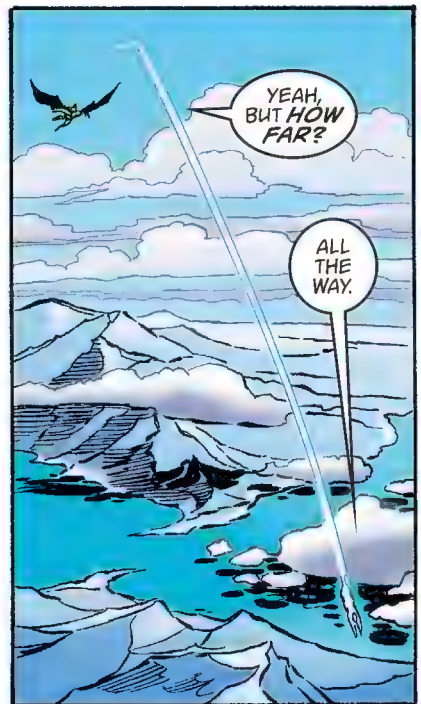
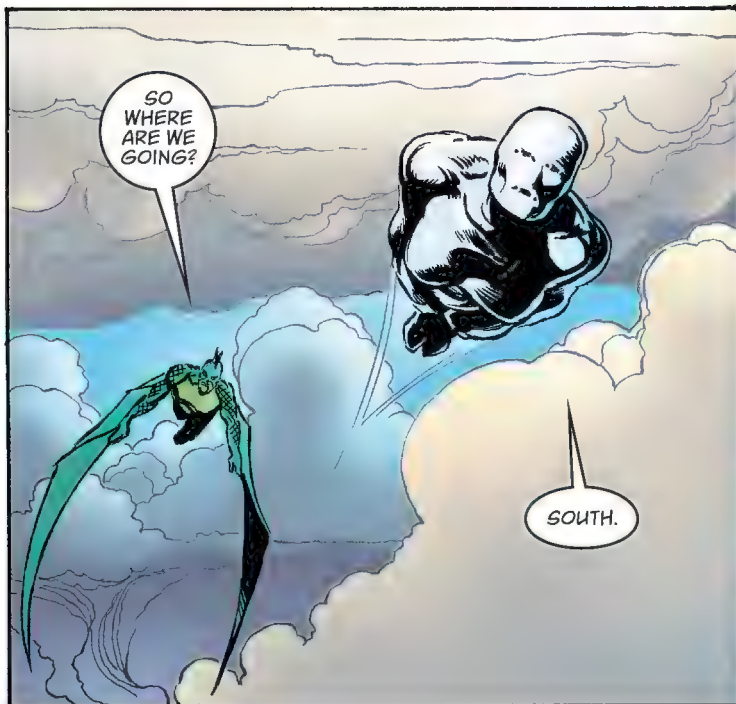
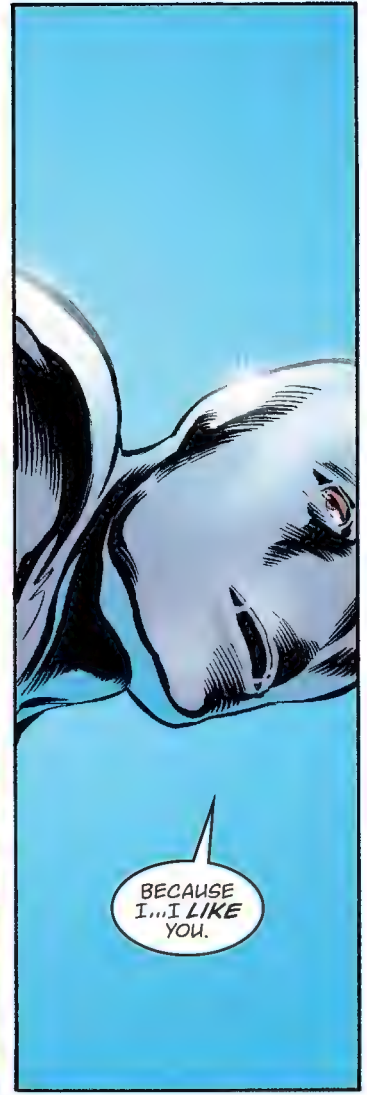
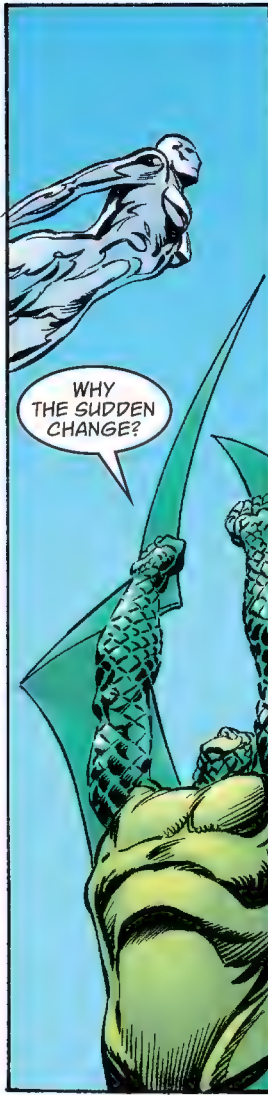
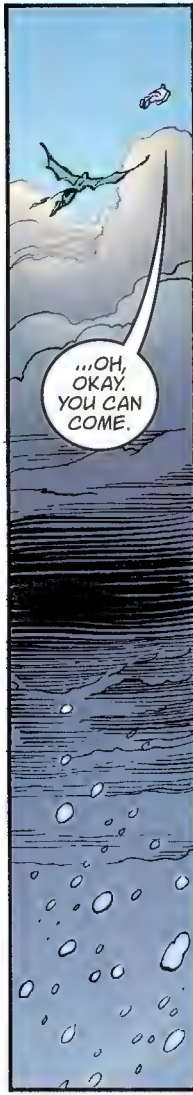
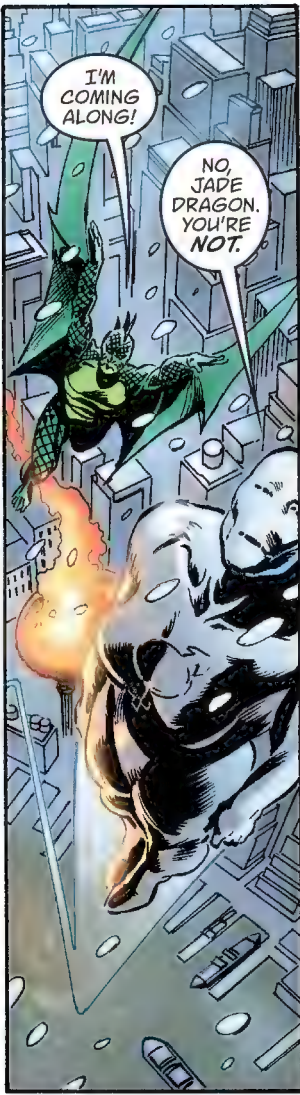


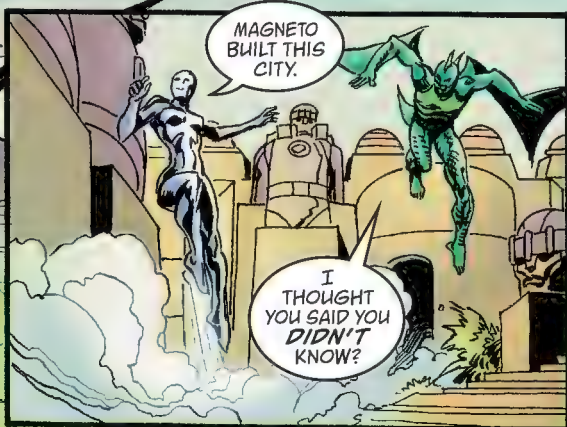
YOU
DON'T UNDERSTAND,
MAIDEN. THIS IS MY
CALLING.

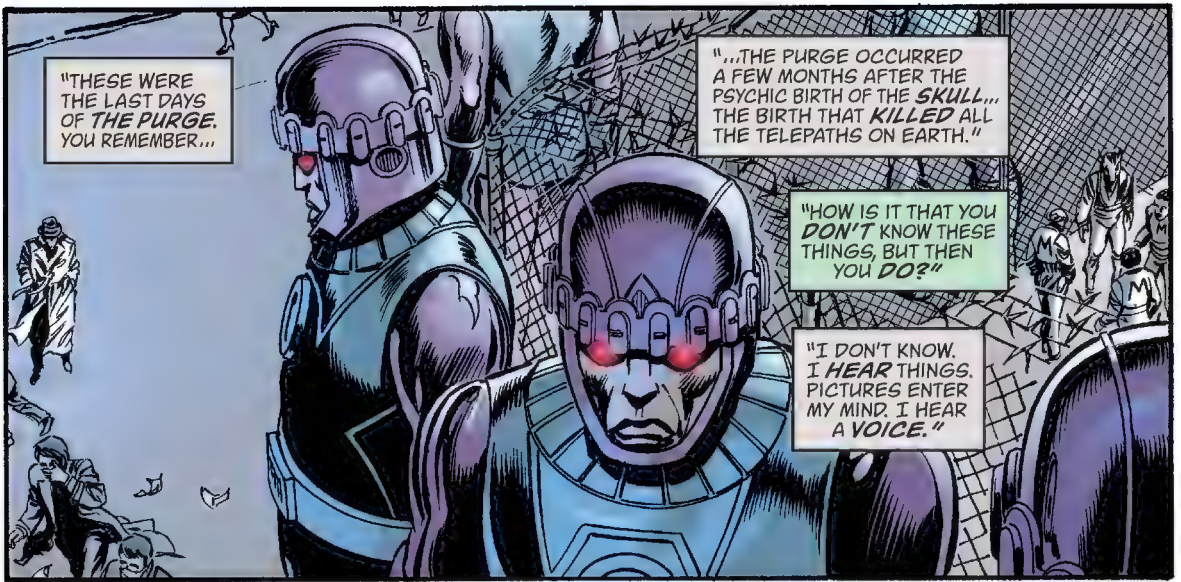


YOU HAVE
YOUR **CALLING**,
SPIDERS MAN.

AND
I HAVE
MINE.





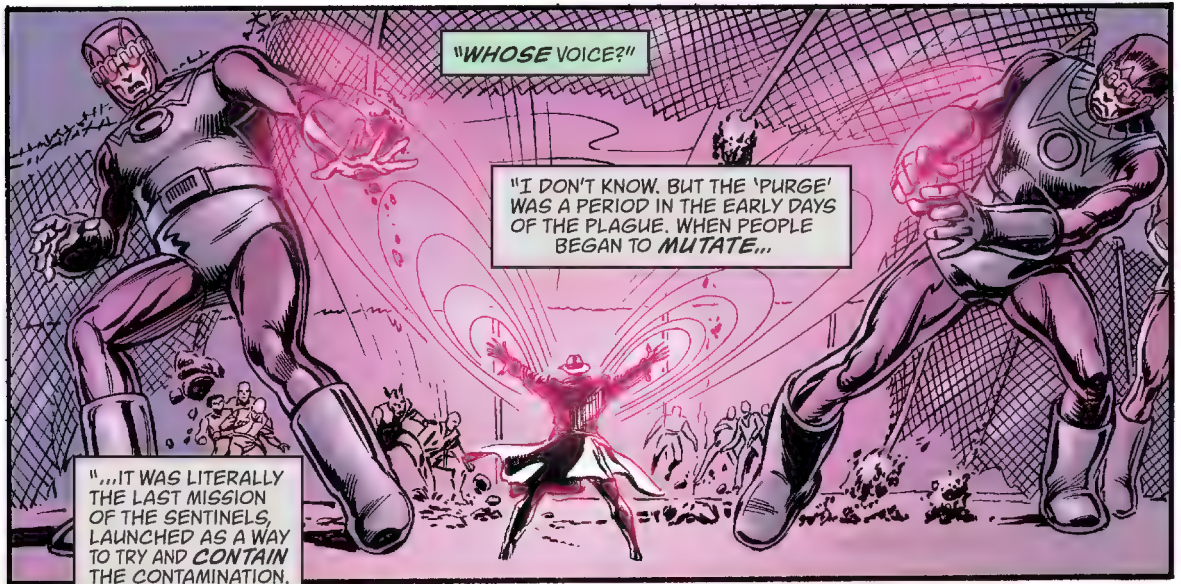


"THESE WERE
THE LAST DAYS
OF THE PURGE.
YOU REMEMBER..."

"...THE PURGE OCCURRED
A FEW MONTHS AFTER THE
PSYCHIC BIRTH OF THE **SKULL**...
THE BIRTH THAT **KILLED** ALL
THE TELEPATHS ON EARTH."

"HOW IS IT THAT YOU
DON'T KNOW THESE
THINGS, BUT THEN
YOU **DO**?"

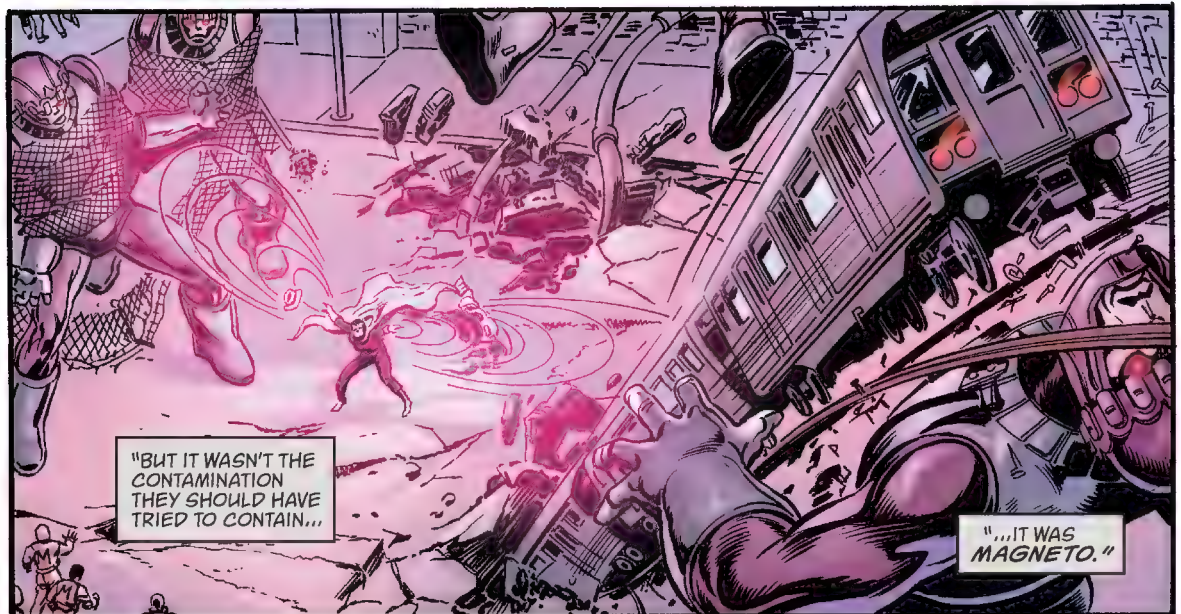
"I DON'T KNOW.
I **HEAR** THINGS.
PICTURES ENTER
MY MIND. I HEAR
A **VOICE**."



"WHOSE VOICE?"

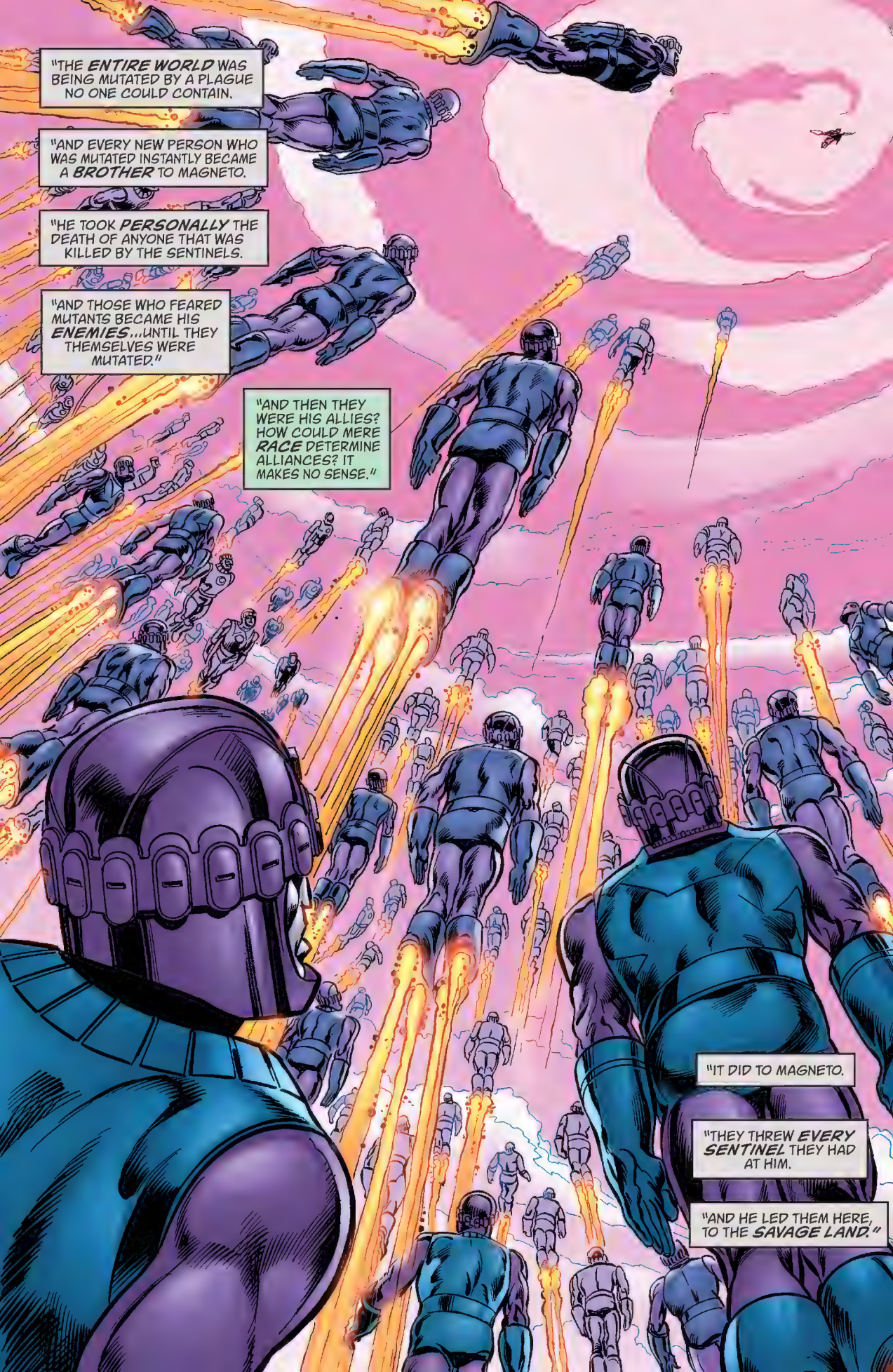
"I DON'T KNOW. BUT THE 'PURGE'
WAS A PERIOD IN THE EARLY DAYS
OF THE PLAGUE. WHEN PEOPLE
BEGAN TO **MUTATE**..."

"...IT WAS LITERALLY
THE LAST MISSION
OF THE SENTINELS,
LAUNCHED AS A WAY
TO TRY AND **CONTAIN**
THE CONTAMINATION."



"BUT IT WASN'T THE
CONTAMINATION
THEY SHOULD HAVE
TRIED TO **CONTAIN**..."

"...IT WAS
MAGNETO."



"THE *ENTIRE WORLD* WAS
BEING MUTATED BY A PLAGUE
NO ONE COULD CONTAIN.

"AND EVERY NEW PERSON WHO
WAS MUTATED INSTANTLY BECAME
A *BROTHER* TO MAGNETO.

"HE TOOK *PERSONALLY* THE
DEATH OF ANYONE THAT WAS
KILLED BY THE SENTINELS.

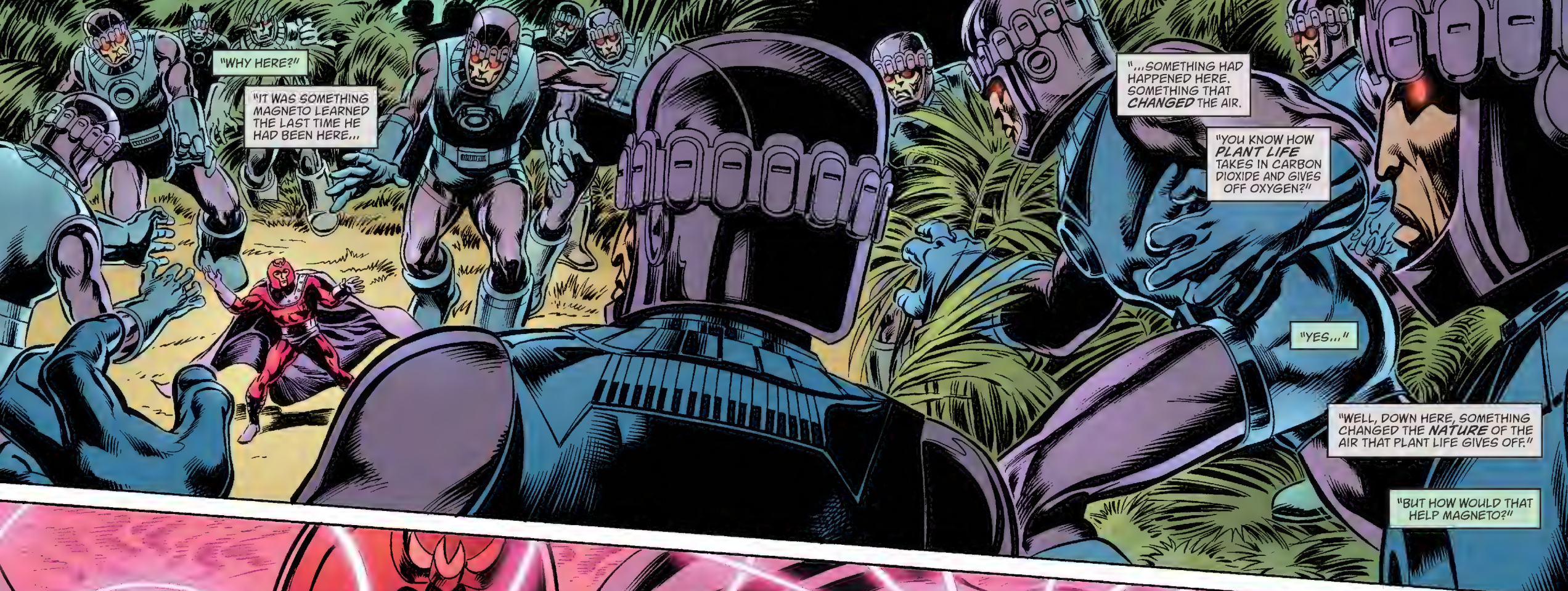
"AND THOSE WHO FEARED
MUTANTS BECAME HIS
ENEMIES...UNTIL THEY
THEMSELVES WERE
MUTATED."

"AND THEN THEY
WERE HIS ALLIES?
HOW COULD MERE
RACE DETERMINE
ALLIANCES? IT
MAKES NO SENSE."

"IT DID TO MAGNETO.

"THEY THREW *EVERY*
SENTINEL THEY HAD
AT HIM.

"AND HE LED THEM HERE,
TO THE *SAVAGE LAND*."



"WHY HERE?"

"IT WAS SOMETHING
MAGNETO LEARNED
THE LAST TIME HE
HAD BEEN HERE..."

"...SOMETHING HAD
HAPPENED HERE.
SOMETHING THAT
CHANGED THE AIR.

"YOU KNOW HOW
PLANT LIFE
TAKES IN CARBON
DIOXIDE AND GIVES
OFF OXYGEN?"

"YES..."

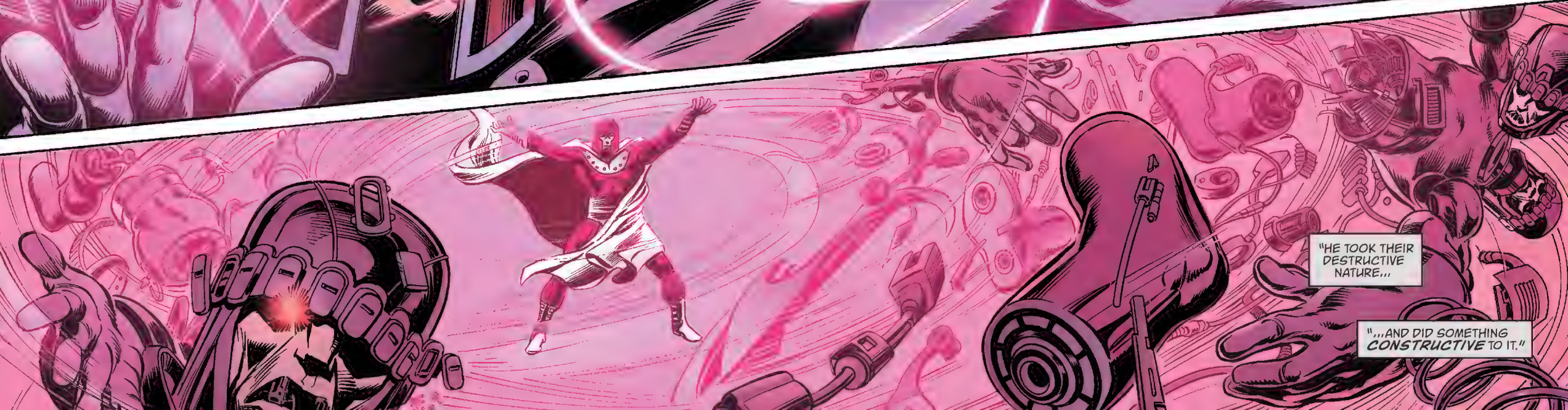
"WELL, DOWN HERE, SOMETHING
CHANGED THE *NATURE* OF THE
AIR THAT PLANT LIFE GIVES OFF."

"BUT HOW WOULD THAT
HELP MAGNETO?"



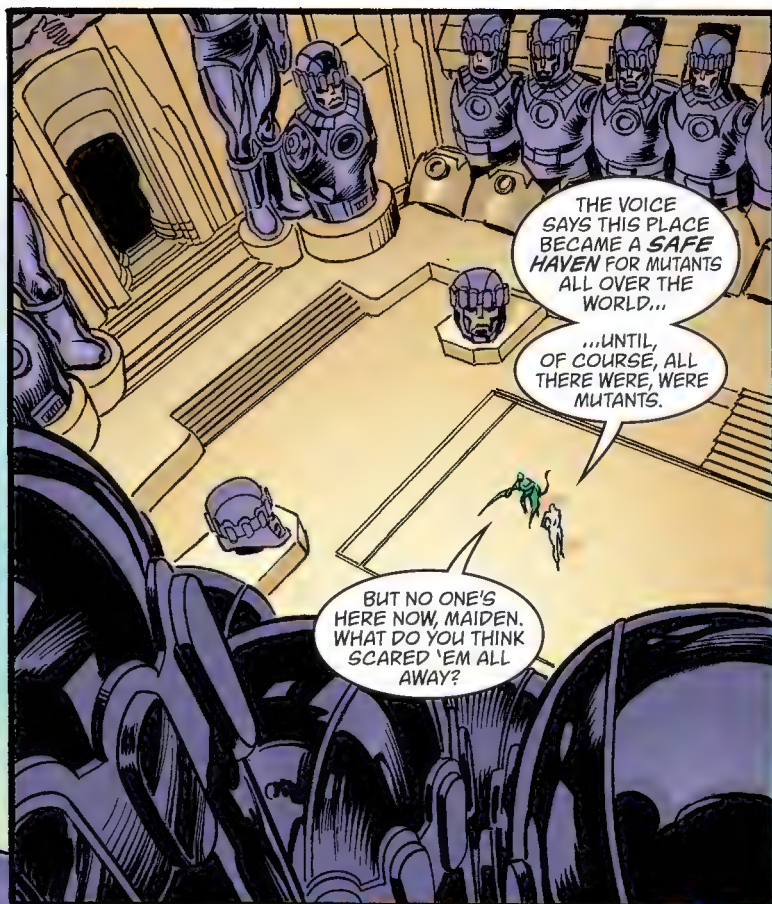
"THE SENTINELS WERE
DESIGNED WITH A
SUBSTANCE MAGNUS
COULDN'T CONTROL WITH
HIS MAGNETIC POWERS.

"BUT HERE, BECAUSE
OF WHATEVER HAPPENED,
MAGNETO COULD
CONTROL THE AIR
ITSELF.



"HE TOOK THEIR
DESTRUCTIVE
NATURE..."

"...AND DID SOMETHING
CONSTRUCTIVE TO IT."



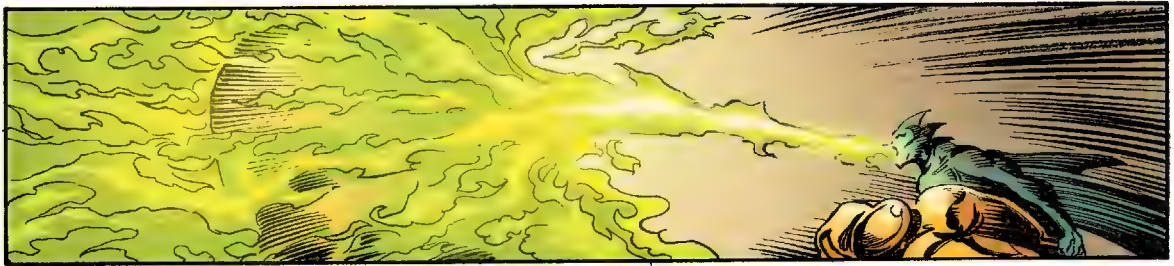
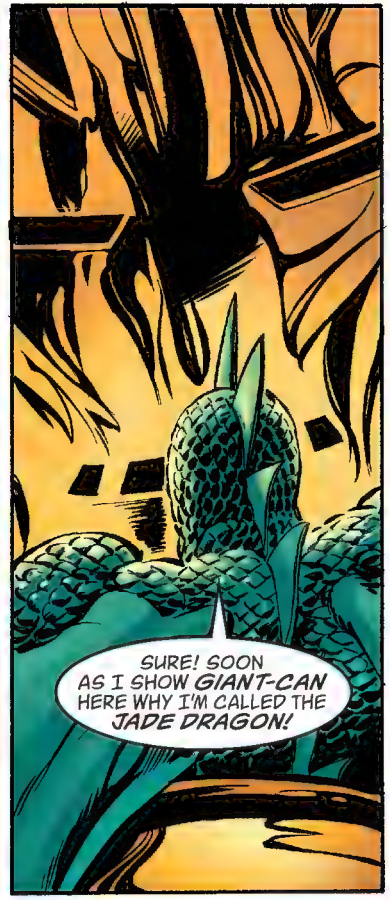
THE VOICE
SAYS THIS PLACE
BECAME A **SAFE**
HAVEN FOR MUTANTS
ALL OVER THE
WORLD...

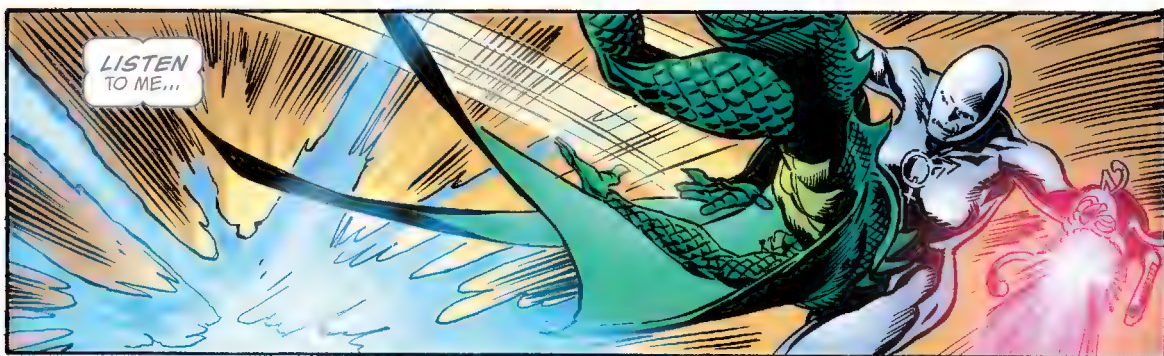
...UNTIL,
OF COURSE, ALL
THERE WERE, WERE
MUTANTS.

BUT NO ONE'S
HERE NOW, MAIDEN.
WHAT DO YOU THINK
SCARED 'EM ALL
AWAY?

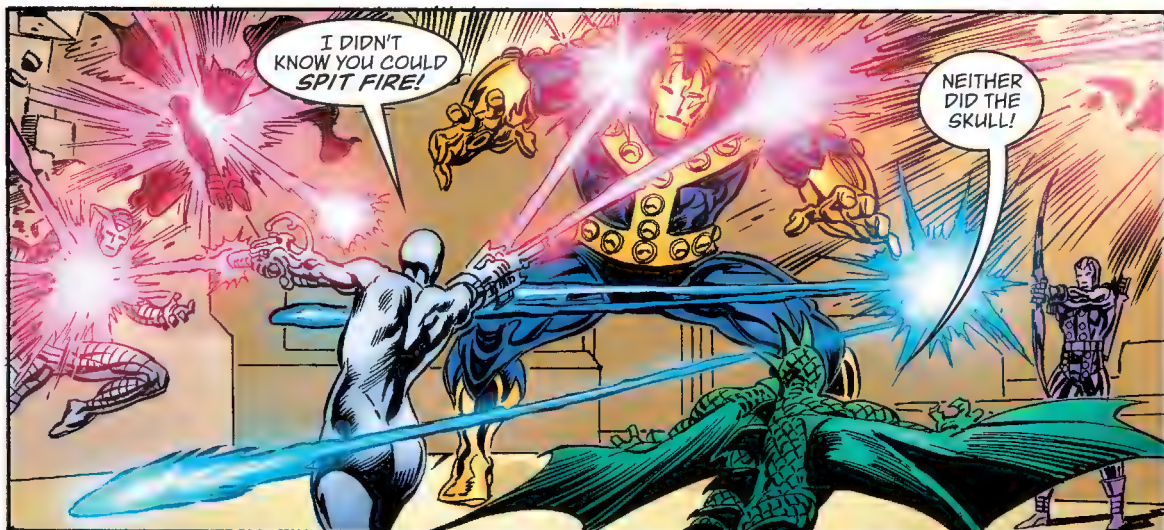


I DON'T THINK
WE SHOULD ASK ANY
MORE **QUESTIONS** WE
DON'T WANT THE
ANSWERS TO!



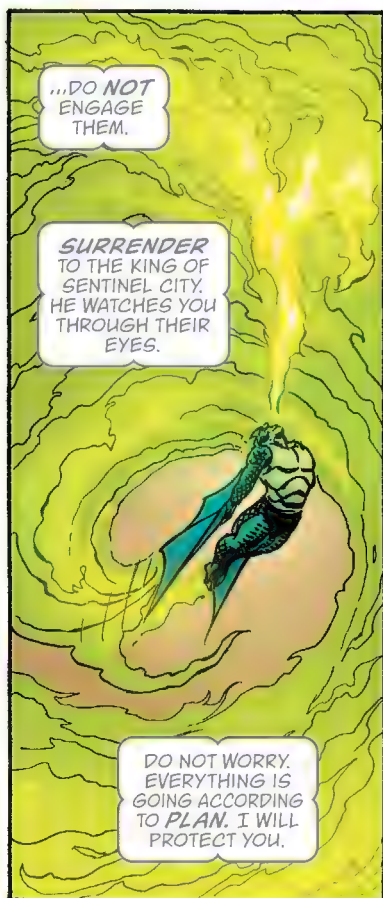


LISTEN
TO ME...



I DIDN'T
KNOW YOU COULD
SPIT FIRE!

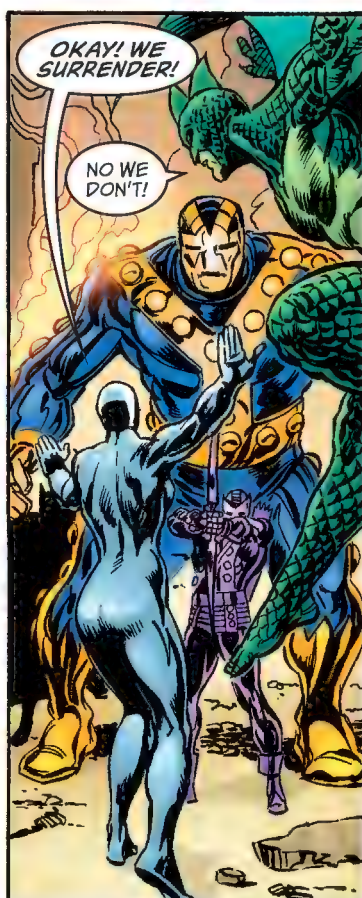
NEITHER
DID THE
SKULL!



...DO NOT
ENGAGE
THEM.

SURRENDER
TO THE KING OF
SENTINEL CITY.
HE WATCHES YOU
THROUGH THEIR
EYES.

DO NOT WORRY.
EVERYTHING IS
GOING ACCORDING
TO **PLAN**. I WILL
PROTECT YOU.



OKAY! WE
SURRENDER!

NO WE
DON'T!



YES. WE DO.





OKAY, SO
NOW THAT WE'RE
LOCKED UP, LET
ME ASK YOU A
QUESTION.

NOT NOW,
JADE. THE VOICE IS
TELLING ME--



YEAH, WELL,
I'D LEAVE YOU TWO
ALONE IF THERE WAS
ANYWHERE I COULD
GO.

SO JUST TELL
ME WHEN THERE'S A
BREAK IN THE CON-
VERSATION, 'CAUSE
I'VE GOT A FEW
QUESTIONS.

LIKE, I
THOUGHT THE
IRON AVENGERS
WERE SUPPOSED
TO BE **GOOD**
GUYS.

THAT
WAS THEIR
INTENDED
PURPOSE,
JADE.



"AFTER THE SKULL'S DEATH,
THE IRON AVENGERS WERE
REASSEMBLED BY KING
BRITAIN AND THE BLACK
KNIGHT..."

I DO NOT
BELIEVE *THIS*
IS THE WAY TO
HONOR THEIR
MEMORY, KING
BRITAIN.

IS THAT WHAT
YOU TOLD *STARK*,
VISION?

YES.
IT IS.

THEN LET US
HOPE WE FARE BET-
TER THAN *HE* DID...
OR *DIE* BETTER,
ANYWAY.



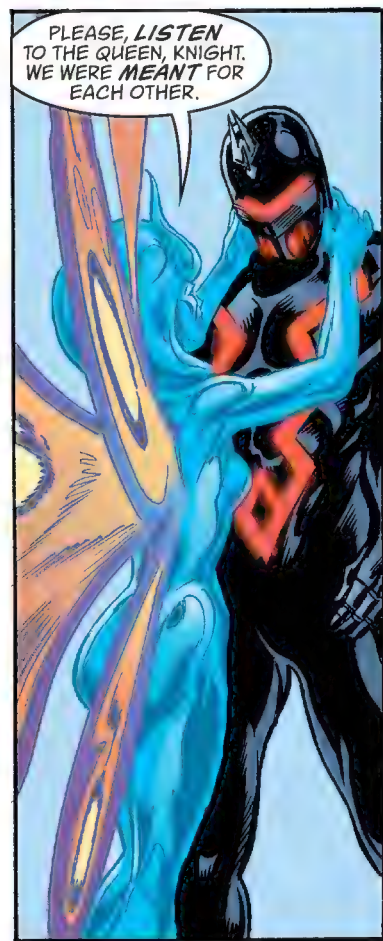
"THESE NEW **IRON AVENGERS** WERE NO LONGER LED BY THE VISION, WHO WENT ON TO ASSIST **MAR-VELL** IN HIS QUEST..."

"...BUT WERE INSTEAD LED BY THE **BLACK KNIGHT**--MUCH TO THE DISAPPOINTMENT OF **MEDUSA**, THE QUEEN OF THE INHUMANS."



YOUR FATHER IS **DEAD**, MY SON.

THE INHUMAN NATION REQUIRES AN **HEIR**. LUNA MUST BE YOUR QUEEN. IT HAS BEEN **DECIDED**.



PLEASE, **LISTEN** TO THE QUEEN, KNIGHT. WE WERE **MEANT** FOR EACH OTHER.



I KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO **WANT** TO BELIEVE IN THE OLD INHUMAN WAYS, LUNA. YOU **WANT** TO BE QUEEN. YOU **WANT** TO HELP RULE OUR NATION.

I CHOOSE TO **SERVE**.

YOU MAKE ME SOUND SO **TRITE**.



WHY DID YOU SEEK ME OUT, QUEEN **MEDUSA**? **WHY?**

WHY DID YOU BRING ME **BACK** TO EARTH?!



THE INHUMAN
ROYAL COUNCIL IS
GONE, MOTHER.

BUT OUR
WAYS ARE NOT,
SON. LISTEN
TO ME.



ALL OF
THIS CAN PASS
AWAY, AS WELL. WE
MUST **HOLD ON** TO
THE OLD WAYS.

IS THIS MY
MOTHER WHO
SPEAKS TO ME
NOW?

SHE WHO
FLED FROM THE
COUNCIL WHEN
THEY CHOSE TO
TAKE ME AWAY
FROM HER?

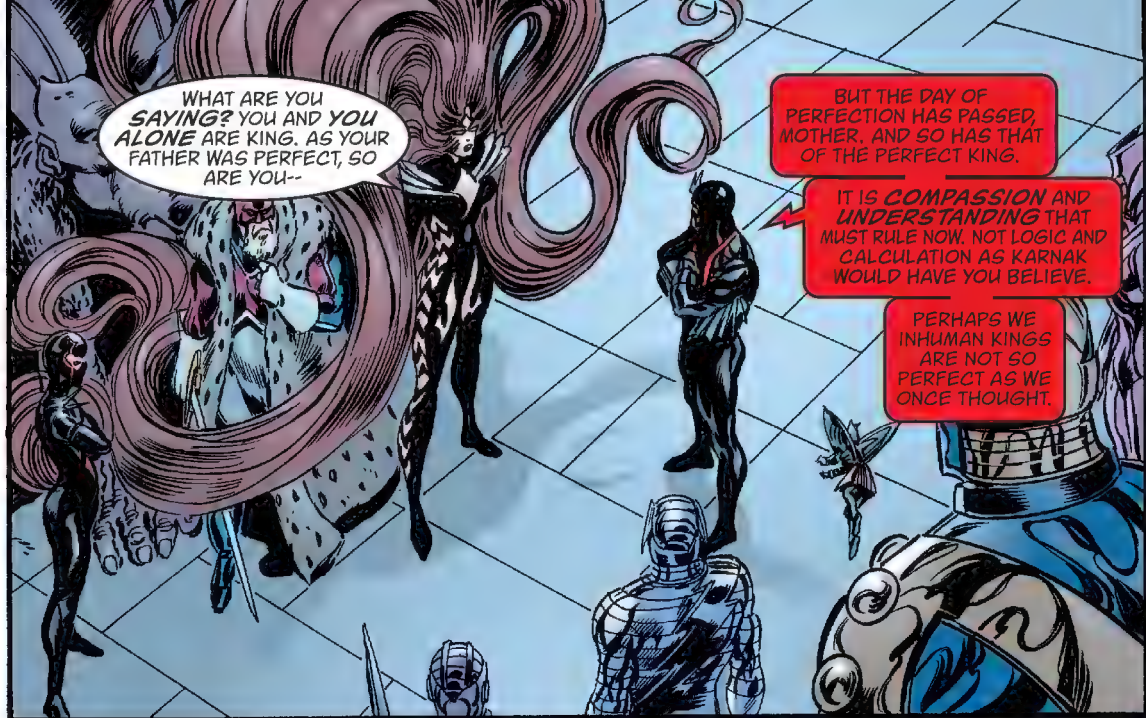
A FORMER
MEMBER OF THE
**FRIGHTFUL
FOUR**?

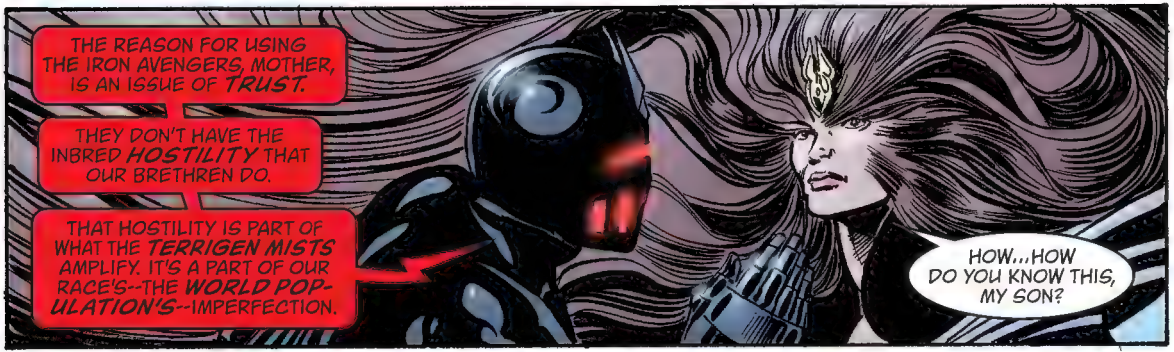
THE
RUNAWAY
OF HER
RACE?



PERHAPS THE
NEW INHUMAN
LEADER WON'T
COME FROM MY
SEED, BUT
YOURS.

OR HAVEN'T
YOU NOTICED
THAT THERE IS
A **KING** HERE
WHO HAS **LOST**
HIS **QUEEN.**





THE REASON FOR USING THE IRON AVENGERS, MOTHER, IS AN ISSUE OF **TRUST**.

THEY DON'T HAVE THE INBRED **HOSTILITY** THAT OUR BRETHREN DO.

THAT HOSTILITY IS PART OF WHAT THE **TERRIGEN MISTS** AMPLIFY. IT'S A PART OF OUR RACE'S--THE **WORLD POPULATION'S**--IMPERFECTION.

HOW...HOW DO YOU KNOW THIS, MY SON?



FATHER TOLD ME.

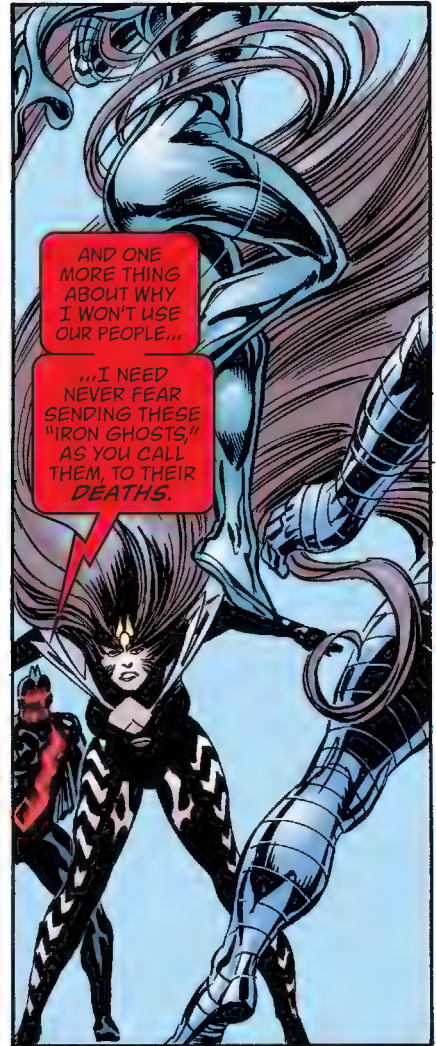
BUT YOUR FATHER COULDN'T **SPEAK**...NOT WITHOUT **DESTROYING EVERYTHING** IN HIS PATH.



LET THEM GO, MEDUSA! OR I'LL **CUT THEM FREE**.

I HEARD HIM ANYWAY.

THAT WON'T BE **NECESSARY**, YOUR HIGHNESS. **WILL IT, MOTHER?**



AND ONE MORE THING ABOUT WHY I WON'T USE OUR PEOPLE...

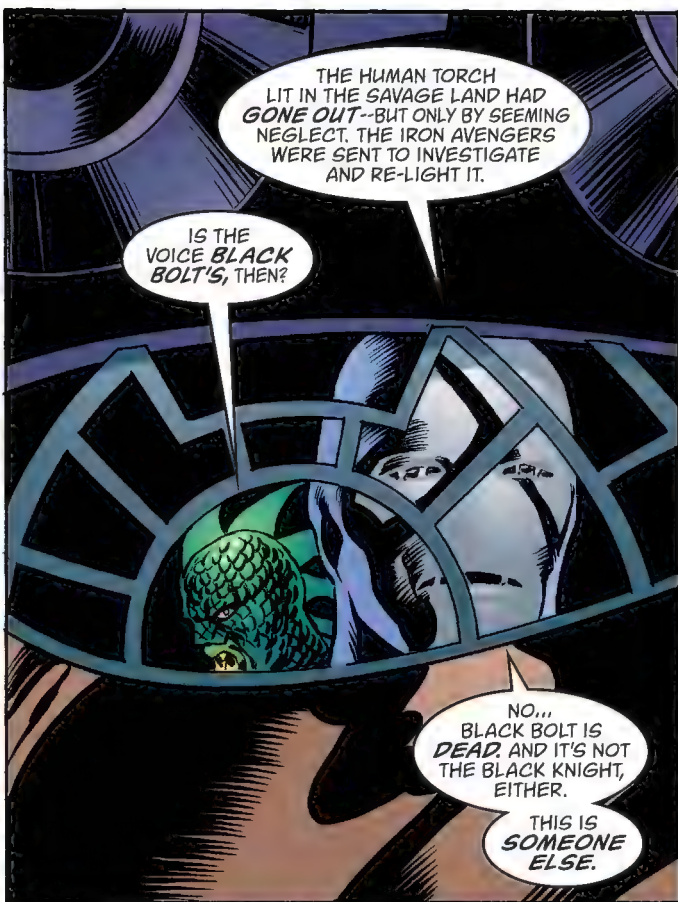
...I NEED NEVER FEAR SENDING THESE "IRON GHOSTS," AS YOU CALL THEM, TO THEIR **DEATHS**.



BLACK KNIGHT'S *FIRST* PLAN WAS TO HELP REED RICHARDS KEEP THE HUMAN TORCHES BURNING AROUND THE WORLD.

THE HUMAN TORCHES...?

THE DEVICES DESIGNED TO **BURN** THE MUTATING TERRIGEN MISTS FROM THE AIR.

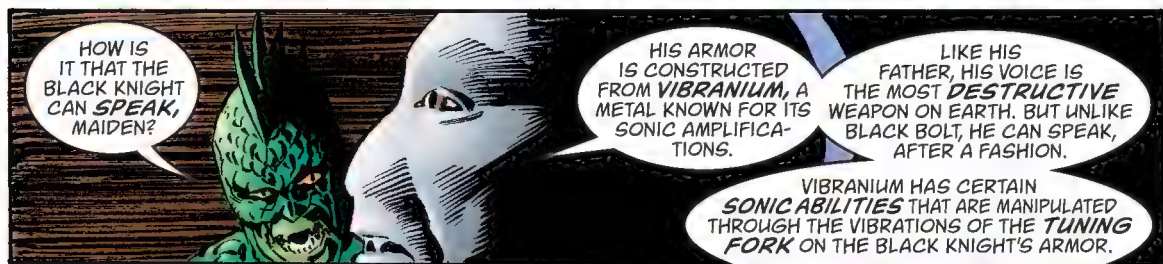


THE HUMAN TORCH LIT IN THE SAVAGE LAND HAD **GONE OUT**--BUT ONLY BY SEEMING NEGLIGENCE. THE IRON AVENGERS WERE SENT TO INVESTIGATE AND RE-LIGHT IT.

IS THE VOICE **BLACK BOLT'S**, THEN?

NO... BLACK BOLT IS **DEAD**, AND IT'S NOT THE BLACK KNIGHT, EITHER.

THIS IS **SOMEONE ELSE**.

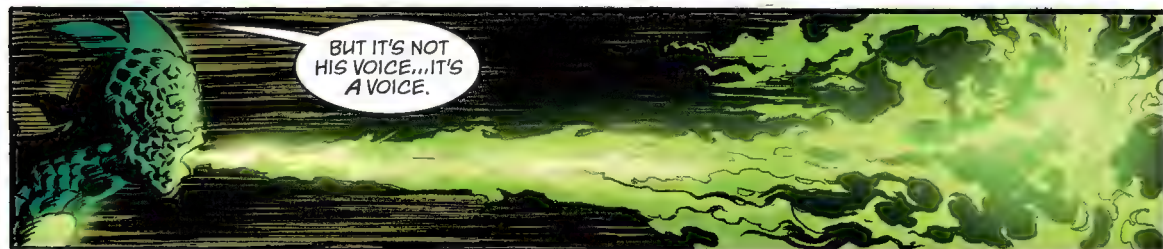


HOW IS IT THAT THE BLACK KNIGHT CAN **SPEAK**, MAIDEN?

HIS ARMOR IS CONSTRUCTED FROM **VIBRANIUM**, A METAL KNOWN FOR ITS SONIC AMPLIFICATIONS.

LIKE HIS FATHER, HIS VOICE IS THE MOST **DESTRUCTIVE** WEAPON ON EARTH. BUT UNLIKE BLACK BOLT, HE CAN SPEAK, AFTER A FASHION.

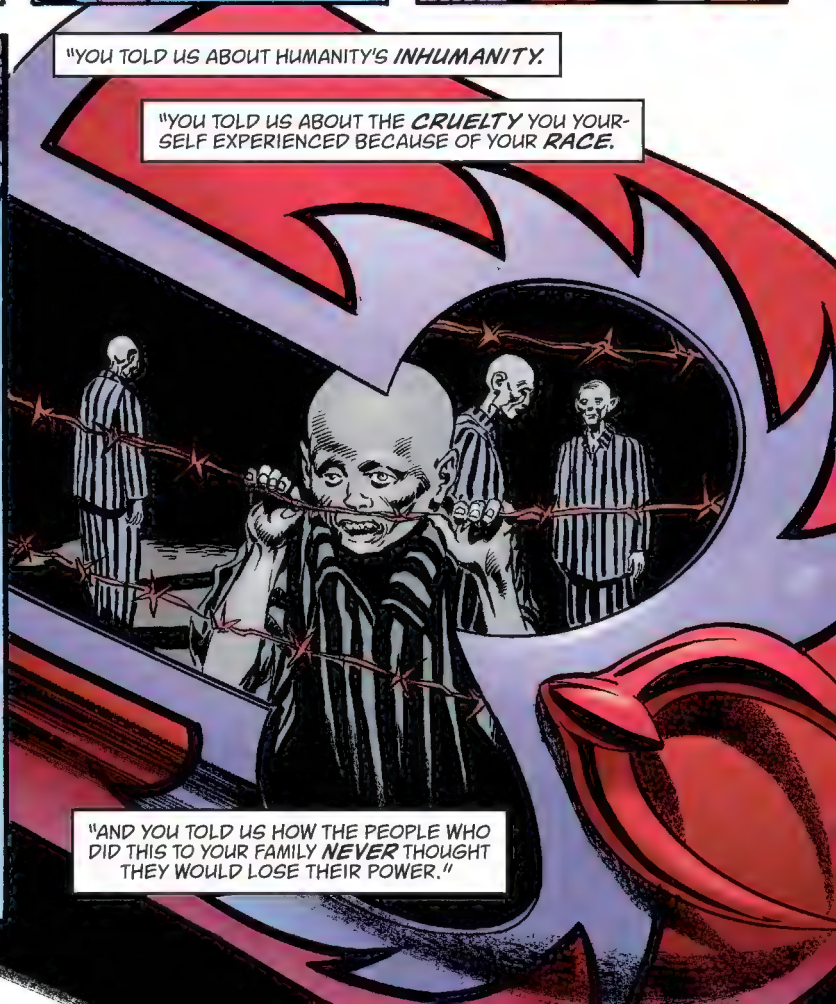
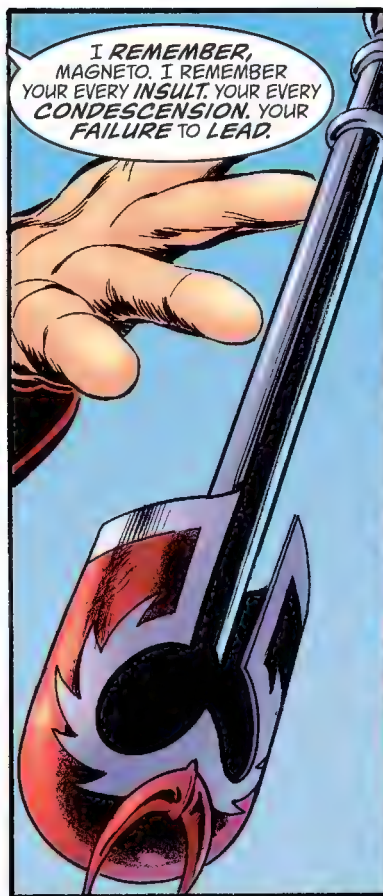
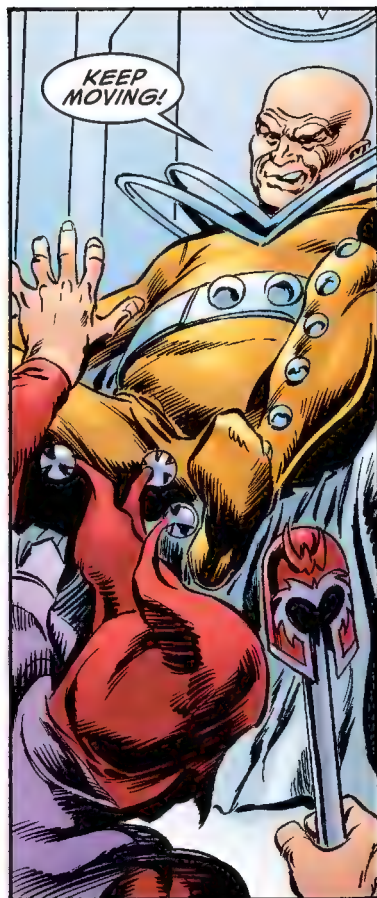
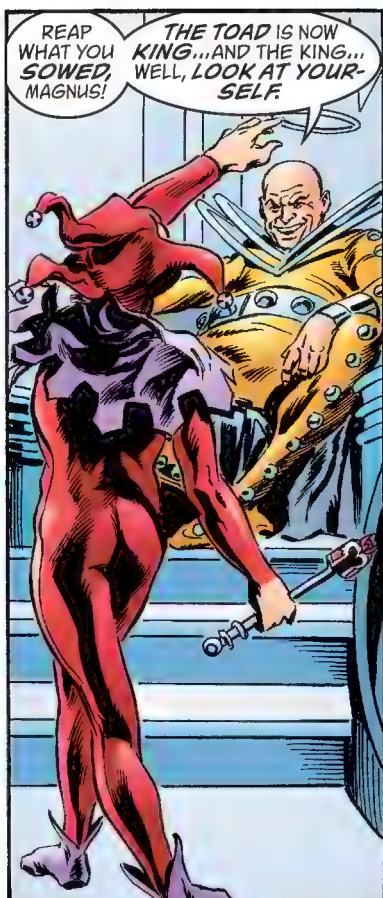
VIBRANIUM HAS CERTAIN **SONIC ABILITIES** THAT ARE MANIPULATED THROUGH THE VIBRATIONS OF THE **TUNING FORK** ON THE BLACK KNIGHT'S ARMOR.



BUT IT'S NOT HIS VOICE...IT'S A VOICE.



WELL, YOU BETTER TELL THIS **VOICE** OF YOURS THAT WE NEED A **GET-OUT-OF-JAIL-FREE CARD**!





"YOU CALLED US BROTHERS, MAGNETO, A **BROTHERHOOD** ...BUT WE NEVER WERE.

"YES, WE WERE MUTANTS... BUT WE WERE NEVER **EQUALS** AS BROTHERS MUST BE. NOT IN **YOUR EYES**.

"YOU WERE THE ONE WHO **NAMED** ME, LIKE SOME MISBEGOTTEN CREATOR'S RIGHT...YOU **SANCTIMONIOUS PIG**.

"SINCE THAT DAY, ALL I WAS TO THE WORLD WAS A **TOAD**.

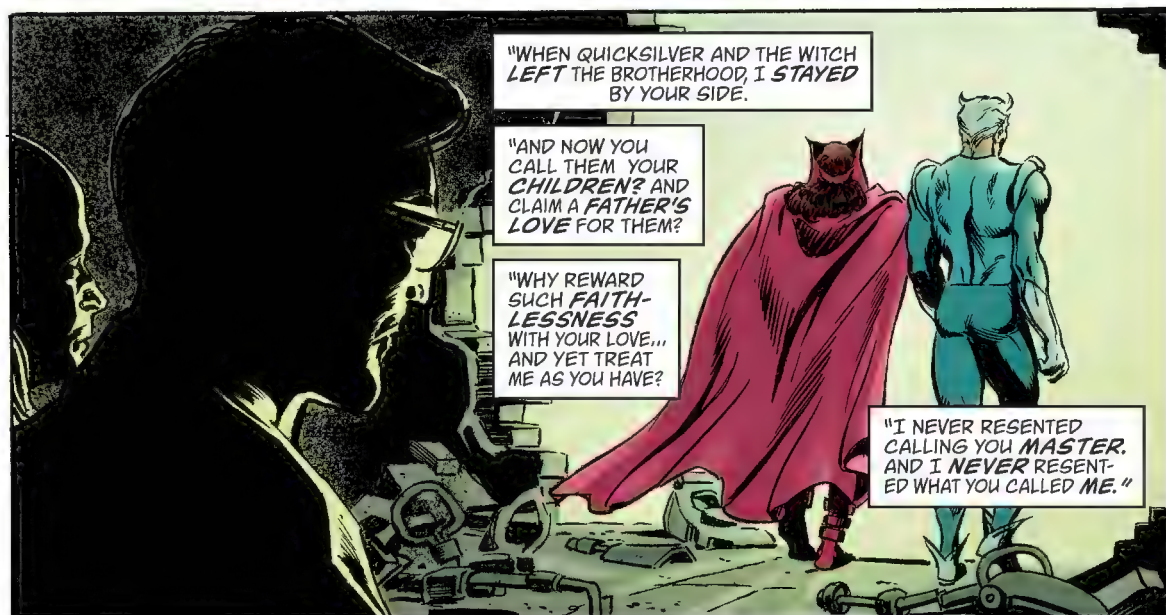


"MASTERMIND GAVE ME A **PIG'S HEAD** WITH HIS ILLUSIONS. PIETRO TOLD ME I **ATE** LIKE ONE. AND WANDA...WANDA **COULDN'T STAND** THE SIGHT OF ME.

"IS THAT HOW YOU LOOK OUT FOR A **BROTHER**, MAGNUS?

"YOU SAID IT WOULD BE **DIFFERENT**. YOU TOLD ME THIS WOULD BE A PLACE WHERE MY **APPEARANCE** WOULD BE SEPARATE FROM MY **IDENTITY**.

"YOU **LIED**.

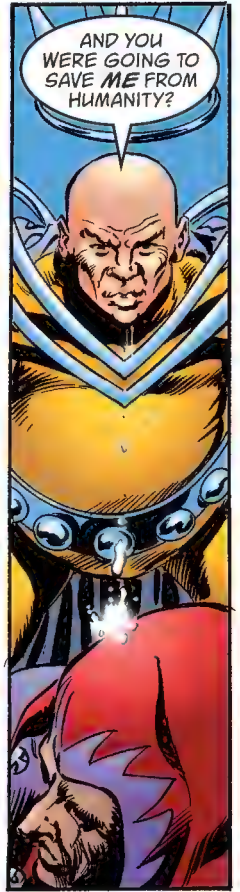
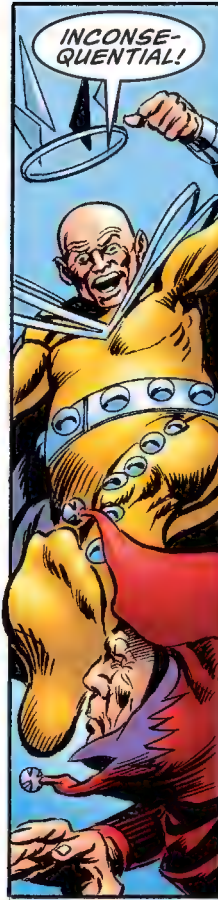
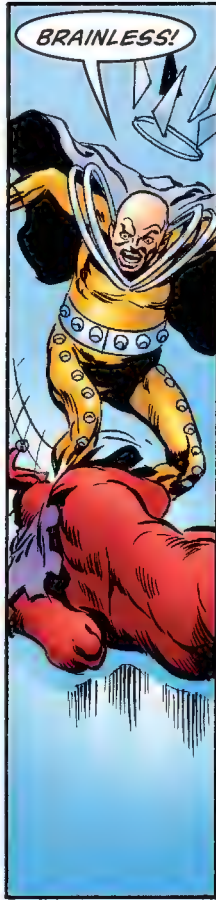
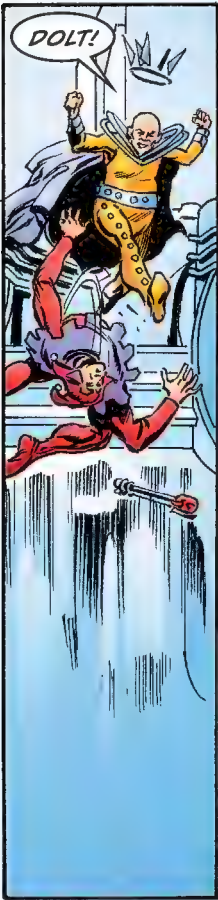


"WHEN QUICKSILVER AND THE WITCH LEFT THE BROTHERHOOD, I **STAYED** BY YOUR SIDE.

"AND NOW YOU CALL THEM YOUR **CHILDREN**? AND CLAIM A **FATHER'S LOVE** FOR THEM?

"WHY REWARD SUCH **FAITHLESSNESS** WITH YOUR LOVE... AND YET TREAT ME AS YOU HAVE?

"I NEVER RESENTED CALLING YOU **MASTER**. AND I **NEVER** RESENTED WHAT YOU CALLED ME."



"AND STILL, I **STAYED** WITH YOU.

"REMEMBER WHEN THAT **ALIEN** TOOK US TO ANOTHER WORLD TO BE STUDIED? YOU ESCAPED AND **LEFT ME** THERE..."

"...A MEMBER OF **YOUR BROTHERHOOD.**

"AND WHEN I RETURNED, **STILL** I FOLLOWED YOU. STILL I **ENDURED**. FOR YEAR AFTER YEAR, UNTIL EVEN THE **X-MEN** NO LONGER EXISTED.

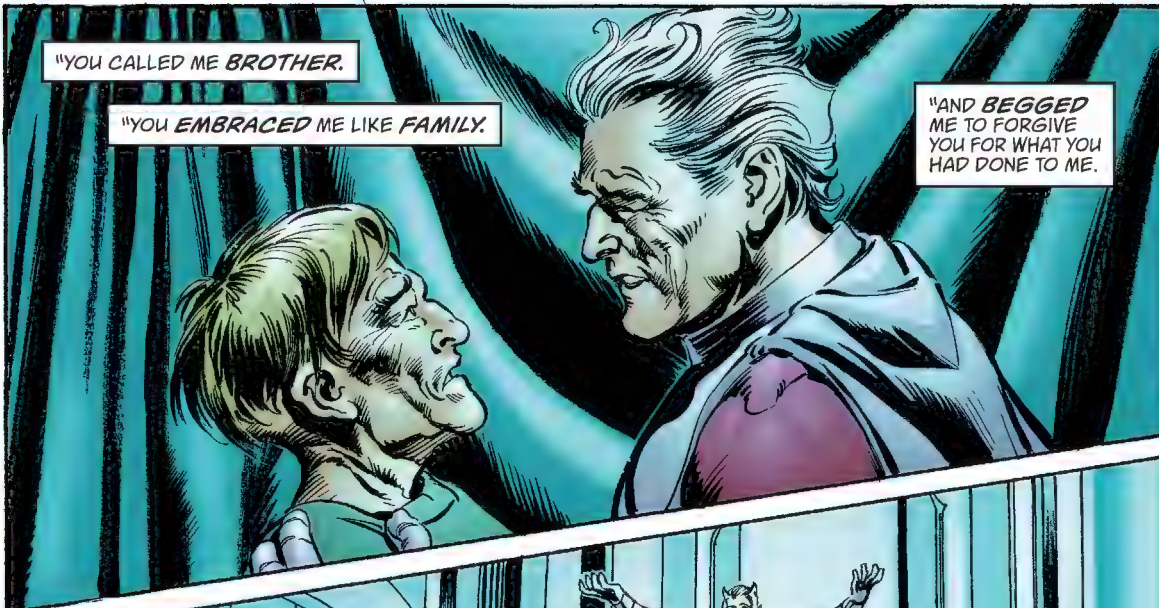
"WHEN **SENTINEL CITY** BECAME THE ONLY PLACE ON EARTH **SAFE** FOR MUTANTS, I CAME... READY TO SERVE YOU AGAIN.

"PREPARED FOR **MORE**."

"AND DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU **DID**, YOU WEAK-MINDED PRETENDER?"

"I WILL **NEVER FORGET.**"





"YOU CALLED ME **BROTHER**.

A close-up of two men. On the left, a man with short brown hair and a green tunic looks up at an older man on the right. The older man has white hair and a purple and white robe. They are in a room with blue and black vertical stripes in the background.

"YOU **EMBRACED** ME LIKE **FAMILY**.

"AND **BEGGED** ME TO FORGIVE YOU FOR WHAT YOU HAD DONE TO ME.



"YOU GAVE ME A SEAT OF HONOR.

A man in a purple and white robe sits on a throne, arms raised. A man in a green tunic sits next to him. A crowd of people is gathered in front of them. The scene is set in a large, ornate hall.

"YOU TOLD ME THE SECRETS OF YOUR CITY AND GAVE ME AN AUTHORITY I **NEVER KNEW** I COULD POSSESS.



"AND SO I HAD A CHOICE.

A close-up of the older man with white hair, looking down at a younger man with brown hair who is looking up at him with a determined expression.



"FORGIVENESS... OR REVENGE?"

A close-up of a man's face, looking down at another man who is looking up at him with a determined expression.

"THIS IS ALL YOUR **FAULT**, MAGNUS. WHY COULDN'T YOU HAVE JUST LEFT WELL ENOUGH ALONE?"



...WITH THE DEATH OF THE CELESTIAL CHILD AND THE RE-POLARIZATION OF THE WORLD, **TOAD** RECEIVED THE POWER THAT WAS OTHERWISE MEANT FOR **MAGNETO**.

ON AN EMOTIONAL LEVEL, TOAD IS STILL BEING CONTROLLED BY MAGNETO. HE'S MERELY **POLARIZED** HIS BEHAVIOR. TRADED **ONE** EXTREME FOR **ANOTHER**.



BUT WHY WOULD THEY **EXCHANGE** POWERS, MAIDEN?

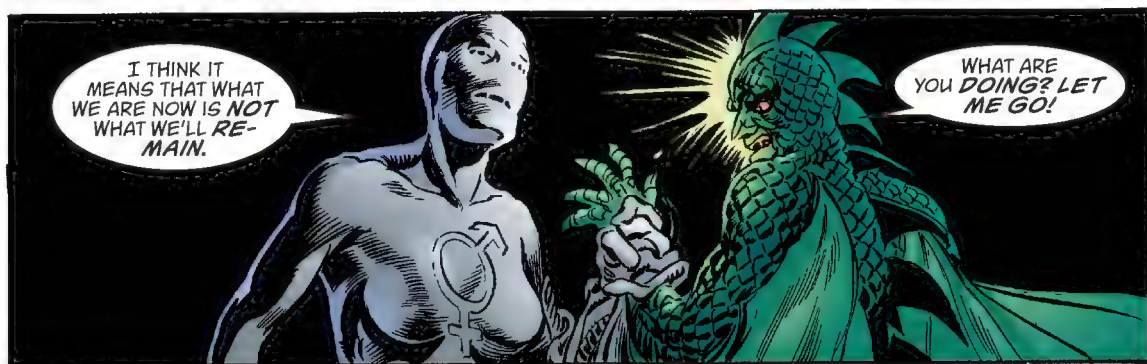


THE VOICE SAYS IT WAS THE REPOLARIZATION OF THE EARTH, PLUS THE REDISTRIBUTION AND LOSS OF **VIBRANIUM** AT THE PLANET'S CORE.

IT'S HAD SUCH AN **EFFECT** ON THOSE LIVING UPON OUR PLANET THAT THE POPULATION'S BEGINNING TO REACH THE **SECOND TIER** OF MUTATION--THE EQUALIZATION OF POWER.

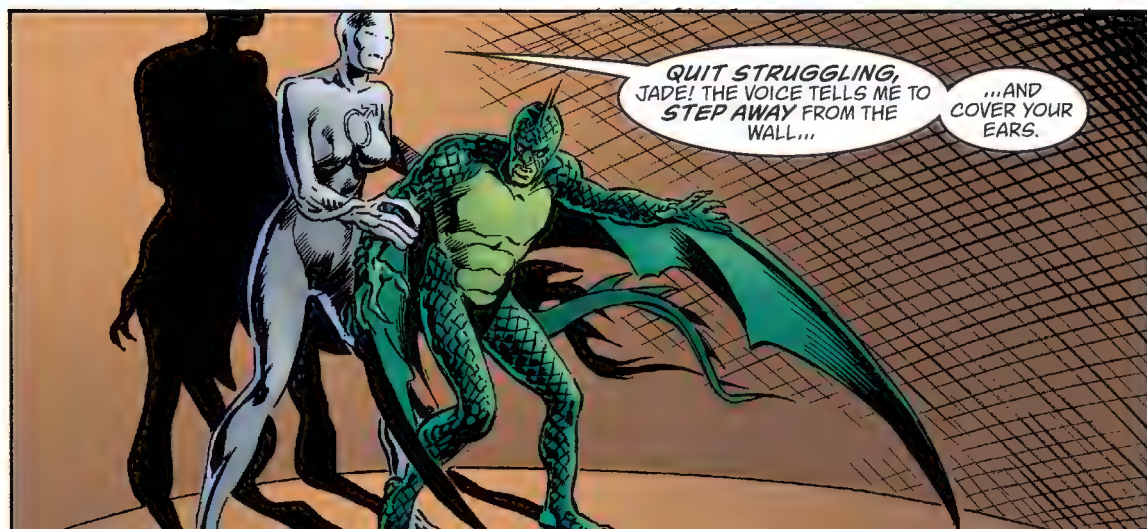


SECOND TIER? I DON'T UNDERSTAND...



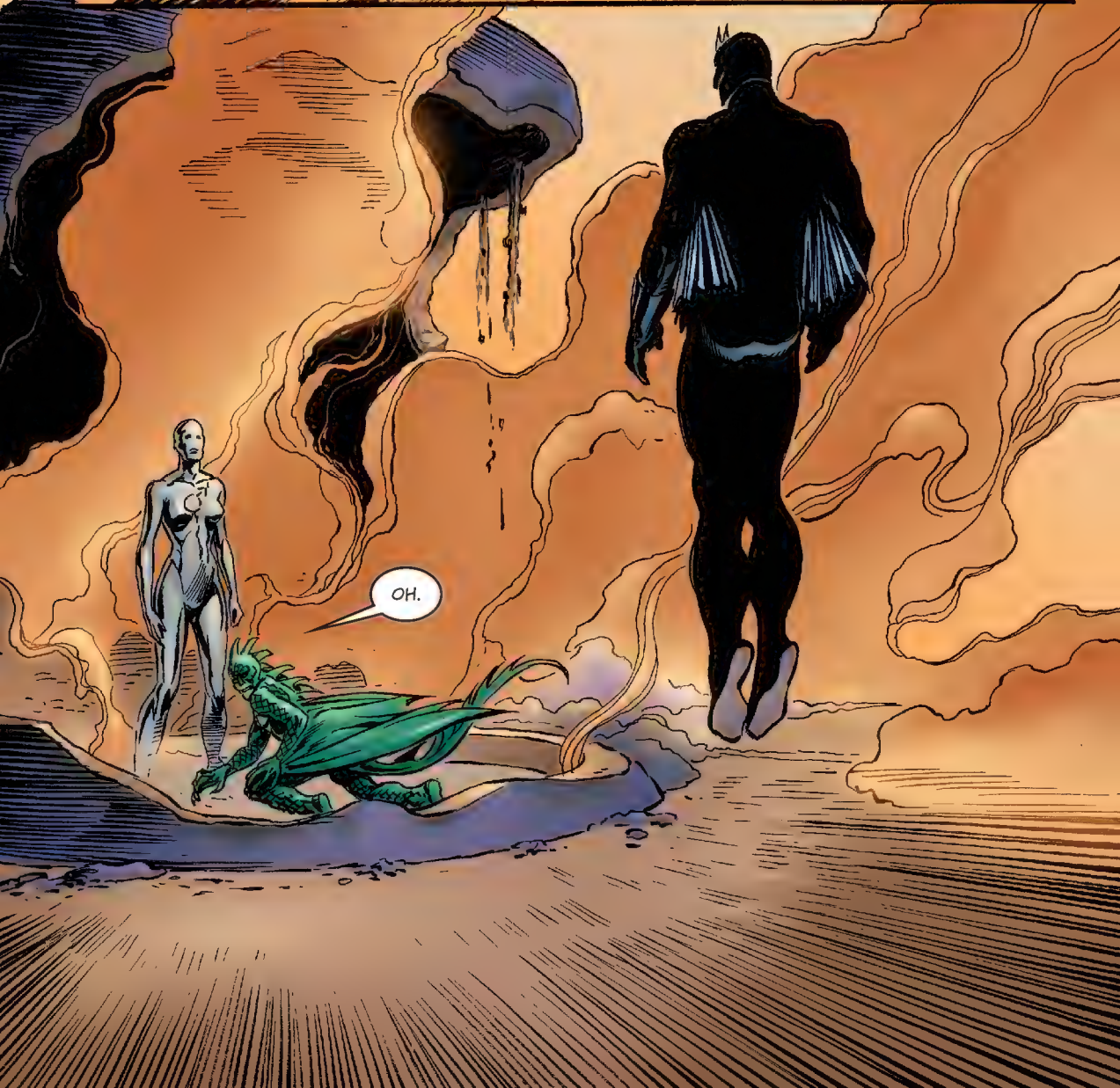
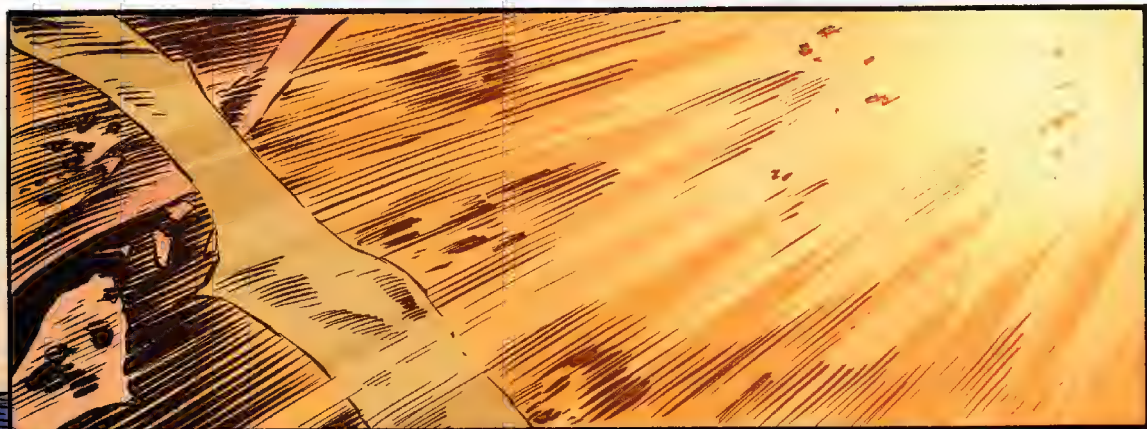
I THINK IT MEANS THAT WHAT WE ARE NOW IS **NOT** WHAT WE'LL **RE-MAIN**.

WHAT ARE YOU **DOING?** LET ME GO!



QUIT STRUGGLING, JADE! THE VOICE TELLS ME TO **STEP AWAY** FROM THE WALL...

...AND COVER YOUR EARS.





ANOTHER
FRIEND OF
YOURS, MAGNUS?
GOOD!

HIS
LOYALTY TO YOU
MUST BE **REWARD-
ED!**

LISTEN
TO ME, IRON
MAIDEN.

WHILE THE SON OF BLACK BOLT
DIVERTS THE KING OF SENTINEL
CITY, IT IS TIME FOR US TO MEET.
BUT I WILL ONLY GUIDE YOU
AND YOU ALONE.

"WHAT
ABOUT
JADE?"

YOU
SHOULDN'T
HAVE COME
HERE, BLACK
KNIGHT!

I HAVE **OTHER PLANS** FOR
THE FIRE-BREATHING. THIS IS
WHAT I WANT YOU TO TELL HIM...

WILL YOU **LEAVE**
AND BE AT **PEACE**,
TOAD? WILL YOU
FORGIVE MAGNETO
FOR HIS **SINS**
AGAINST YOU?

NO.
I AM
NOT THE
TOAD. **HE**
IS!

"WHO **ARE** YOU?"

THE LAST
TELEPATH.

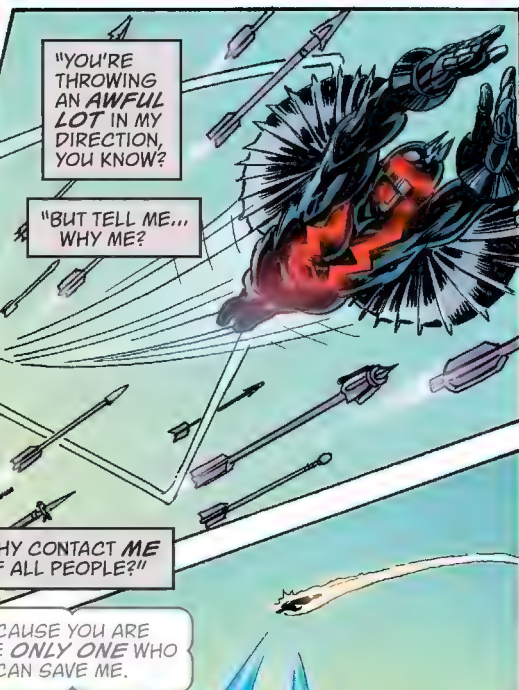
"BUT ALL THE
TELEPATHS ON
EARTH **DIED.**"

TRUE.



"THEN WHY AREN'T YOU DEAD?"

BECAUSE I AM *UNDER* THE CITY. I WAS NEVER HIT BY THE PSYCHIC WAVE THAT SLAUGHTERED THE WORLD'S TELEPATHS.

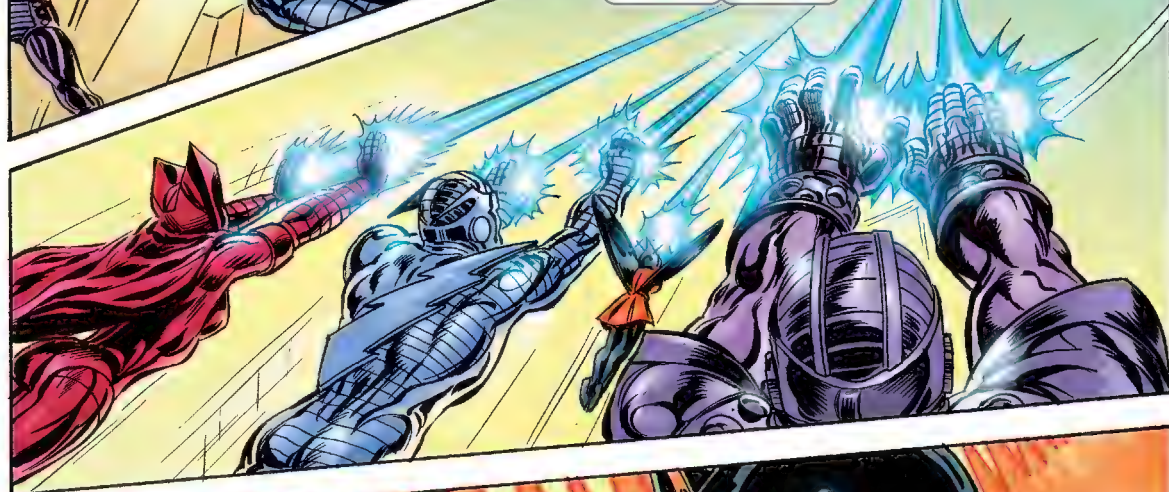


"YOU'RE THROWING AN *AWFUL* LOT IN MY DIRECTION, YOU KNOW?"

"BUT TELL ME... WHY ME?"

"WHY CONTACT *ME* OF ALL PEOPLE?"

BECAUSE YOU ARE THE *ONLY ONE* WHO CAN SAVE ME.



"ARE...ARE YOU *DYING*?"

NO. THAT WOULD BE SUCH A *BEAUTIFUL DREAM*.

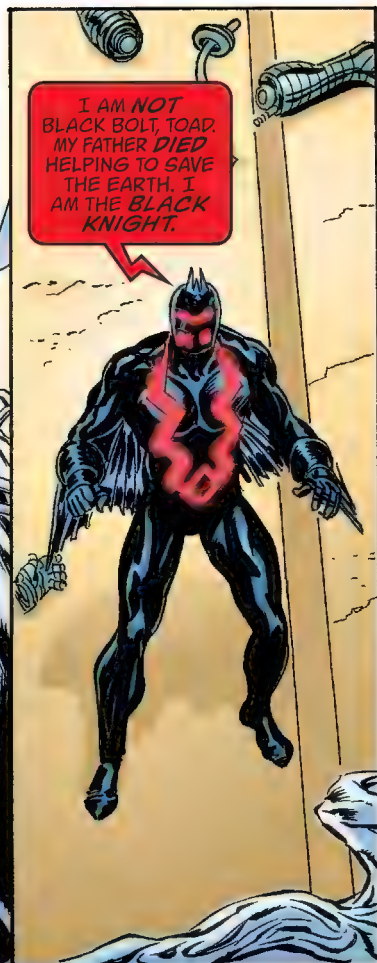
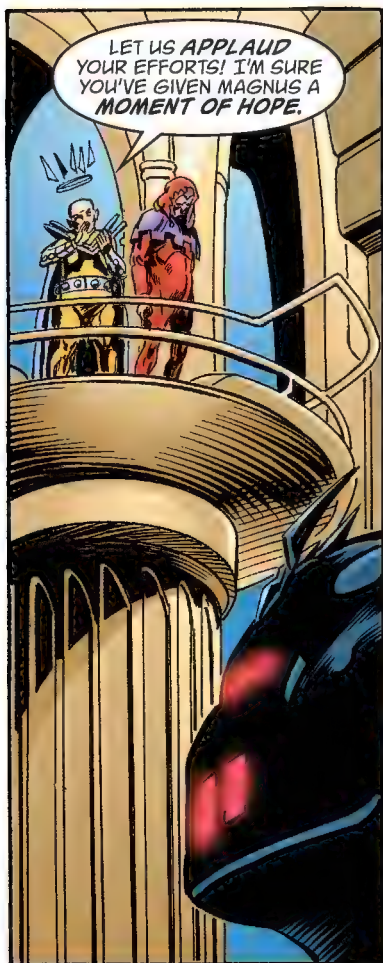
AND THIS ALL *STARTED* WITH A DREAM, DID YOU KNOW THAT?

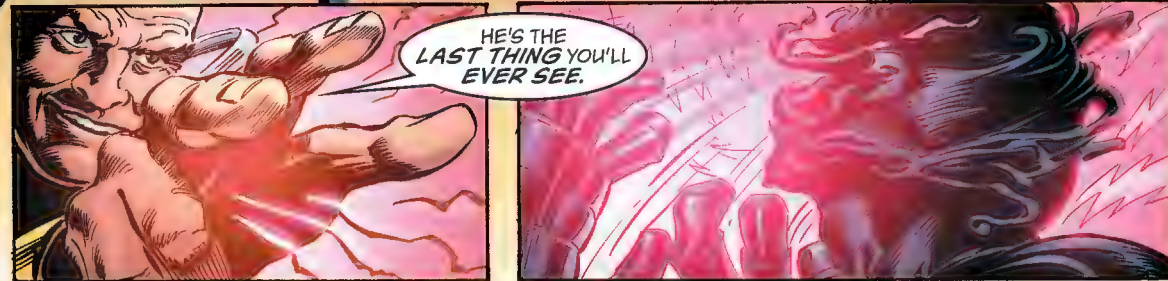
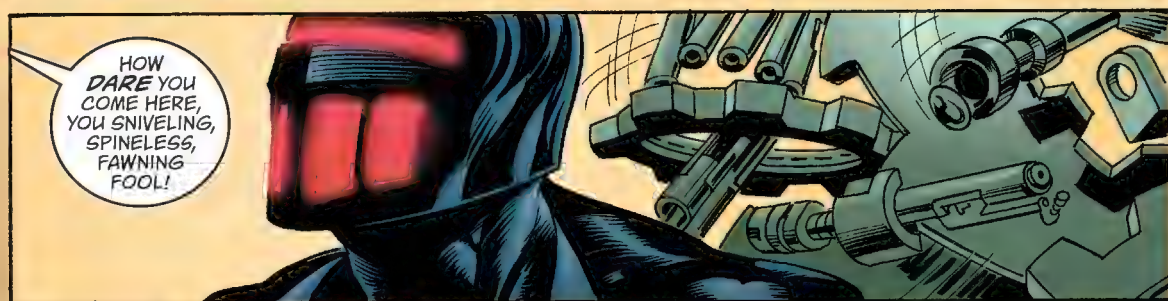
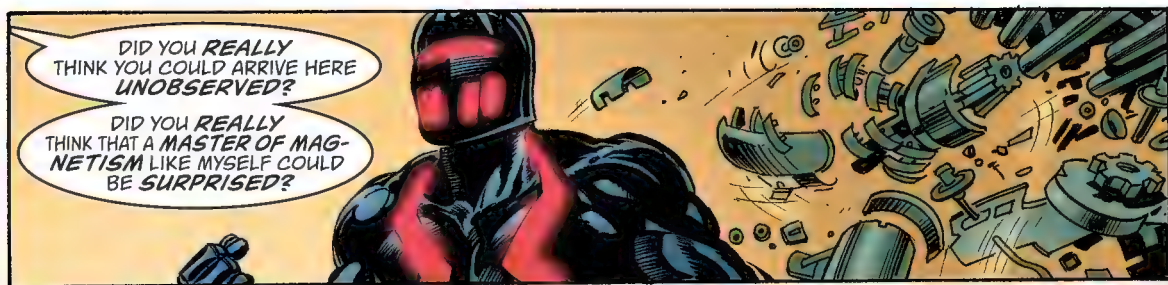


A DREAM OF
PEACE...
THAT NOW
LIES IN
PIECES.



OH, VERY
GOOD!







THE TOAD IS **FOOLED** BY HIS POWER, MAIDEN.

HE DOESN'T KNOW HOW TO USE IT AS **MAGNETO** ONCE DID.

HE LACKS **SUBTLETY.**

IMAGINATION.



CONVICTION.

JADE, WHILE TOAD'S **DISTRACTED**, GET **MAGNETO** OUT!

THAT **LITTLE TOAD** WILL **KILL ME** IF I TRY THAT!



THEN WHAT ARE YOU **DOING** HERE, JADE?

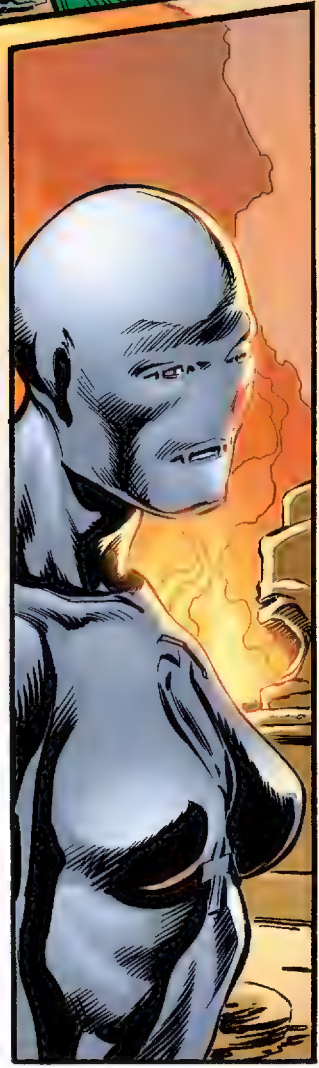
THIS IS WHY YOU LET ME JOIN YOU? TO GET **MAGNETO** OUT?

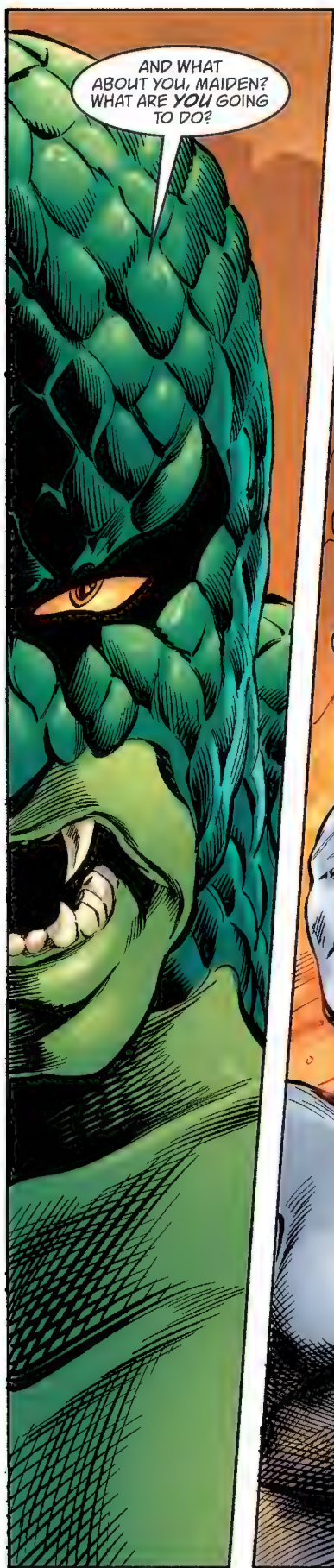
THE VOICE TOLD YOU TO LET ME COME! IT TOLD YOU TO TELL ME **YOU LIKED ME**...DIDN'T IT?



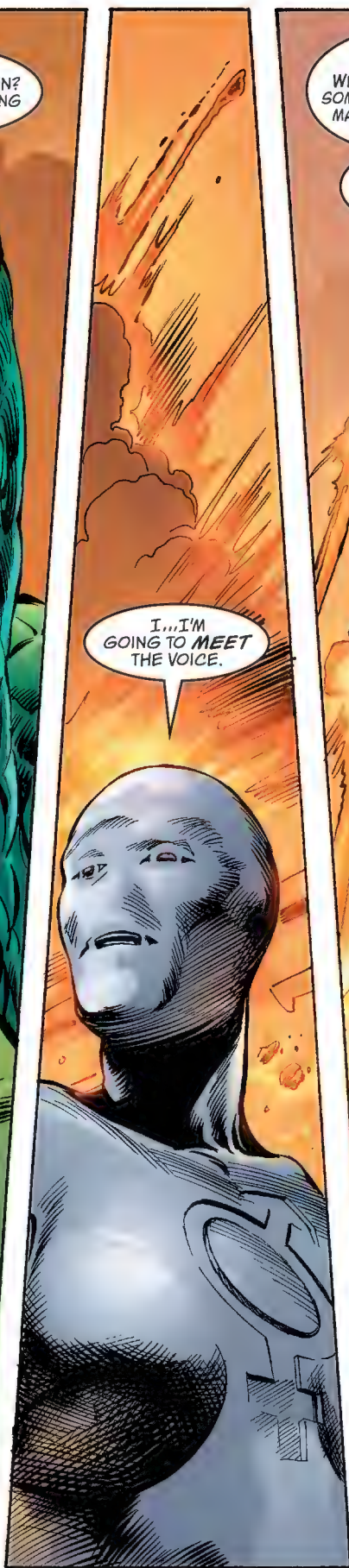
SO WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN **IMMORTUS** AND THIS VOICE, HUH? OR THAT OF THE **SKULL**?

HAS ANYTHING REALLY CHANGED?

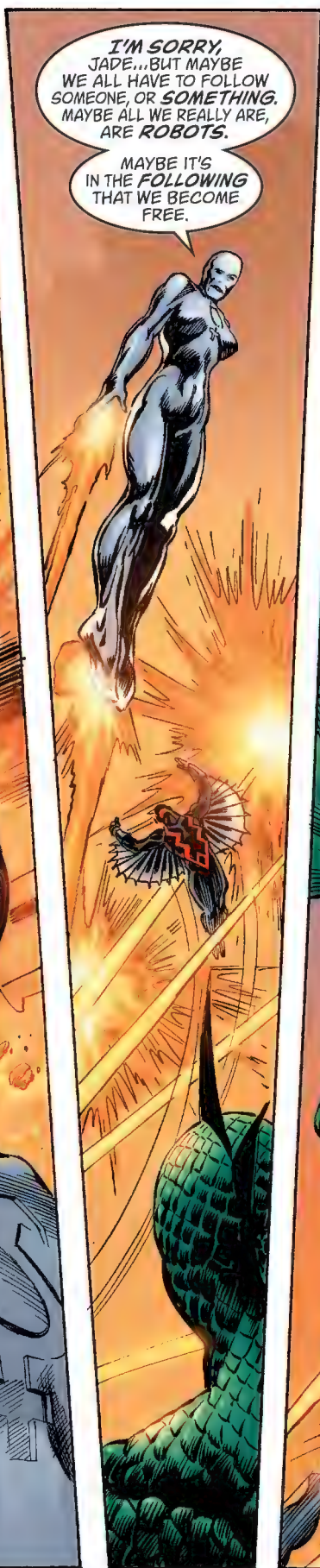




AND WHAT ABOUT YOU, MAIDEN? WHAT ARE *YOU* GOING TO DO?

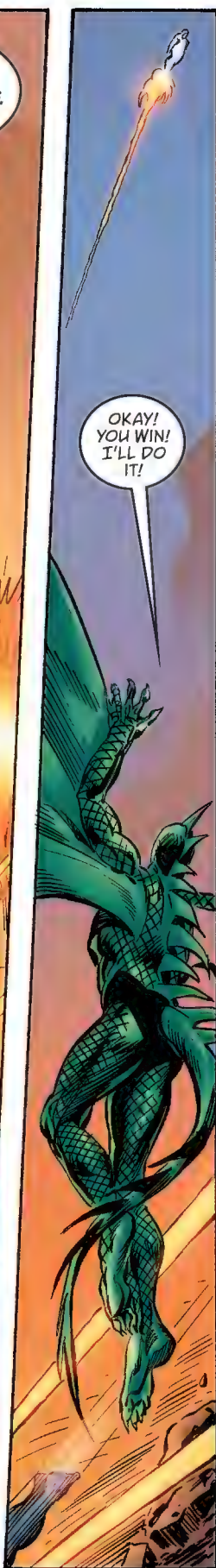


I...I'M GOING TO *MEET* THE VOICE.



I'M SORRY, JADE...BUT MAYBE WE ALL HAVE TO FOLLOW SOMEONE, OR *SOMETHING*. MAYBE ALL WE REALLY ARE, ARE *ROBOTS*.

MAYBE IT'S IN THE *FOLLOWING* THAT WE BECOME FREE.



OKAY! YOU WIN! I'LL DO IT!





THIS ENEMY
IS THE SON OF A KING!
ONLY **ANOTHER KING**
SHOULD TAKE HIS
LIFE!



AND SO I
SHALL!

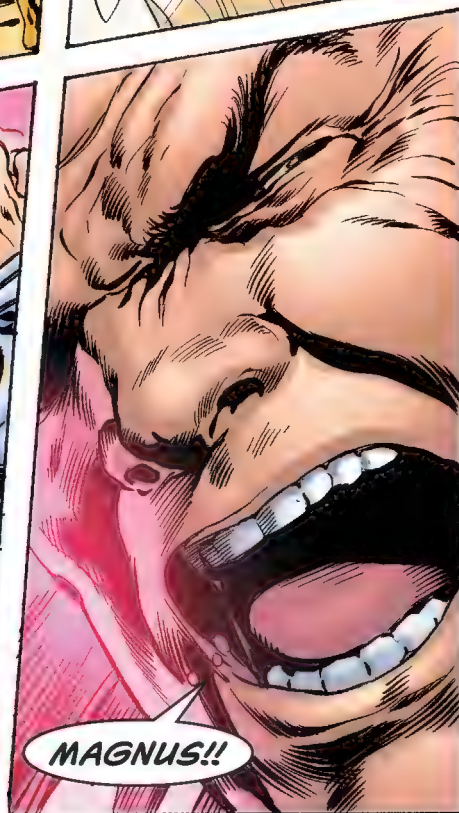


DON'T WORRY,
MAGNETO! ACCORDING
TO IRON MAIDEN, YOU'VE
GOT SOME FRIENDS IN
LOW PLACES!

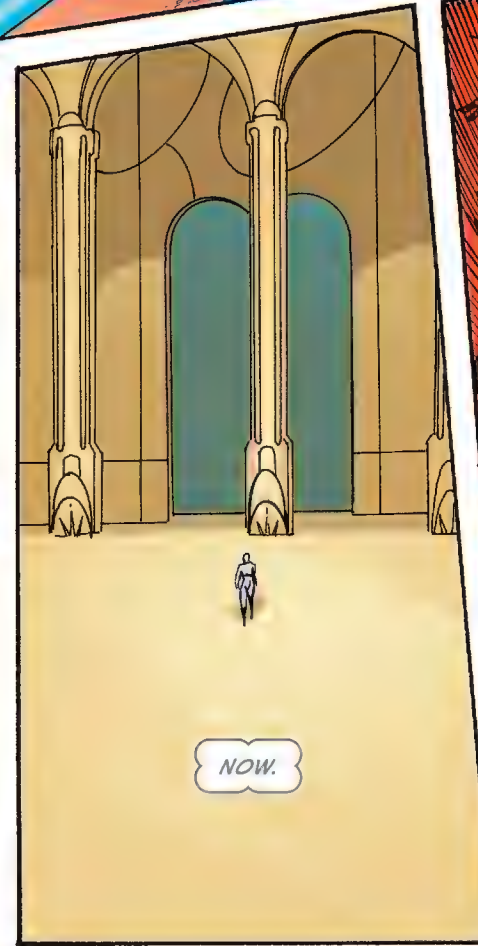
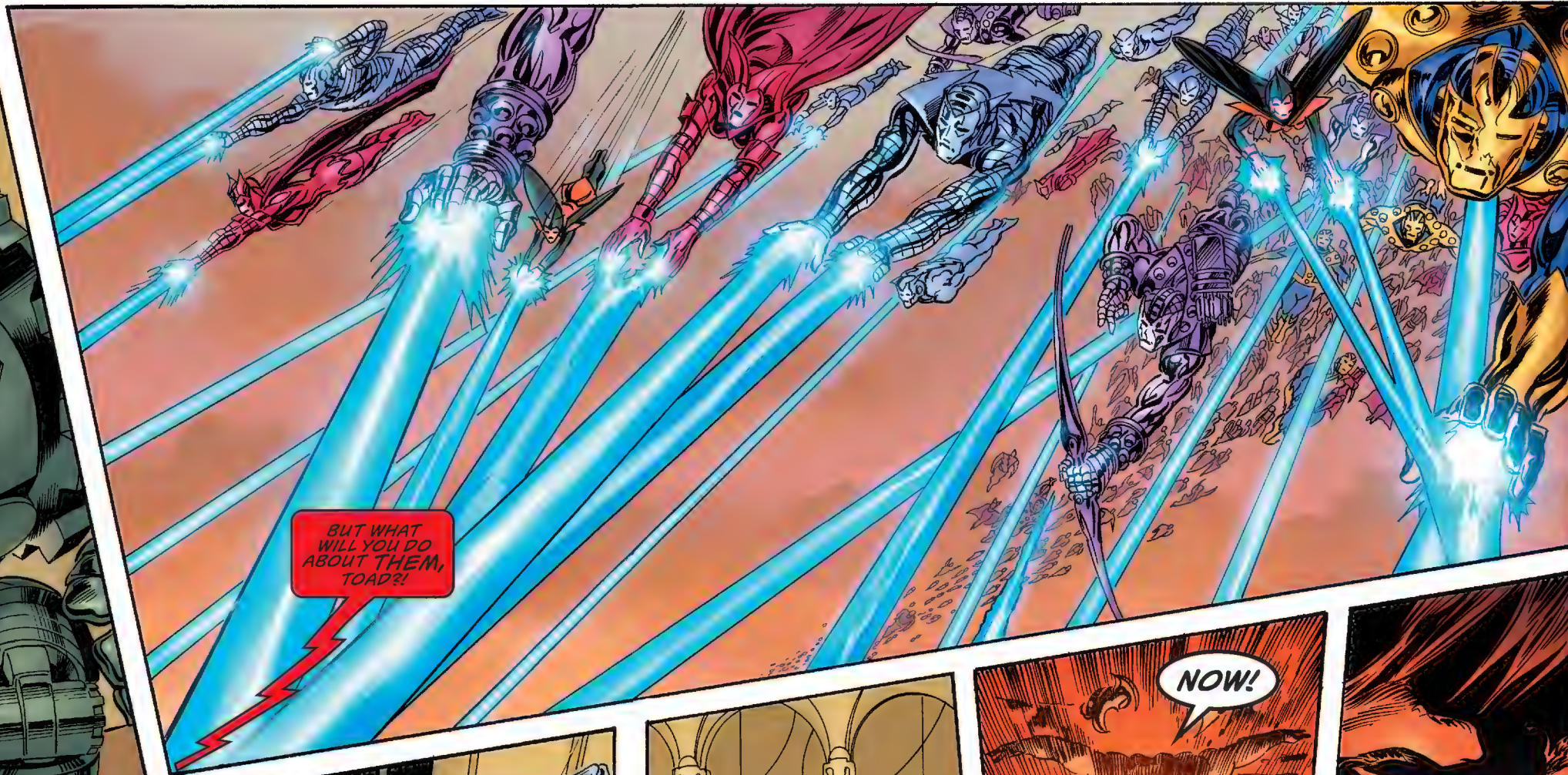


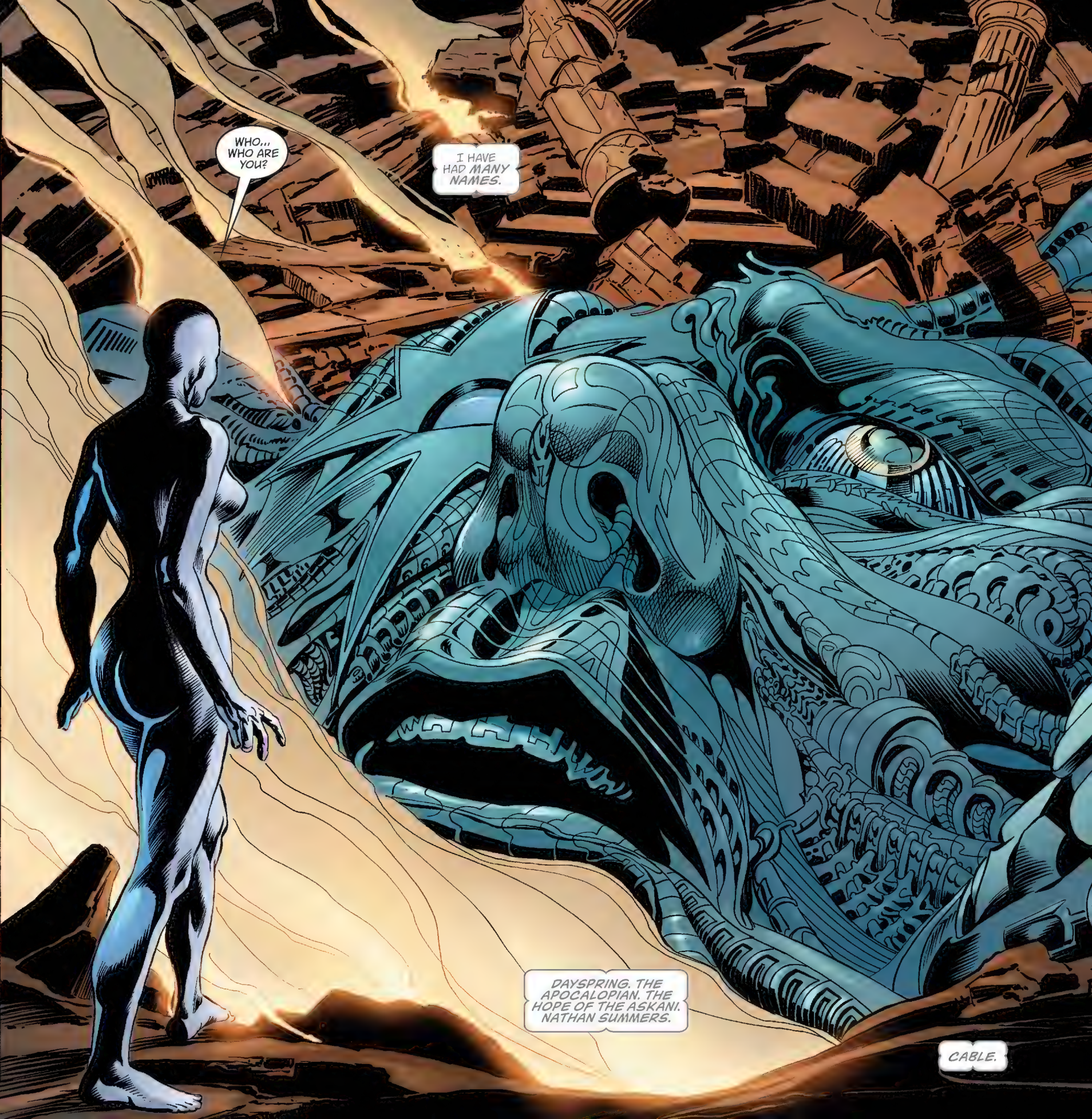
YOU SEE,
MAGNUS? **THIS** IS
HOW YOU TREAT AN
ENEMY.

MAGNUS--?



MAGNUS!!



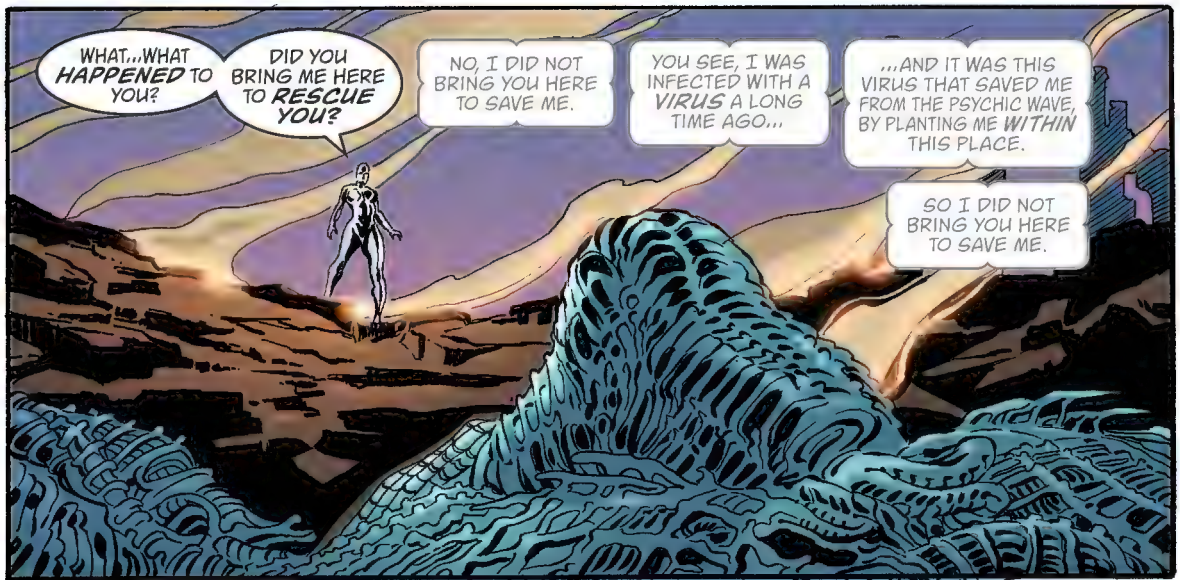


WHO...
WHO ARE
YOU?

I HAVE
HAD MANY
NAMES.

DAYSpring, THE
APOCALOPIAN, THE
HOPE OF THE ASKANI,
NATHAN SUMMERS.

CABLE.



WHAT...WHAT
HAPPENED TO
YOU?

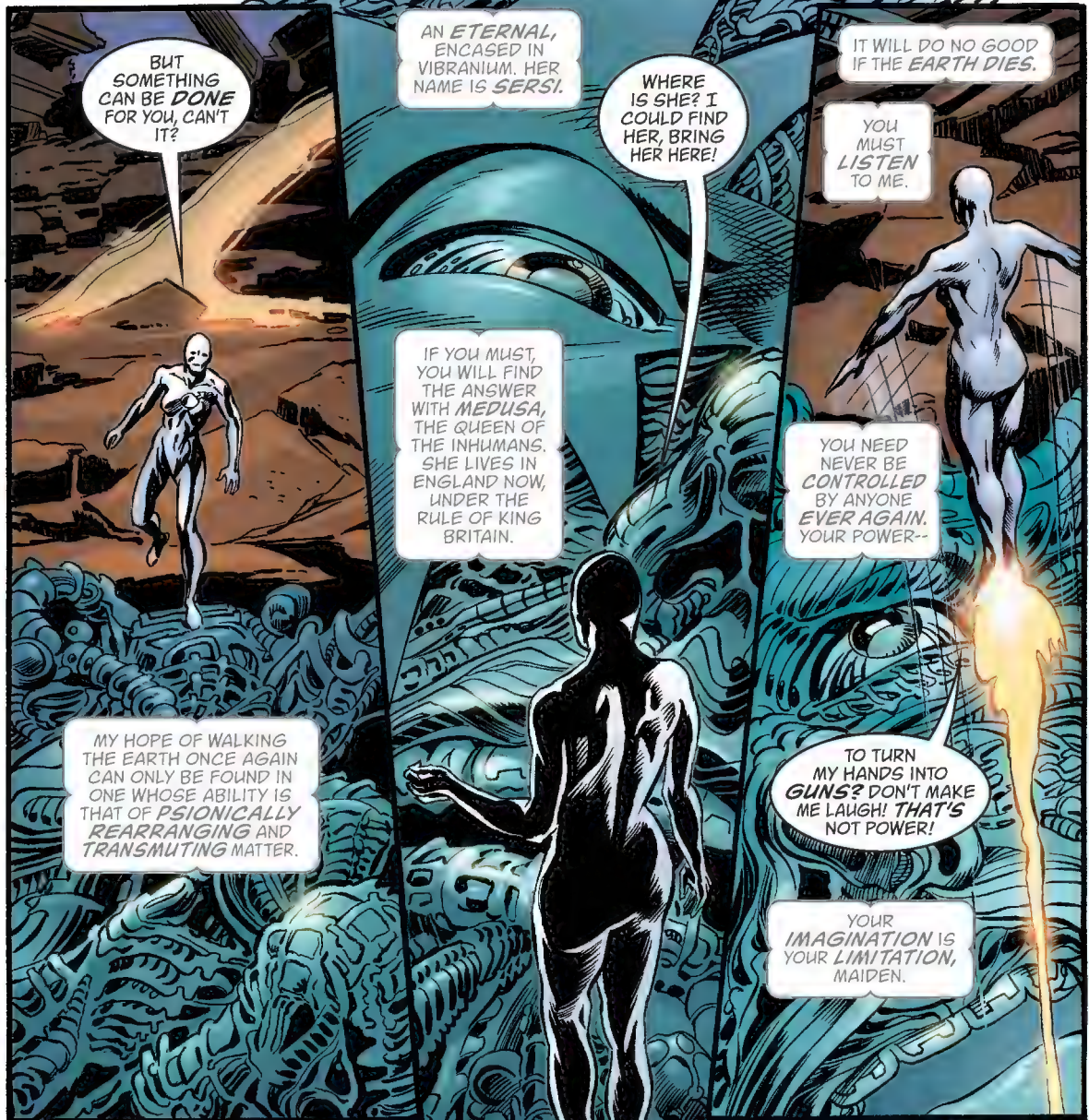
DID YOU
BRING ME HERE
TO **RESCUE**
YOU?

NO, I DID NOT
BRING YOU HERE
TO SAVE ME.

YOU SEE, I WAS
INFECTED WITH A
VIRUS A LONG
TIME AGO...

...AND IT WAS THIS
VIRUS THAT SAVED ME
FROM THE PSYCHIC WAVE,
BY PLANTING ME *WITHIN*
THIS PLACE.

SO I DID NOT
BRING YOU HERE
TO SAVE ME.



BUT
SOMETHING
CAN BE **DONE**
FOR YOU, CAN'T
IT?

AN *ETERNAL*,
ENCASED IN
VIBRANIUM. HER
NAME IS **SERSI**.

WHERE
IS SHE? I
COULD FIND
HER, BRING
HER HERE!

IT WILL DO NO GOOD
IF THE **EARTH** DIES.

YOU
MUST
LISTEN
TO ME.

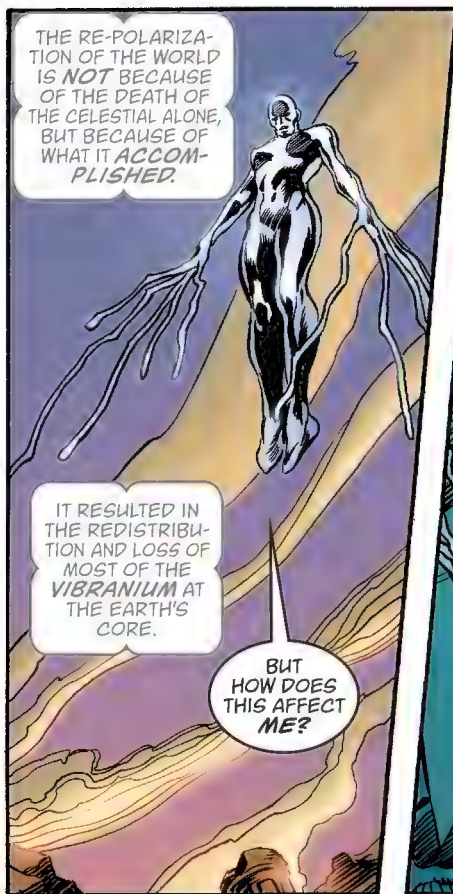
IF YOU MUST,
YOU WILL FIND
THE ANSWER
WITH **MEDUSA**,
THE QUEEN OF
THE INHUMANS.
SHE LIVES IN
ENGLAND NOW,
UNDER THE
RULE OF KING
BRITAIN.

YOU NEED
NEVER BE
CONTROLLED
BY ANYONE
EVER AGAIN.
YOUR POWER--

MY HOPE OF WALKING
THE EARTH ONCE AGAIN
CAN ONLY BE FOUND IN
ONE WHOSE ABILITY IS
THAT OF **PSIONICALLY**
REARRANGING AND
TRANSMUTING MATTER.

TO TURN
MY HANDS INTO
GUNS? DON'T MAKE
ME LAUGH! **THAT'S**
NOT POWER!

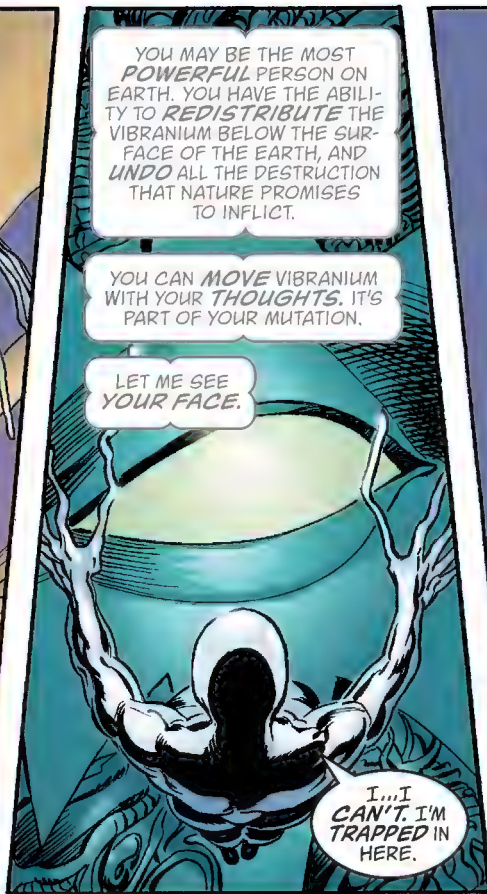
YOUR
IMAGINATION IS
YOUR **LIMITATION**,
MAIDEN.



THE RE-POLARIZATION OF THE WORLD IS **NOT** BECAUSE OF THE DEATH OF THE CELESTIAL ALONE, BUT BECAUSE OF WHAT IT **ACCOMPLISHED**.

IT RESULTED IN THE REDISTRIBUTION AND LOSS OF MOST OF THE **VIBRANIUM** AT THE EARTH'S CORE.

BUT HOW DOES THIS AFFECT ME?



YOU MAY BE THE MOST **POWERFUL** PERSON ON EARTH. YOU HAVE THE ABILITY TO **REDISTRIBUTE** THE VIBRANIUM BELOW THE SURFACE OF THE EARTH, AND **UNDO** ALL THE DESTRUCTION THAT NATURE PROMISES TO INFLICT.

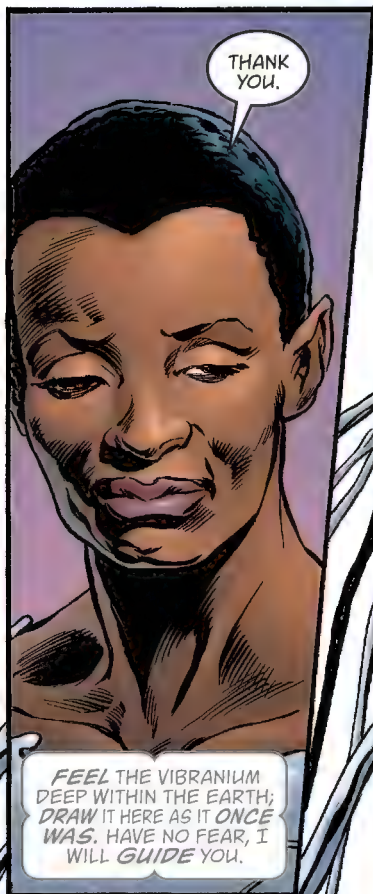
YOU CAN **MOVE** VIBRANIUM WITH YOUR **THOUGHTS**. IT'S PART OF YOUR MUTATION.

LET ME SEE YOUR FACE.

I...I CAN'T. I'M TRAPPED IN HERE.

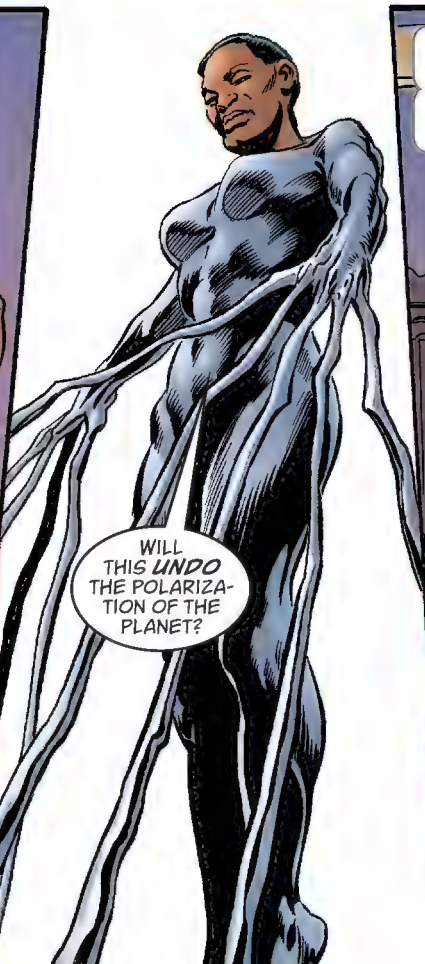


THIS IS CRAZY...

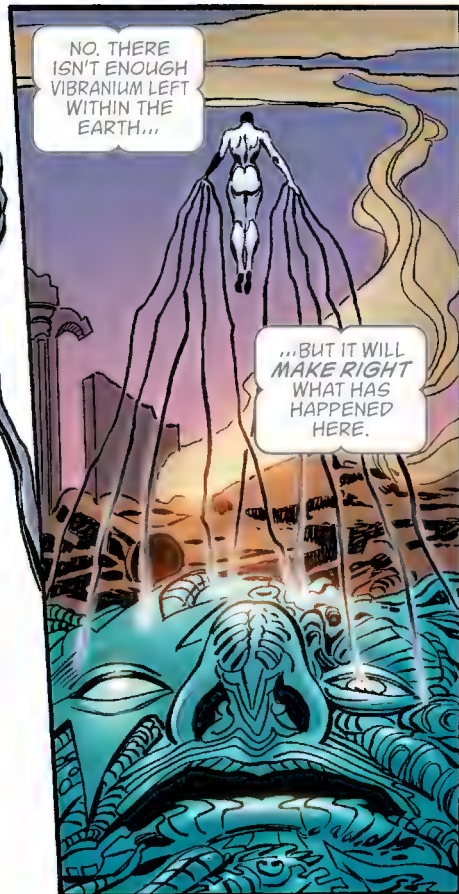


THANK YOU.

FEEL THE VIBRANIUM DEEP WITHIN THE EARTH; DRAW IT HERE AS IT **ONCE WAS**. HAVE NO FEAR, I WILL **GUIDE** YOU.

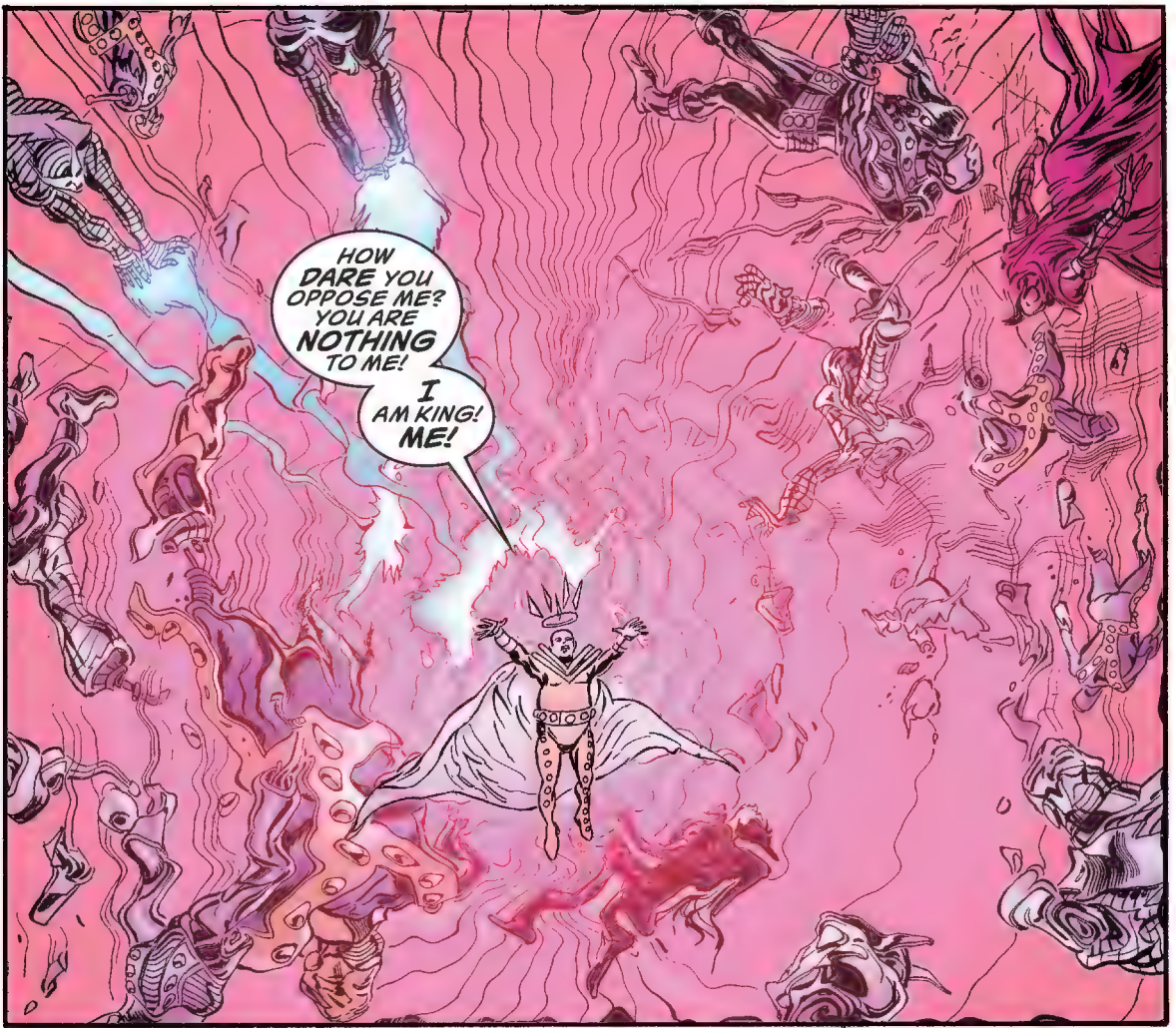


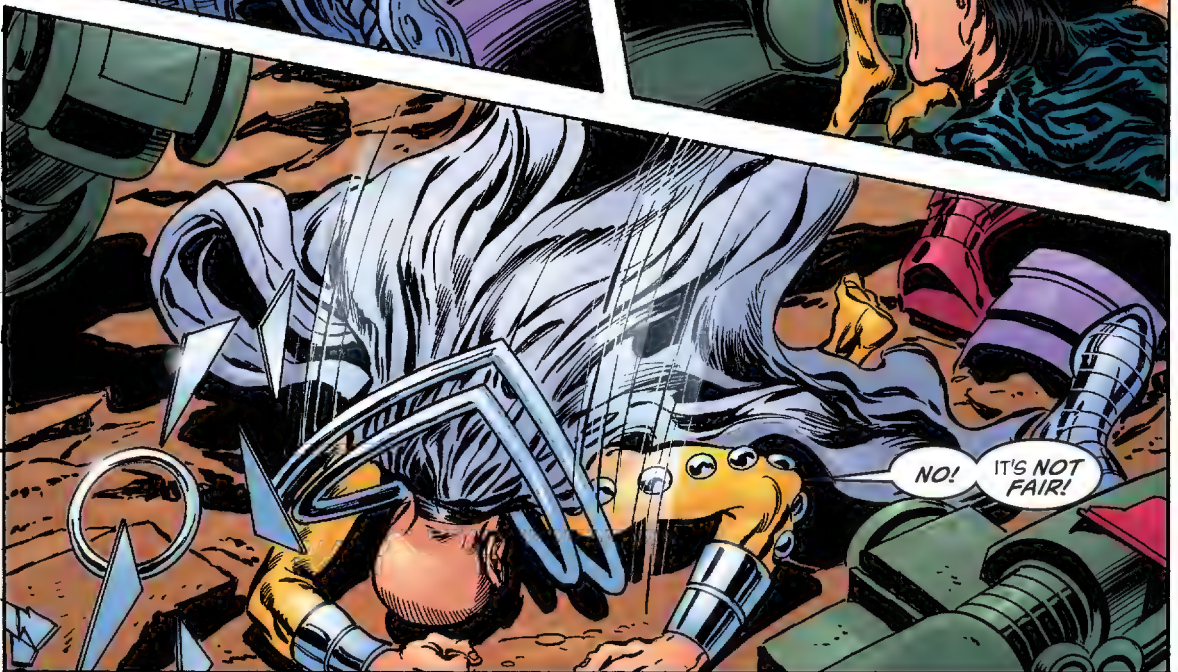
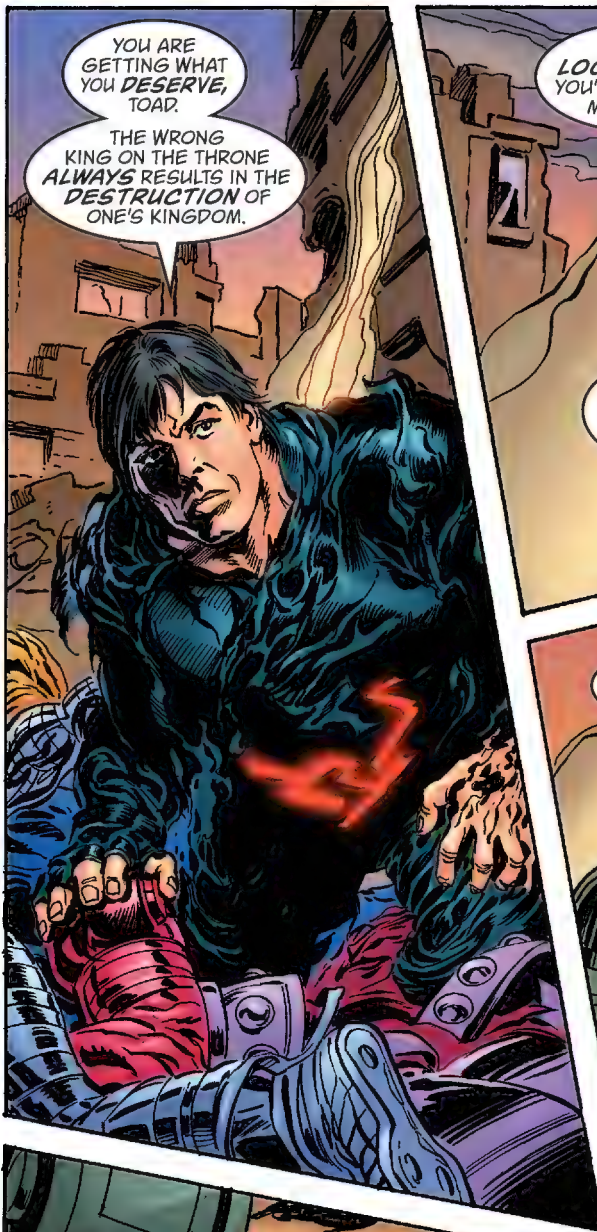
WILL THIS **UNDO** THE POLARIZATION OF THE PLANET?

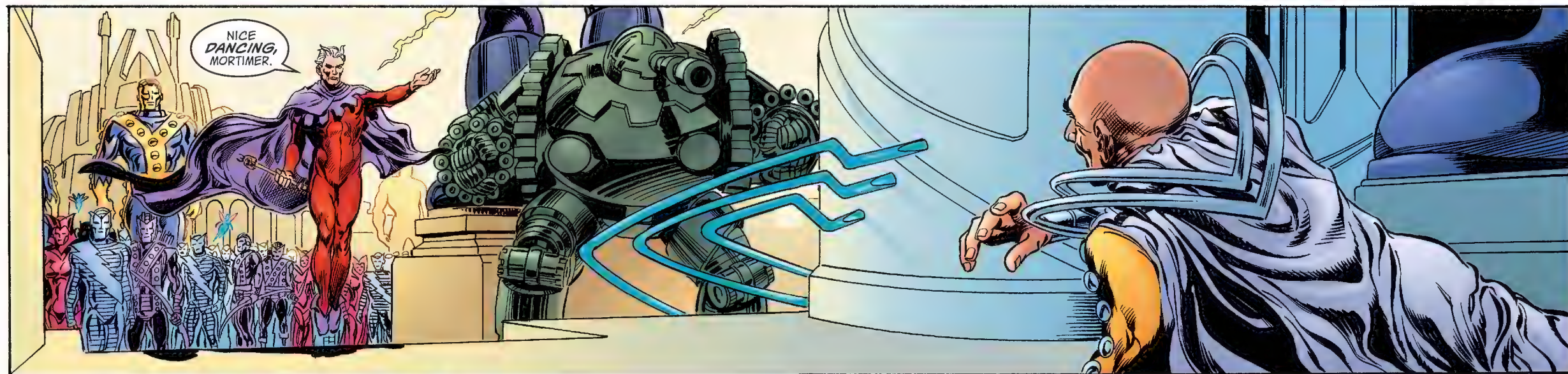
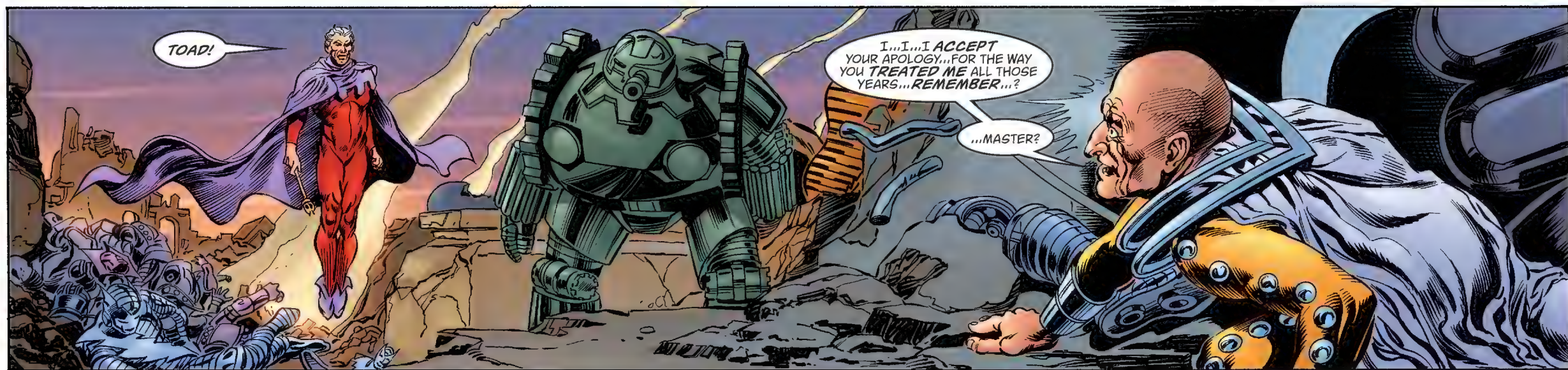


NO, THERE ISN'T ENOUGH VIBRANIUM LEFT WITHIN THE EARTH...

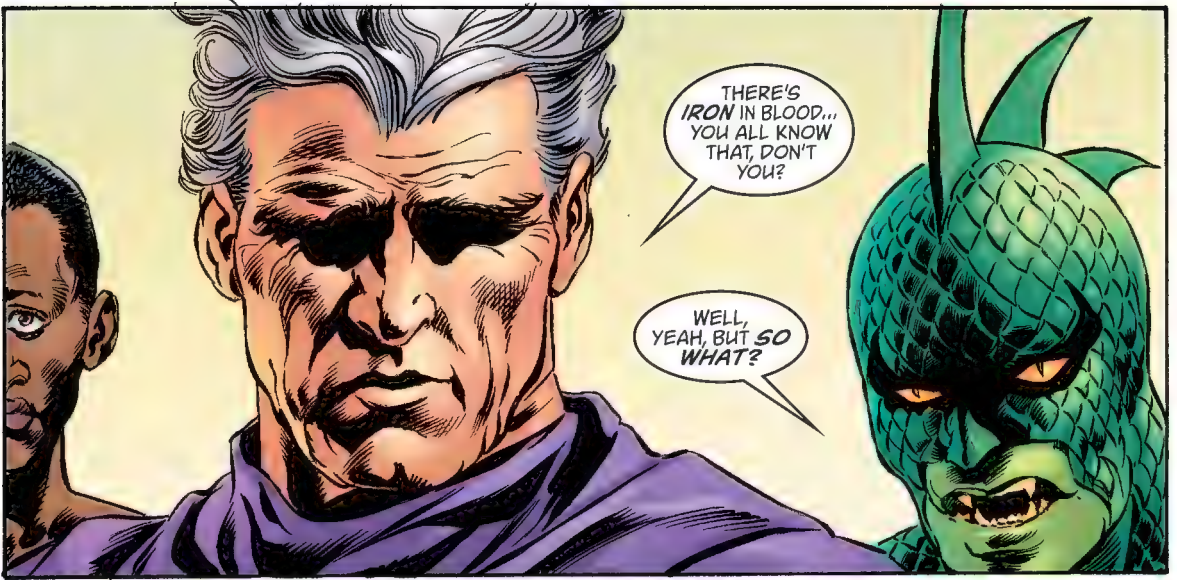
...BUT IT WILL **MAKE RIGHT** WHAT HAS HAPPENED HERE.











THERE'S
IRON IN BLOOD...
YOU ALL KNOW
THAT, DON'T
YOU?

WELL,
YEAH, BUT *SO*
WHAT?



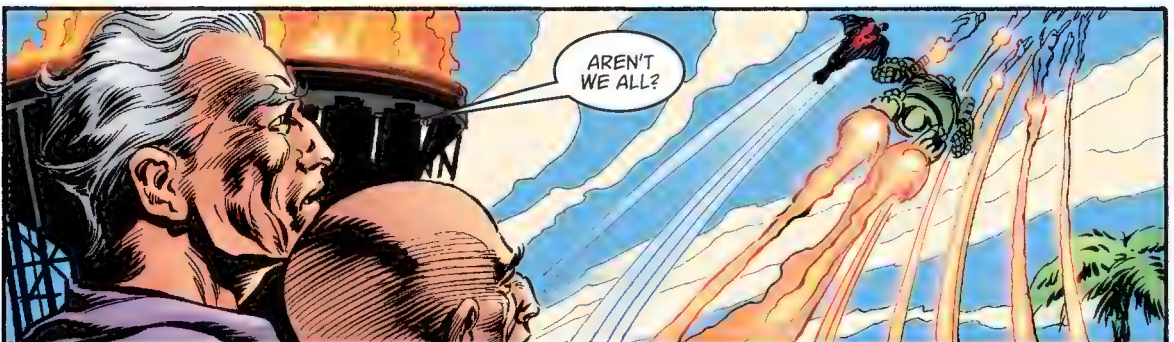
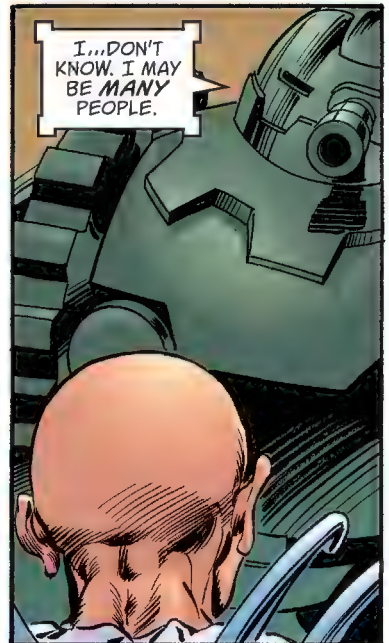
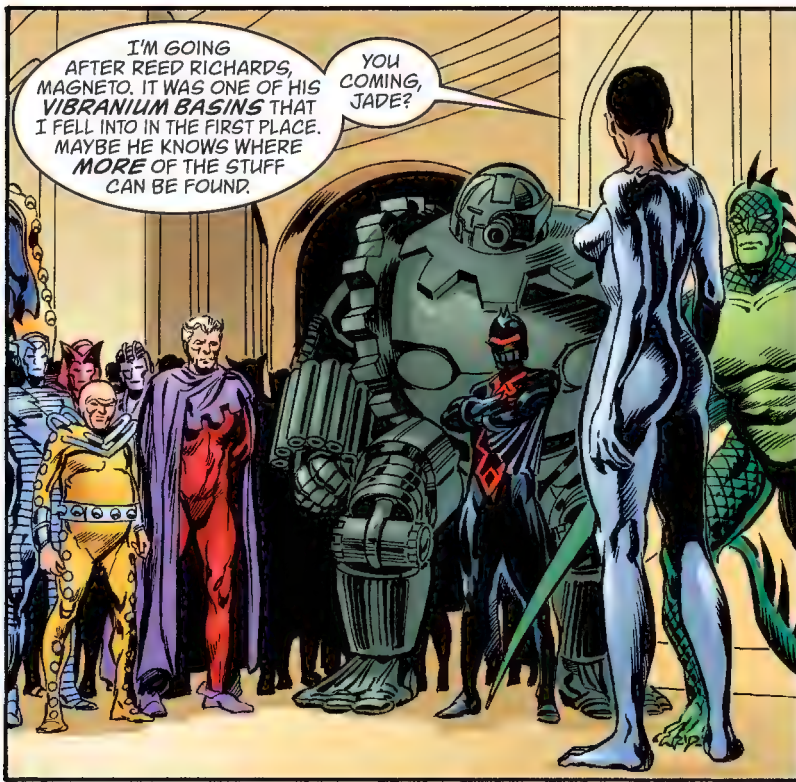
I AM THE
MASTER OF
MAGNETISM
ONCE AGAIN.



WHY?
WHY CAN'T YOU
JUST LET ME
DIE?



YOU'VE LIVED
YOUR ENTIRE LIFE AS
A *COWARD*, MORTIMER. HOW
COULD I LET A MEMBER OF
MY BROTHERHOOD *DIE*
LIKE ONE?



UNIVERSE



KRUEGER
BRAITHWAITE
REINHOLD

“Is it true, Mar-Vell?”

“Yes, Kyle.”

“Then it doesn’t matter if the Silver Surfer defeats Creel or not? It’s a useless battle to save a torch that’s not even worth saving now. The re-polarization of the world is going to destroy this planet. We thought we’d saved our world when Galactus destroyed the embryo at its core, but it was just a stay of execution. These are the last days of the planet, aren’t they? All of our lives, as unresolved as they are, will cease to be?”

“If that’s what your piece of the Cosmic Consciousness reveals, Kyle. There are no guarantees of resolution apart from death. But as your visions have shown you, there is much going on beyond Death, in other realms altogether.”

“Everything goes black shortly after the world starts falling apart. That’s what I see with these eyes. Reed Richards is leaving the planet with the rocket that brought the Inhuman Royal Family to Earth in the first place. Even Reed, of all people, has given up on this world.”

“Mephisto goads Immortus to travel back in time and create a new world, perhaps, where there is no awareness of the Celestial seed ... just as there is no death of the Embryo at the Earth’s core. In his own way, Mephisto is attempting to save the planet.”

“But why, Mar-Vell?”

“Mephisto needs one world to create an alternate history of another. If this continuity ends, that’s one less world for Mephisto to manipulate into others. He’s banking on being able to convince Immortus to change this reality through another time manipulation.”

“You can’t be saying that our salvation rests in the hands of Mephisto, can you?”

“Devils can be heroes, too, Kyle, if it serves what they deem to be good.”



UNIVERSE X

I S S U E 1 2

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story and script

ALEX ROSS
story, cover painter and character designer

DOUGIE BRAITHWAITE
pencils

BILL REINHOLD
with **ROBIN RIGGS** inks

LAURA DEPUY
colors

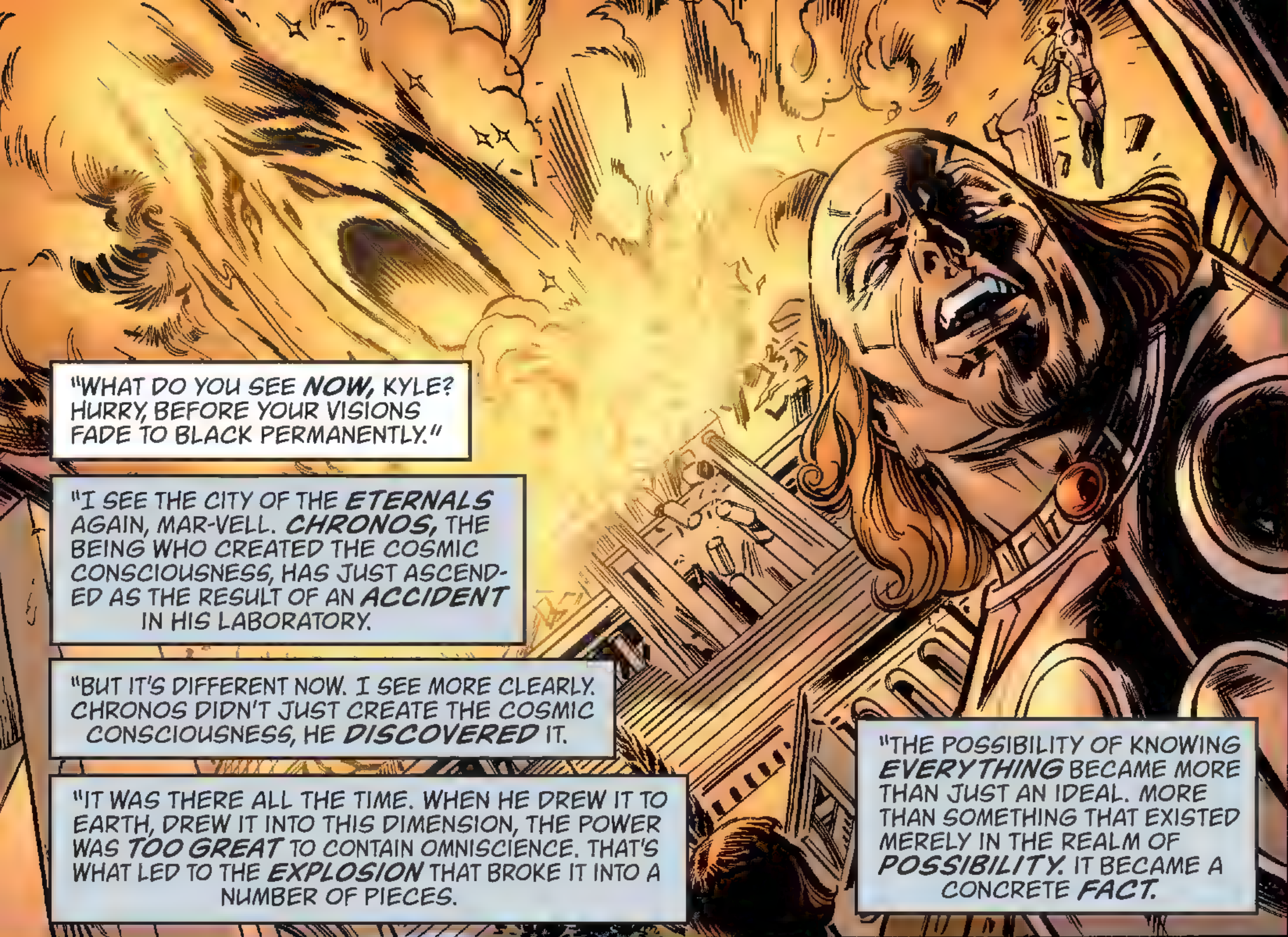
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JOE QUESADA
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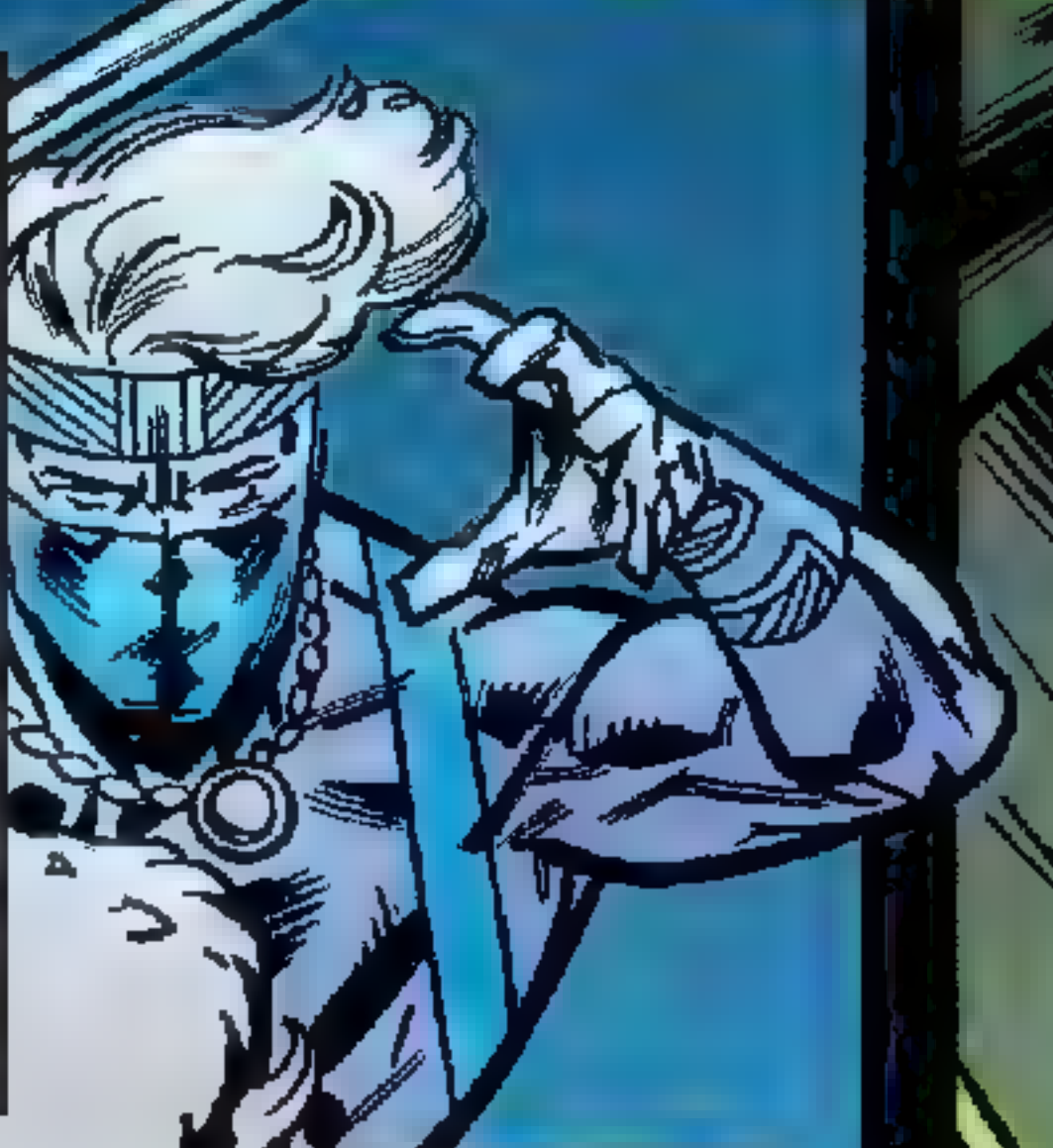
"WHAT DO YOU SEE **NOW**, KYLE?
HURRY, BEFORE YOUR VISIONS
FADE TO BLACK PERMANENTLY."

"I SEE THE CITY OF THE **ETERNALS**
AGAIN, MAR-VELL. **CHRONOS**, THE
BEING WHO CREATED THE COSMIC
CONSCIOUSNESS, HAS JUST ASCEND-
ED AS THE RESULT OF AN **ACCIDENT**
IN HIS LABORATORY."

"BUT IT'S DIFFERENT NOW. I SEE MORE CLEARLY.
CHRONOS DIDN'T JUST CREATE THE COSMIC
CONSCIOUSNESS, HE **DISCOVERED** IT."

"IT WAS THERE ALL THE TIME. WHEN HE DREW IT TO
EARTH, DREW IT INTO THIS DIMENSION, THE POWER
WAS **TOO GREAT** TO CONTAIN OMNISCIENCE. THAT'S
WHAT LED TO THE **EXPLOSION** THAT BROKE IT INTO A
NUMBER OF PIECES."

"THE POSSIBILITY OF KNOWING
EVERYTHING BECAME MORE
THAN JUST AN IDEAL. MORE
THAN SOMETHING THAT EXISTED
MERELY IN THE REALM OF
POSSIBILITY. IT BECAME A
CONCRETE **FACT**."



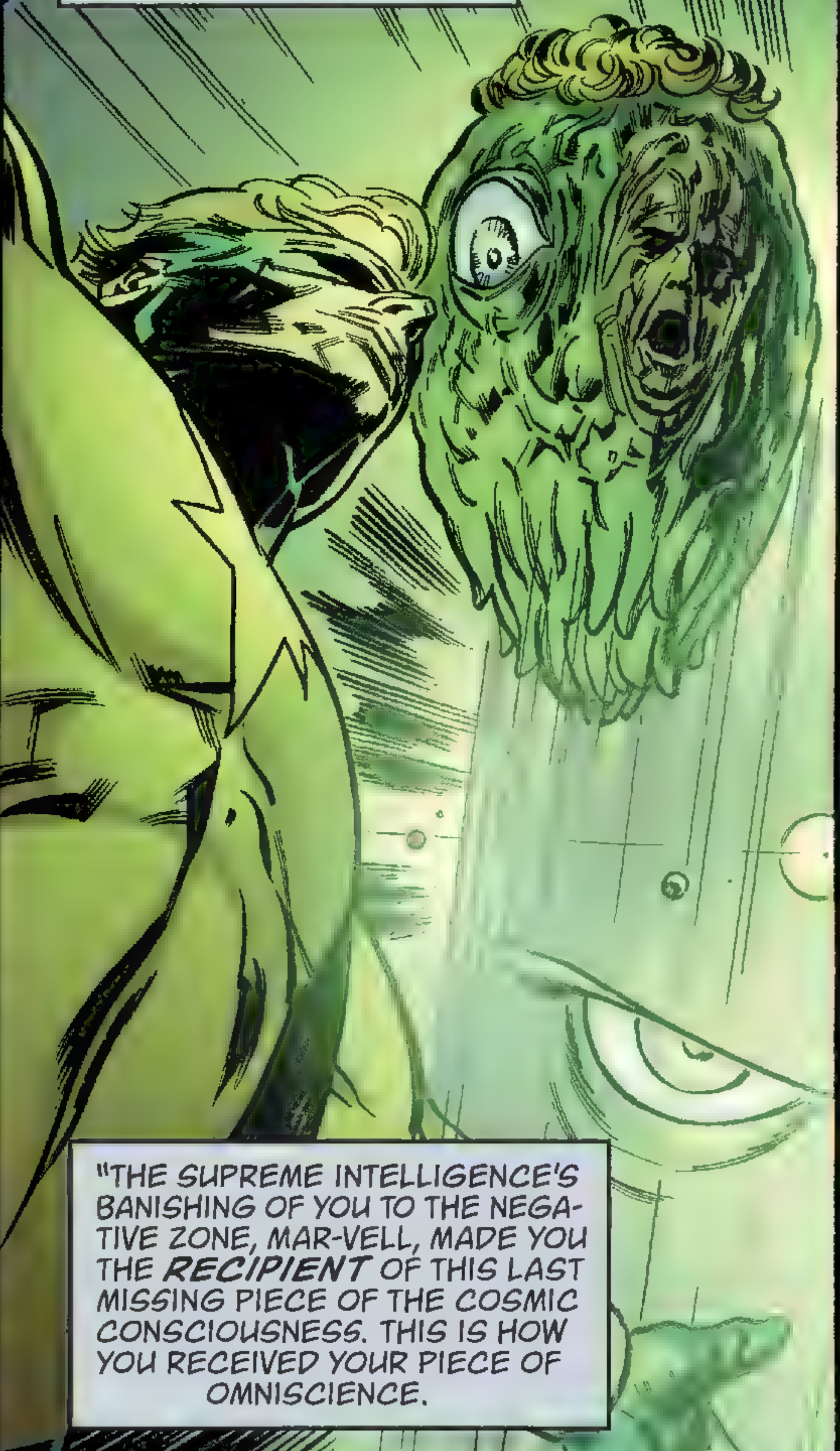
"ALL BUT ONE OF THE
DISPARATE PIECES
WERE RECOLLECTED
BY **MERLIN**. HIS MAGIC
ALLOWED THE GROWING
DEPOSIT OF KNOWLEDGE
TO REST UPON THE LIKE-
NESS OF **KING ARTHUR**.
THE COSMIC CONSCIOUS-
NESS WAS THEN KNOWN
AS THE **SPIRIT OF
THE PENDRAGON**."

"MERLIN THEN USED WHAT HE DISCOVERED
FROM HIS COLLECTED PIECES OF OMNIPO-
TENCE TO SEARCH OUT THE EXISTENCE OF
ALTERNATE REALITIES."

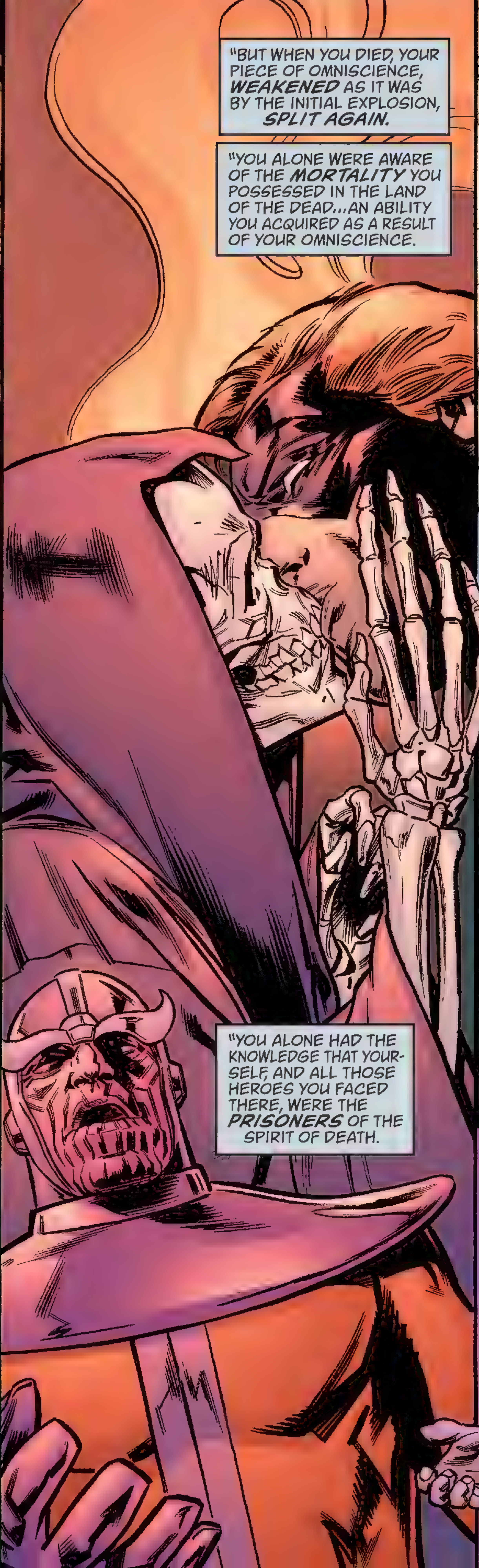
"HE CONSPIRED TO CREATE A **KNIGHTHOOD**
TO POLICE THESE ALTERNATE REALITIES AND
FIND THE MISSING PIECE OF OMNISCIENCE.
THIS KNIGHTHOOD WOULD ONE DAY BECOME
THE **CAPTAIN BRITAIN CORPS**."

"BUT MERLIN **FAILED** TO COMPLETE THE COS-
MIC CONSCIOUSNESS AND ARTHUR **DIED**. THE
ONE PIECE MERLIN COULD NOT FIND HAD BEEN
LOST IN ANOTHER REALM--ONE DISCOVERED
IN THIS ERA BY **REED RICHARDS**."

"THE NEGATIVE ZONE."

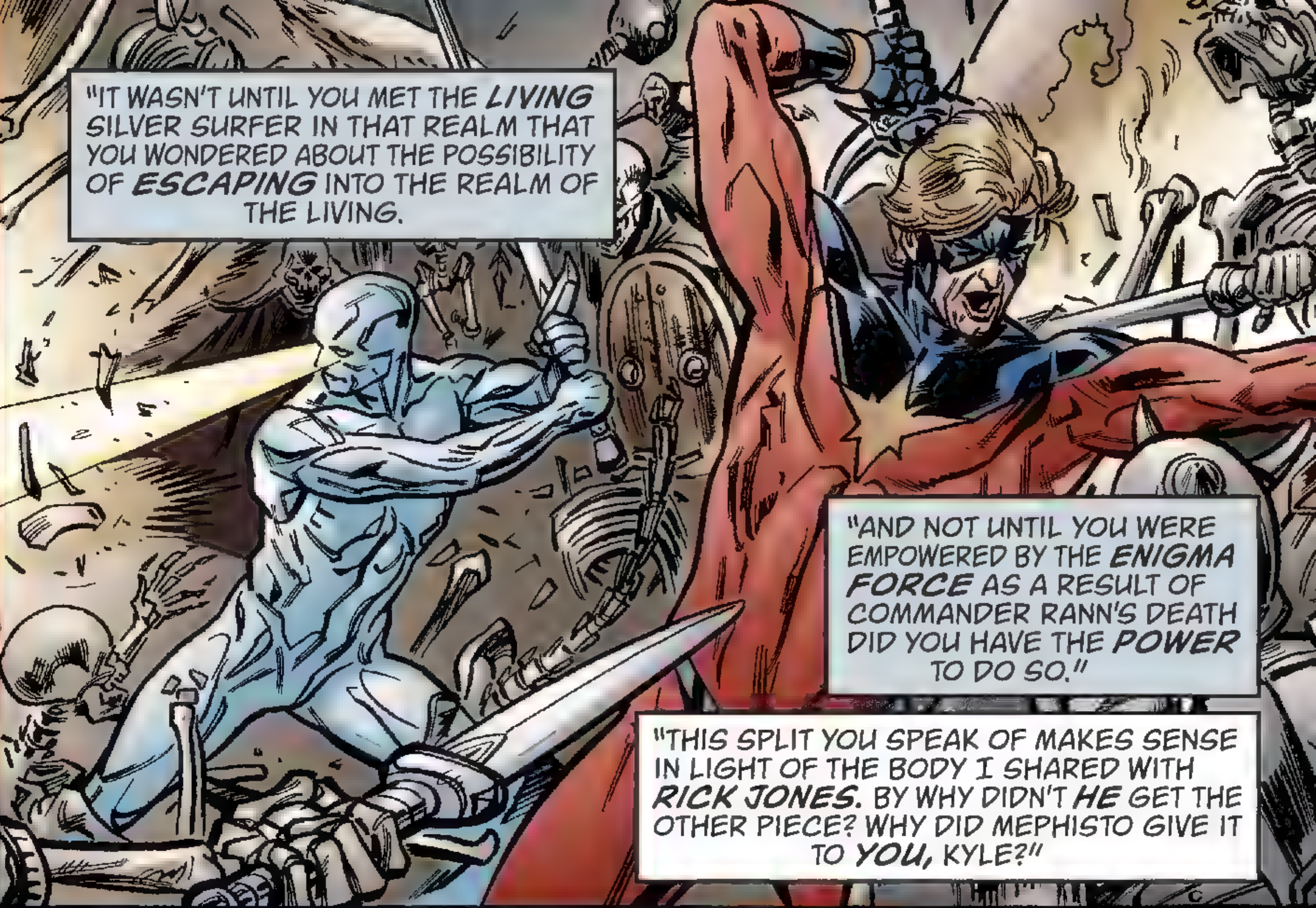


"THE SUPREME INTELLIGENCE'S
BANISHING OF YOU TO THE NEGA-
TIVE ZONE, MAR-VELL, MADE YOU
THE **RECIPIENT** OF THIS LAST
MISSING PIECE OF THE COSMIC
CONSCIOUSNESS. THIS IS HOW
YOU RECEIVED YOUR PIECE OF
OMNISCIENCE."



"BUT WHEN YOU DIED, YOUR
PIECE OF OMNISCIENCE,
WEAKENED AS IT WAS
BY THE INITIAL EXPLOSION,
SPLIT AGAIN."

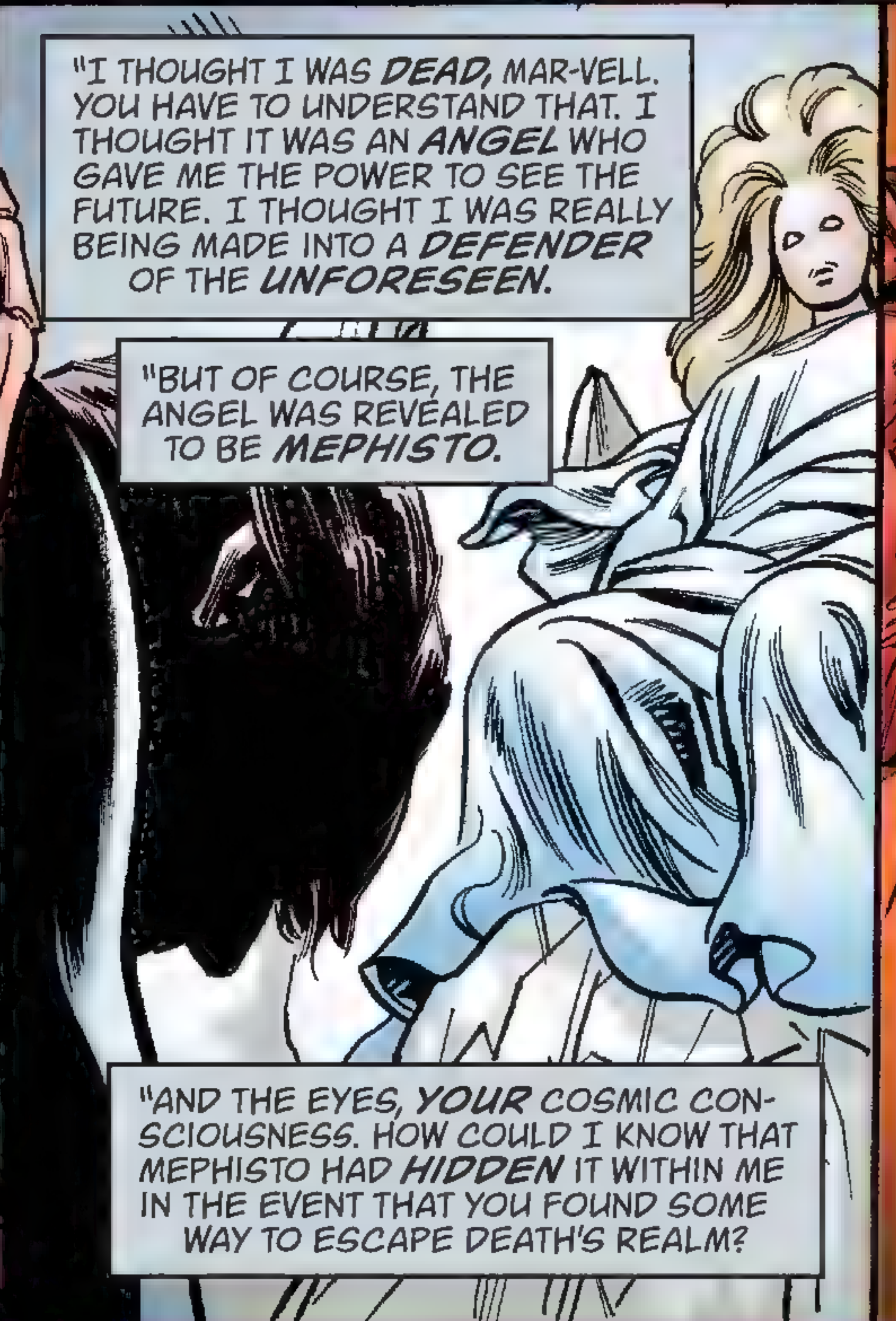
"YOU ALONE WERE AWARE
OF THE **MORTALITY** YOU
POSSESSED IN THE LAND
OF THE DEAD...AN ABILITY
YOU ACQUIRED AS A RESULT
OF YOUR OMNISCIENCE."



"IT WASN'T UNTIL YOU MET THE **LIVING**
SILVER SURFER IN THAT REALM THAT
YOU WONDERED ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY
OF **ESCAPING** INTO THE REALM OF
THE LIVING."

"AND NOT UNTIL YOU WERE
EMPOWERED BY THE **ENIGMA**
FORCE AS A RESULT OF
COMMANDER RANN'S DEATH
DID YOU HAVE THE **POWER**
TO DO SO."

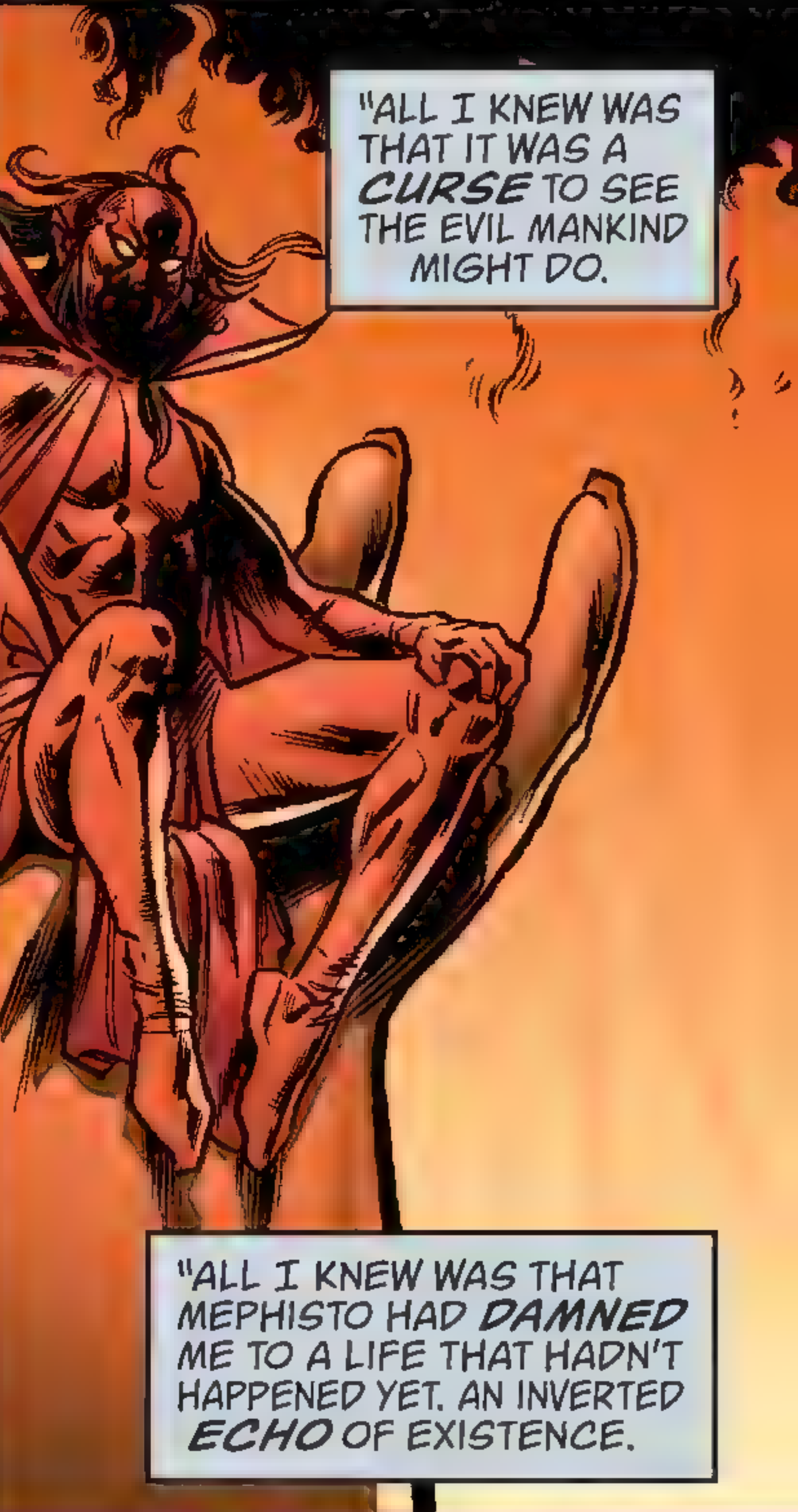
"THIS SPLIT YOU SPEAK OF MAKES SENSE
IN LIGHT OF THE BODY I SHARED WITH
RICK JONES. WHY DIDN'T **HE** GET THE
OTHER PIECE? WHY DID MEPHISTO GIVE IT
TO **YOU**, KYLE?"



"I THOUGHT I WAS **DEAD**, MAR-VELL.
YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND THAT. I
THOUGHT IT WAS AN **ANGEL** WHO
GAVE ME THE POWER TO SEE THE
FUTURE. I THOUGHT I WAS REALLY
BEING MADE INTO A **DEFENDER**
OF THE **UNFORESEEN**."

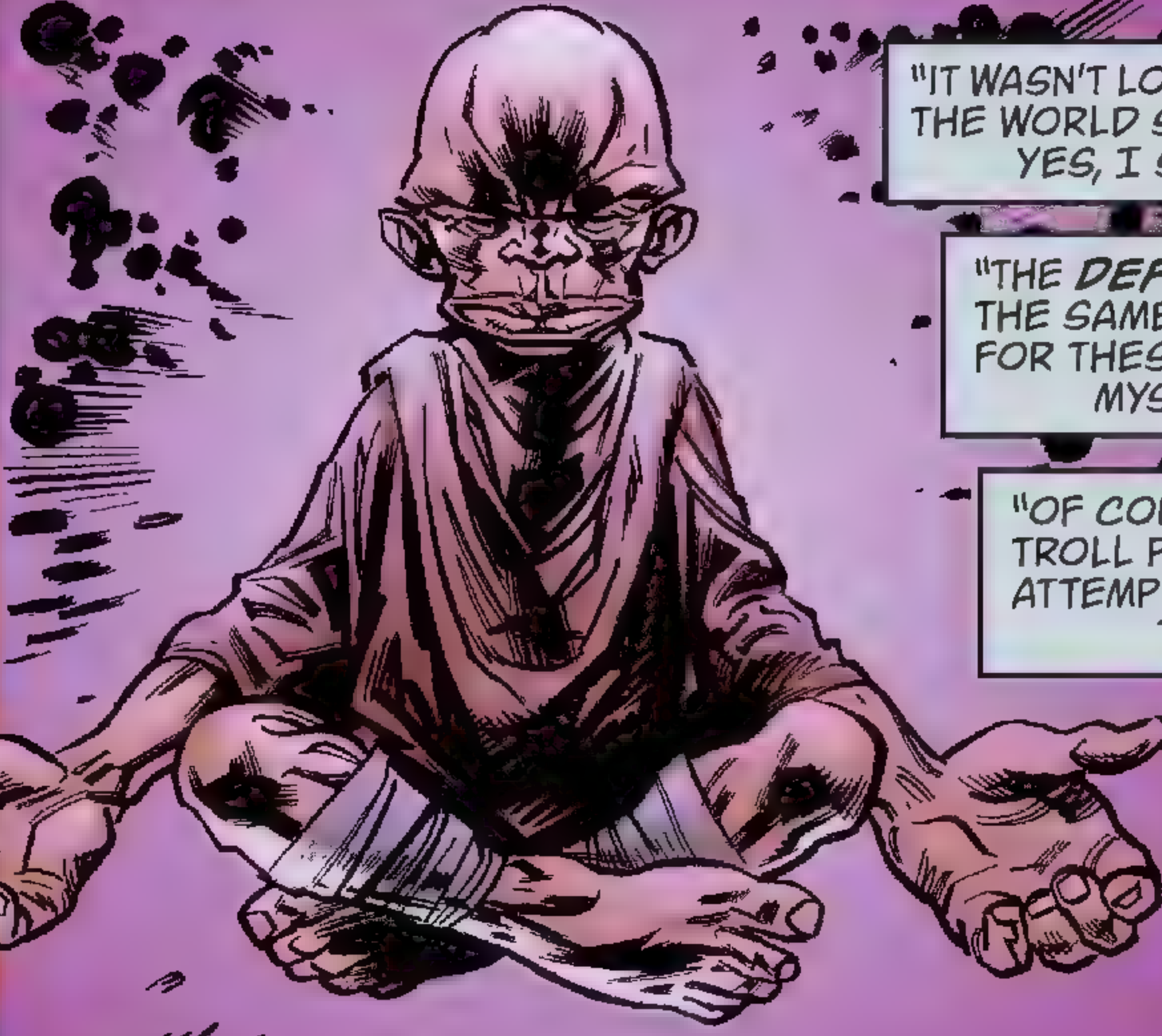
"BUT OF COURSE, THE
ANGEL WAS REVEALED
TO BE **MEPHISTO**."

"AND THE EYES, **YOUR COSMIC CON-**
SCIOUSNESS. HOW COULD I KNOW THAT
MEPHISTO HAD **HIDDEN** IT WITHIN ME
IN THE EVENT THAT YOU FOUND SOME
WAY TO ESCAPE DEATH'S REALM?"



"ALL I KNEW WAS
THAT IT WAS A
CURSE TO SEE
THE EVIL MANKIND
MIGHT DO."

"ALL I KNEW WAS THAT
MEPHISTO HAD **DAMNED**
ME TO A LIFE THAT HADN'T
HAPPENED YET. AN INVERTED
ECHO OF EXISTENCE."



"IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE EVERY **MYSTIC** IN
THE WORLD SHOWED UP ON MY DOORSTEP.
YES, I SAW THEM ALL COMING."

"THE **DEFENDERS** RE-FORMED AROUND
THE SAME TIME I WAS TOLD OF A CURE
FOR THESE ABILITIES FROM ANOTHER
MYSTIC--**PAPA HAGG**."

"OF COURSE, THE CURE THAT LITTLE
TROLL PROMISED WAS ONLY ANOTHER
ATTEMPT TO **STEAL AWAY** MY ABILITY
TO SEE THE FUTURE."

"I REALIZED THAT WHATEVER
IT WAS MEPHISTO HAD STUCK
ME WITH, BETTER IT STAY WITH
ME THAN RISK THE HARM IT
COULD DO IN **SOMEONE**
ELSE'S POSSESSION."

"PERHAPS, WITH THE IMAGES NOW ENTERING MY MIND, I CAN SUGGEST A **REASON** THAT THE COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS WAS SCATTERED AND BROKEN.

"ONCE...THERE WAS A **PERFECT UNIVERSE**. THIS IS THE ONE WE'VE ONLY JUST HEARD OF. AND THIS UNIVERSE WAS **INFECTED** BY SOME OF ITS INHABITANTS WHO HAD EVOLVED BY MANIPULATING THEMSELVES INTO A RACE OF BEINGS **BEYOND** PHYSICAL WANT OR NEED."

"IS SUCH A THING EVEN **POSSIBLE**? ARE WE NOT **DEFINED** BY OUR NEEDS AND MOTIVATIONS?"

"YES. BUT THEY LEARNED THIS **TOO LATE**. IN THE END, THEY FOUND THEY HAD AFFECTED THEMSELVES TO SUCH A DEGREE THAT THEY WERE NO LONGER CAPABLE OF PHYSICAL REPRODUCTION. THEY WERE NO LONGER **CAPABLE** OF ANYTHING SAVE THE **MOVEMENT** OF THEIR OWN ENERGY FORM.

"A **HOUSING** FOR THEIR BEING WAS NECESSARY TO GUARANTEE AGAINST ANY ADDITIONAL LOSS OF DEFINITION. THEY BUILT **ARMOR** FOR THEMSELVES TO CONTAIN THEIR BODIES...AN ORGANIC ENCASING, WHICH ON EARTH, WAS CALLED **VIBRANIUM**.

"BUT METAPHYSICAL PROCREATION WAS DISCOVERED TO BE POSSIBLE BY **IM-PLANTING** A PART OF THEIR ENERGY INTO **WHOLE WORLDS**. AND THEY USED THEIR ABILITIES TO **MANIPULATE** THE RACES OF OTHER WORLDS INTO BECOMING **PROTECTOR**S OF THE EMBRYO THAT WAS PLANTED WITHIN EACH WORLD.

"THIS IS THE ORIGIN OF THE **CELESTIALS**. THEY WOULD THEN IMPLANT '**VIBRANIUM**' INTO THE PLANETS, ALLOWING THEM TO FORM THE HOUSING NECESSARY TO PROVIDE DEFINITION FOR THE **BIRTH**.

"THEIR INFECTION OF THE WORLDS WITHIN THIS UNIVERSE LED TO ITS **COLLAPSE**, WHICH IN TURN LED TO THE CREATION OF **GALACTUS**. AS THEIR **SOLE SURVIVOR**, HE WOULD MAKE CERTAIN THEY'D NEVER DO TO THE NEW UNIVERSE WHAT THEY HAD TO THE OLD ONE.

"BUT THE CREATION OF THE NEW UNIVERSE **CUT OFF** ALL THOSE INHABITANTS OF OUR REALM FROM SOMETHING...**SOME MYSTERY**... THAT THOSE WHO HAD LIVED IN THE ORIGINAL UNIVERSE HAD **ALWAYS KNOWN**.

"SO MANKIND CREATED **RELIGIONS** AND **PHILOSOPHIES** TO PIECE TOGETHER WHAT THEY KNEW HAD BEEN BROKEN.

"WE'D BEEN CUT OFF FROM **PERFECT KNOWLEDGE** WITHOUT EVEN KNOWING IT.

"PERHAPS, MAR-VELL, BECAUSE IT WAS THE **KNOWLEDGE IT-SELF** THAT HAD BEEN BROKEN."

"UNTIL NOW."

"OR, AT LEAST, UNTIL YOU TAKE THE **FINAL PIECE** OF OMNISCIENCE, MAR-VELL. TAKE THESE **EYES**. I DON'T WANT THEM ANYMORE. PERHAPS EARTH WILL **LIVE** IF YOU DO. PERHAPS THE BLACKNESS I SAW WAS MY OWN BLINDING, AND NOTHING MORE. PERHAPS..."

"NO, KYLE. IT'S NOT TIME YET. DEATH WILL BE **AWARE** OF ME IN HER REALM IF I ENTER WITH THE **COMPLETE** CONSCIOUSNESS.

"I MUST WAIT HERE, AS I MUST ALSO WAIT THERE."

NO, STEPHEN. I'M NOT **COMPLETE** YET. WE MUST WAIT.

AND I AM NOT CONVINCED WE HAVE RUN OUT OF **ALLIES** JUST YET.

ANOTHER HOUR OF THIS AND IT'LL BE JUST **YOU** AND **ME**, MAR-VELL!

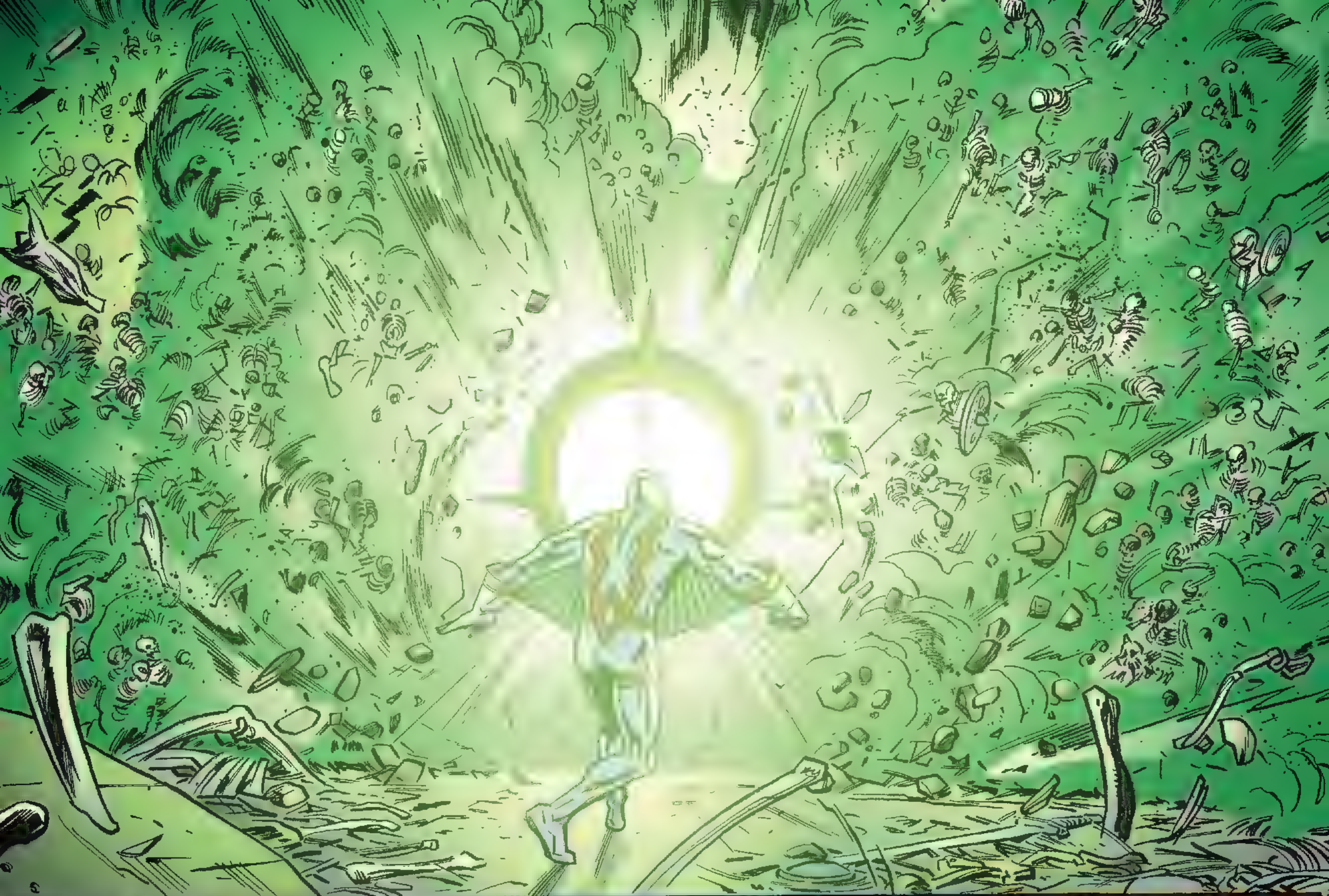
IF WE'RE GOING TO ATTACK, IT MUST BE **NOW**.

WHO--?

IT'S **BLACK BOLT**, THE INHUMAN ROYAL KING.

THEN MAXIMUS SPOKE THE **TRUTH**. YOU **ARE** HERE, MAR-VELL.

AND MY BROTHER IS NO LONGER **MAD**.



IT'S **MIRACULOUS**, MAR-VELL. THE WAR TURNS TO OUR FAVOR ONCE AGAIN WITH BUT **ONE SPOKEN WORD**.

I AM NOT SO **CERTAIN**, STEPHEN. MY CONSCIOUSNESS IS NOT YET COMPLETE.



I DON'T KNOW YET HOW TO DEFEAT **DEATH**.



WHAT?

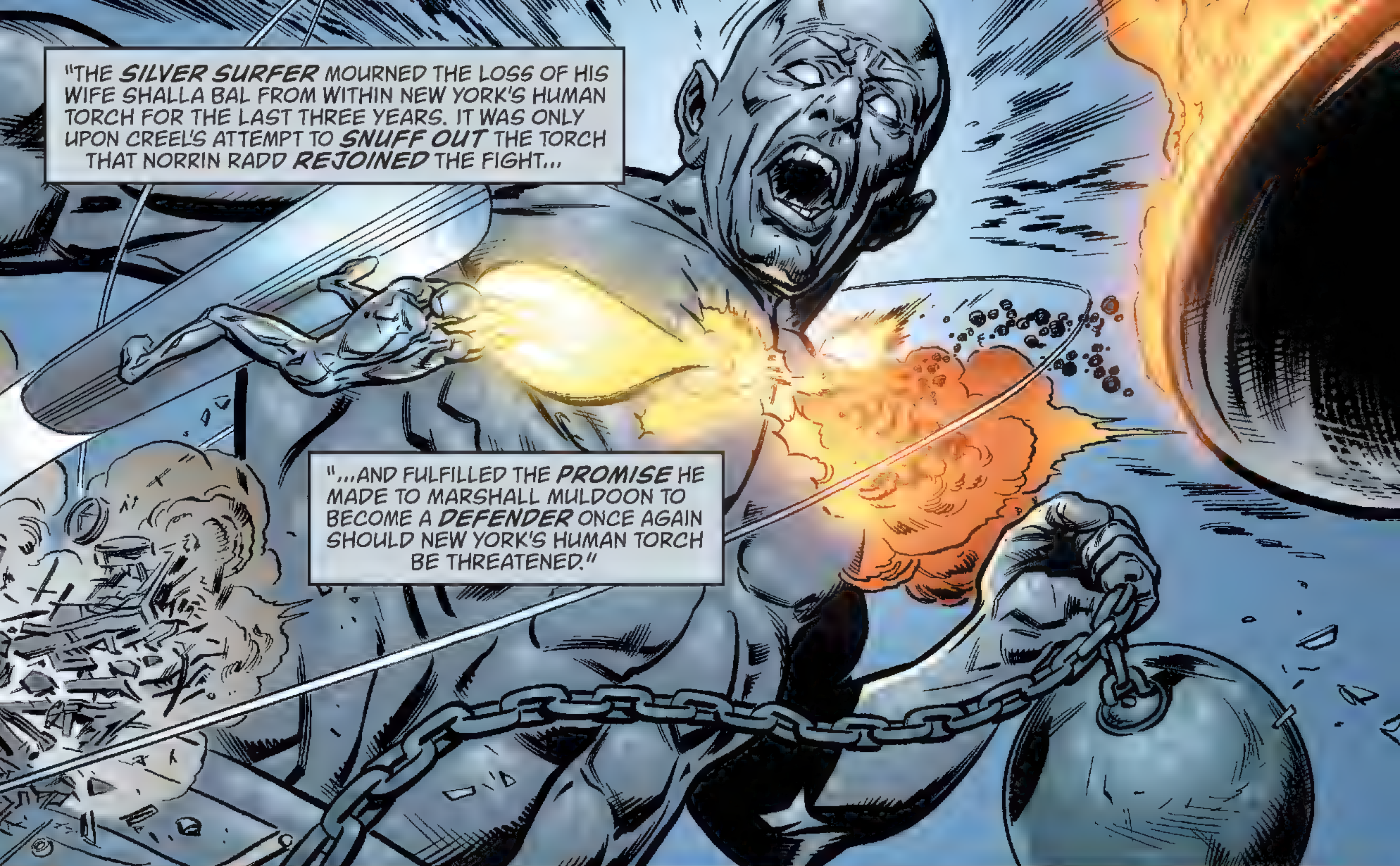


MARI SAYS THAT IMMORTUS IS **IGNORING** HER AND THE REST OF THE ANT-MEN! SHE DOESN'T THINK IT'S GOING TO WORK.

THANK YOU, COMMANDER RANN.

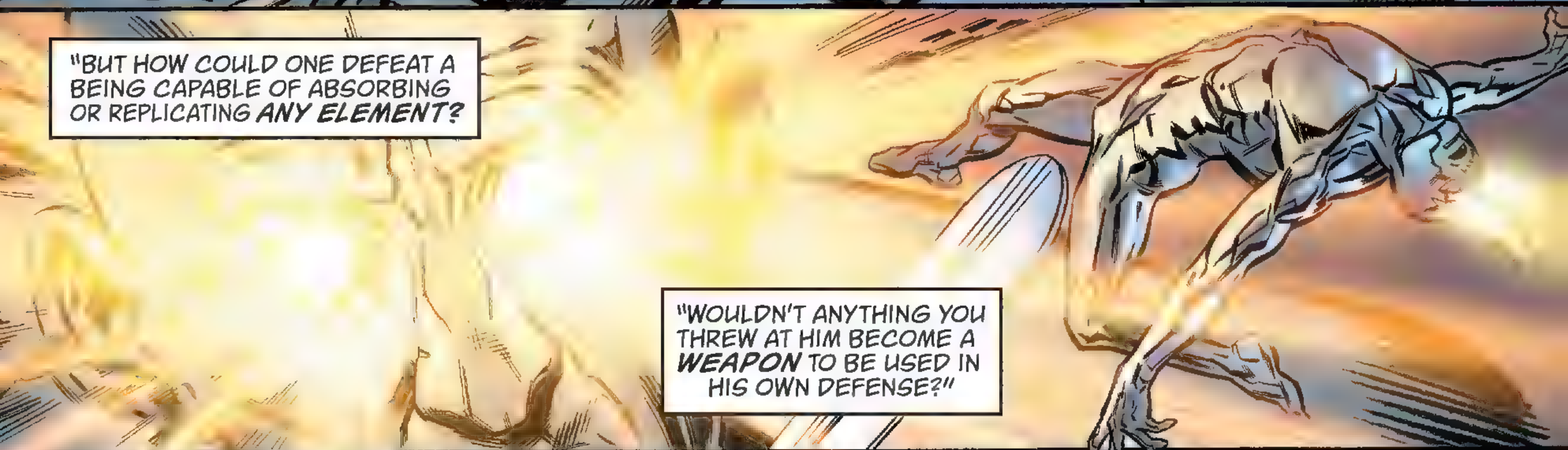


OUR WAR HERE DEPENDS ON **ANOTHER WAR**, STEPHEN...ONE THAT IS **NOT** GOING VERY WELL, I'M AFRAID.



"THE *SILVER SURFER* MOURNED THE LOSS OF HIS WIFE SHALLA BAL FROM WITHIN NEW YORK'S HUMAN TORCH FOR THE LAST THREE YEARS. IT WAS ONLY UPON CREELE'S ATTEMPT TO *SNUFF OUT* THE TORCH THAT NORRIN RADD *REJOINED* THE FIGHT..."

"...AND FULFILLED THE *PROMISE* HE MADE TO MARSHALL MULDOON TO BECOME A *DEFENDER* ONCE AGAIN SHOULD NEW YORK'S HUMAN TORCH BE THREATENED."



"BUT HOW COULD ONE DEFEAT A BEING CAPABLE OF ABSORBING OR REPLICATING *ANY ELEMENT*?"

"WOULDN'T ANYTHING YOU THREW AT HIM BECOME A *WEAPON* TO BE USED IN HIS OWN DEFENSE?"



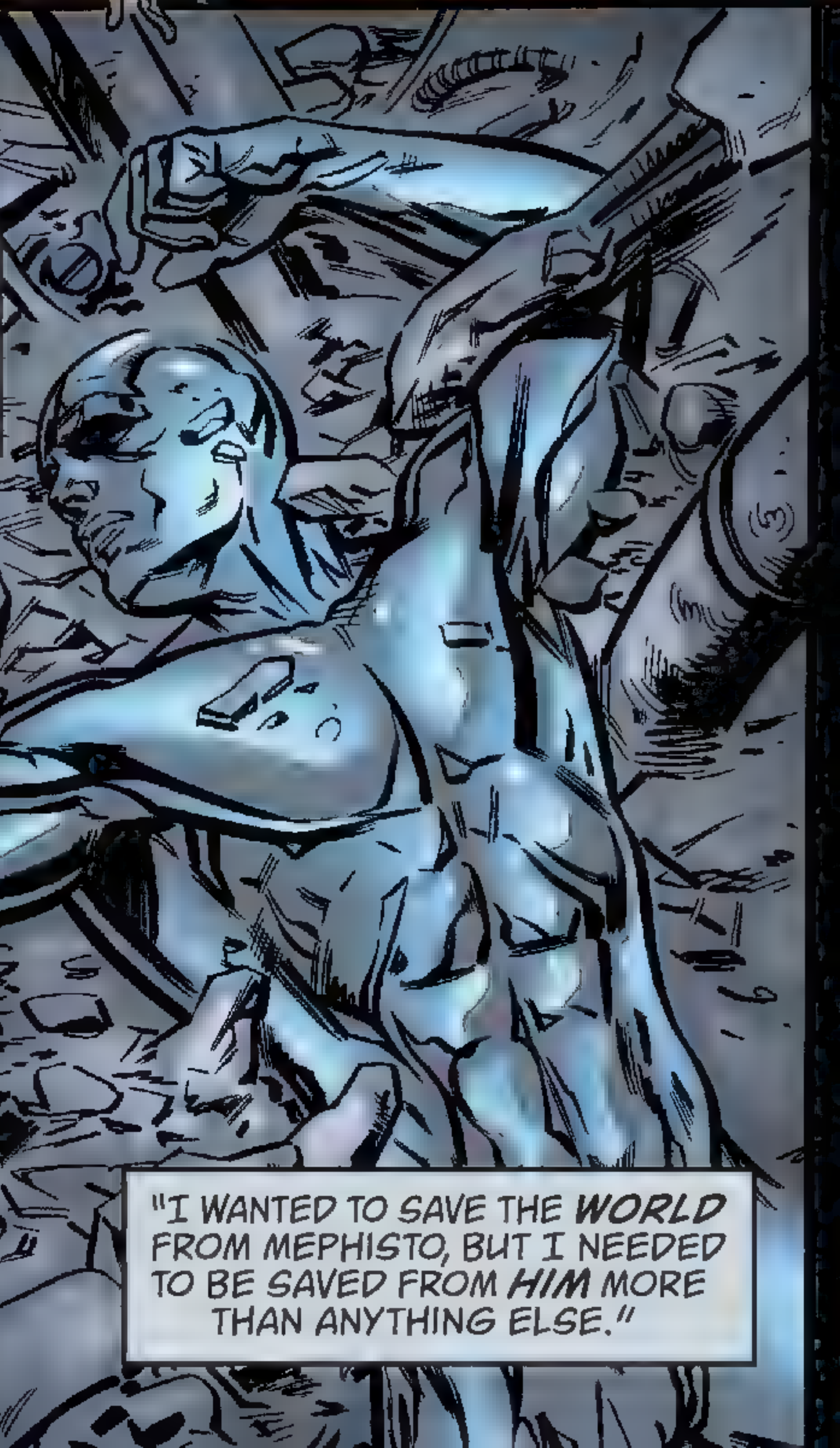
"IF THERE'S ANYTHING I'VE LEARNED FROM THESE EYES, MAR-VELL, IT'S THAT WE HAVE NO DEFENSE FROM *OURSELVES*."

"OUR WANTS, OUR DESIRES, OUR HOPES--OUR ASPIRATIONS ARE OUR *LIMITATIONS*. OUT OF OUR *WANTS* COME OUR *WEAKNESSES*."



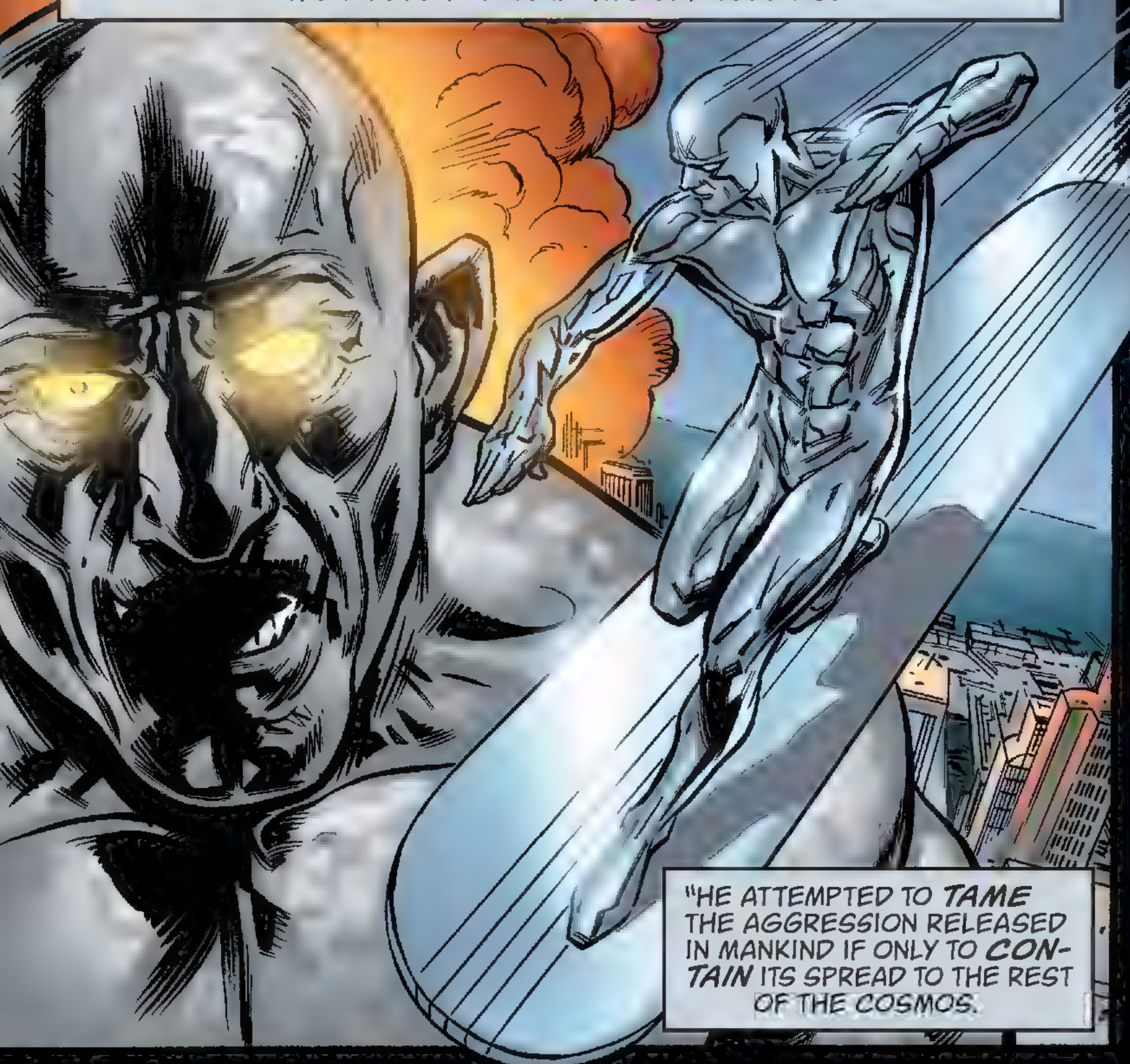
"HOW CAN WE STAND UP TO *THAT*?"

"ISAAC ONLY WANTED TO *FEEL* AGAIN. BUT IT *KILLED* HIM AND MAY HAVE *DOOMED* THIS REALITY."



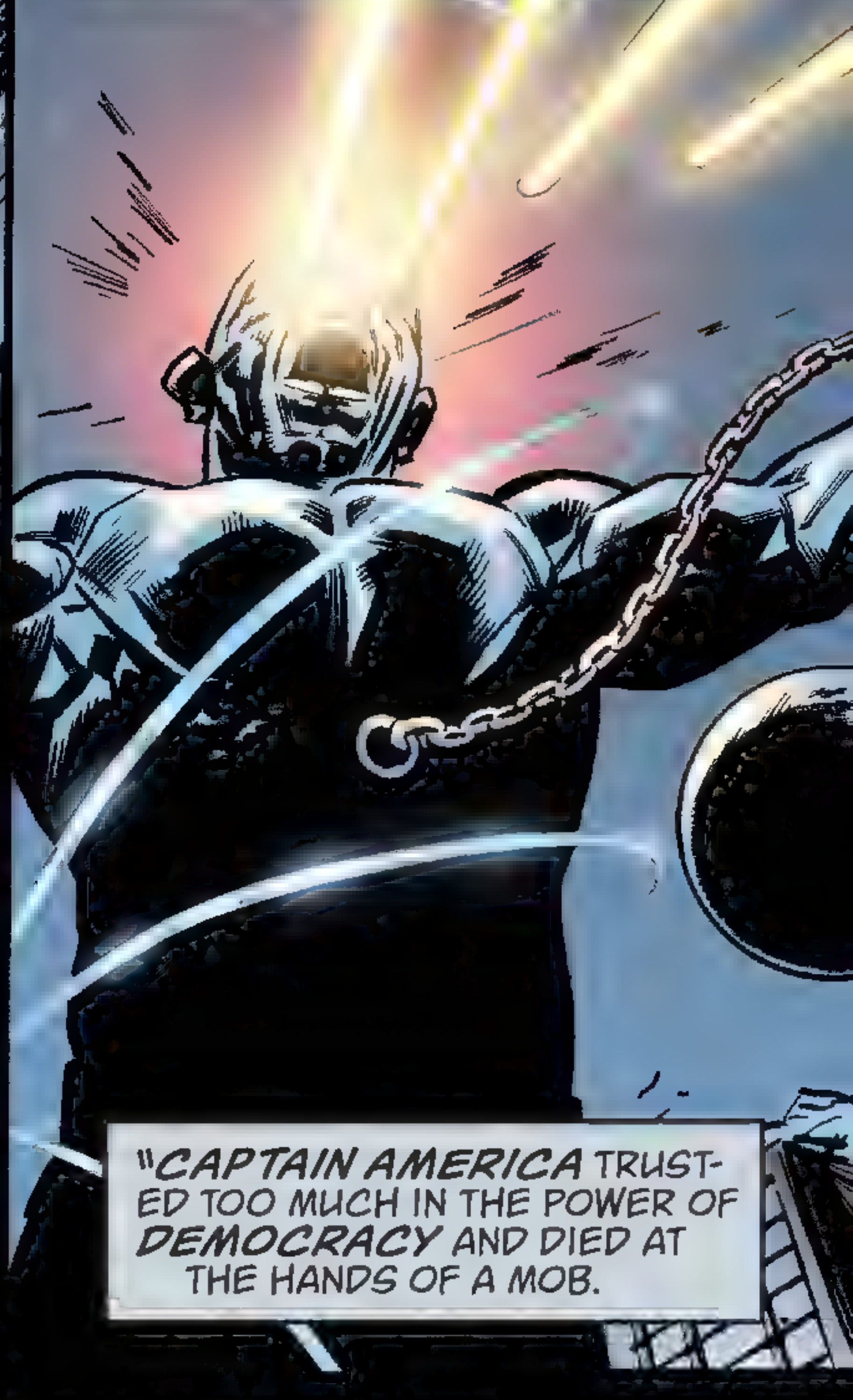
"I WANTED TO SAVE THE *WORLD* FROM MEPHISTO, BUT I NEEDED TO BE SAVED FROM *HIM* MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE."

"**IMMORTUS**, WHO FEARED THAT A MUTATED MANKIND WOULD CONQUER THE UNIVERSE, HOPED INSTEAD TO LEAD THE MUTATED HUMANITY ON TO A **GLORIOUS FUTURE** OF DEEP SPACE COLONIZATION BY CALLING UPON THEIR NEED FOR METAPHYSICAL MEANING.

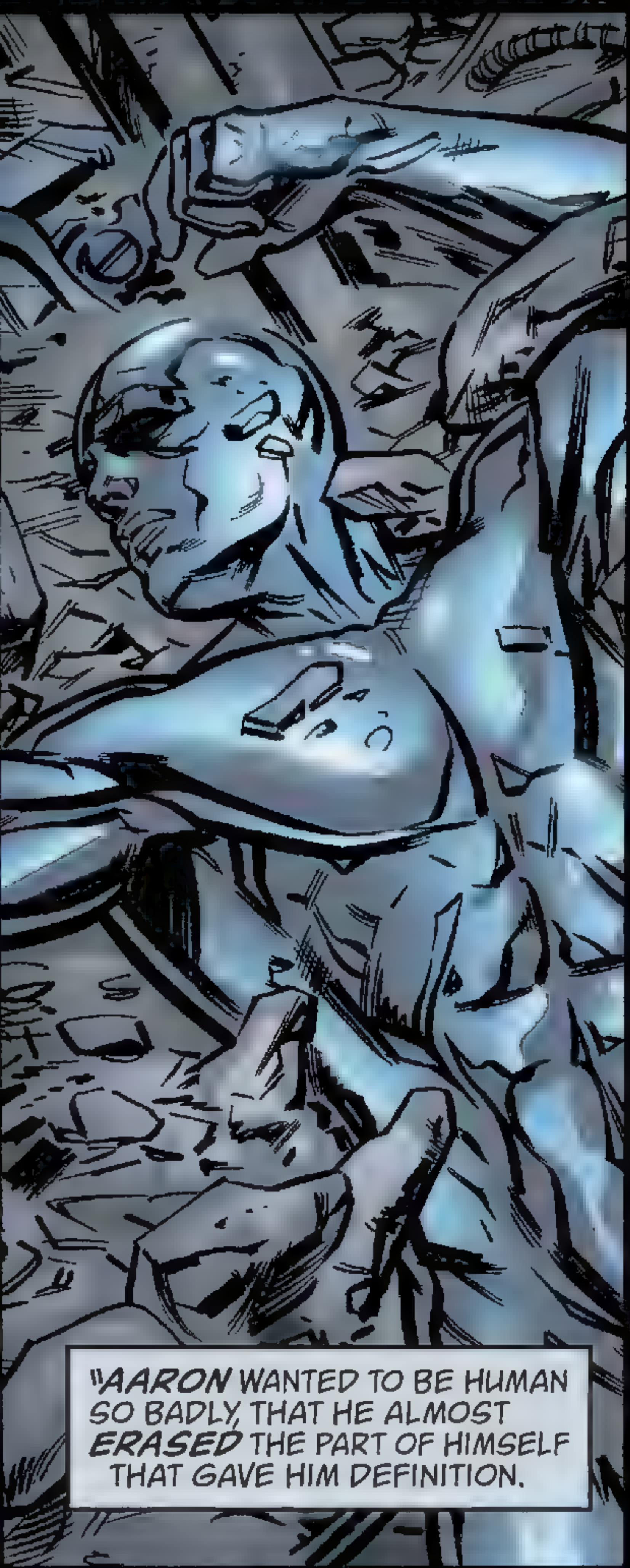


"HE ATTEMPTED TO **TAME** THE AGGRESSION RELEASED IN MANKIND IF ONLY TO **CONTAIN** ITS SPREAD TO THE REST OF THE COSMOS.

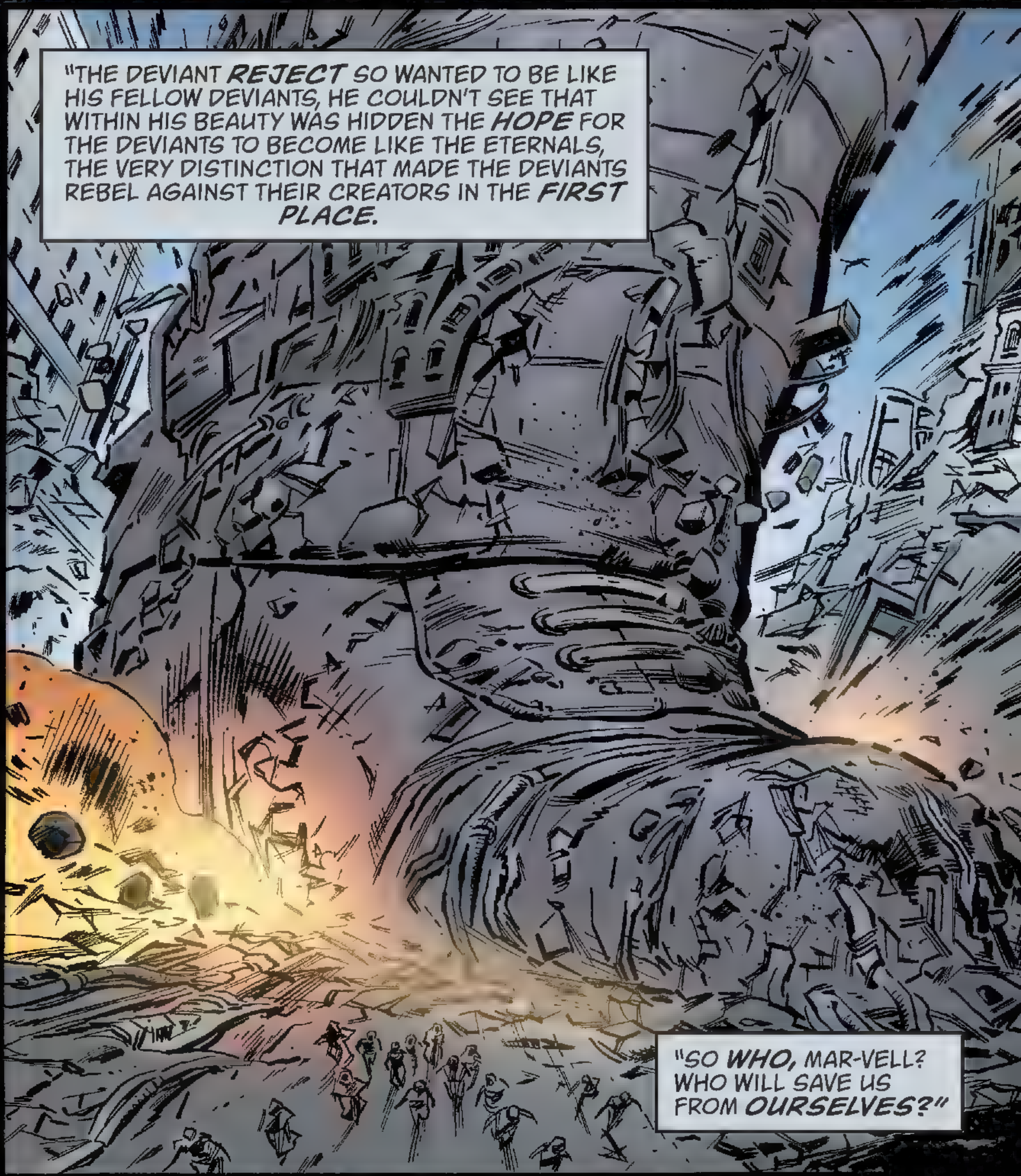
"**KURT WAGNER** BECAME THE **DEMON** HE TRIED SO HARD TO PROVE HE WAS NOT. THE **PREJUDICE** OF THE COMMON MAN TURNED HIM INTO WHAT THEY FEARED **NIGHTCRAWLER** TO TRULY BE.



"**CAPTAIN AMERICA** TRUSTED TOO MUCH IN THE POWER OF **DEMOCRACY** AND DIED AT THE HANDS OF A MOB.



"**AARON** WANTED TO BE HUMAN SO BADLY THAT HE ALMOST **ERASED** THE PART OF HIMSELF THAT GAVE HIM DEFINITION.



"THE **DEVIANT REJECT** SO WANTED TO BE LIKE HIS FELLOW DEVIANTS, HE COULDN'T SEE THAT WITHIN HIS BEAUTY WAS HIDDEN THE **HOPE** FOR THE DEVIANTS TO BECOME LIKE THE **ETERNALS**, THE VERY DISTINCTION THAT MADE THE DEVIANTS REBEL AGAINST THEIR CREATORS IN THE **FIRST PLACE**.

"SO WHO, MAR-VELL? WHO WILL SAVE US FROM **OURSELVES**?"

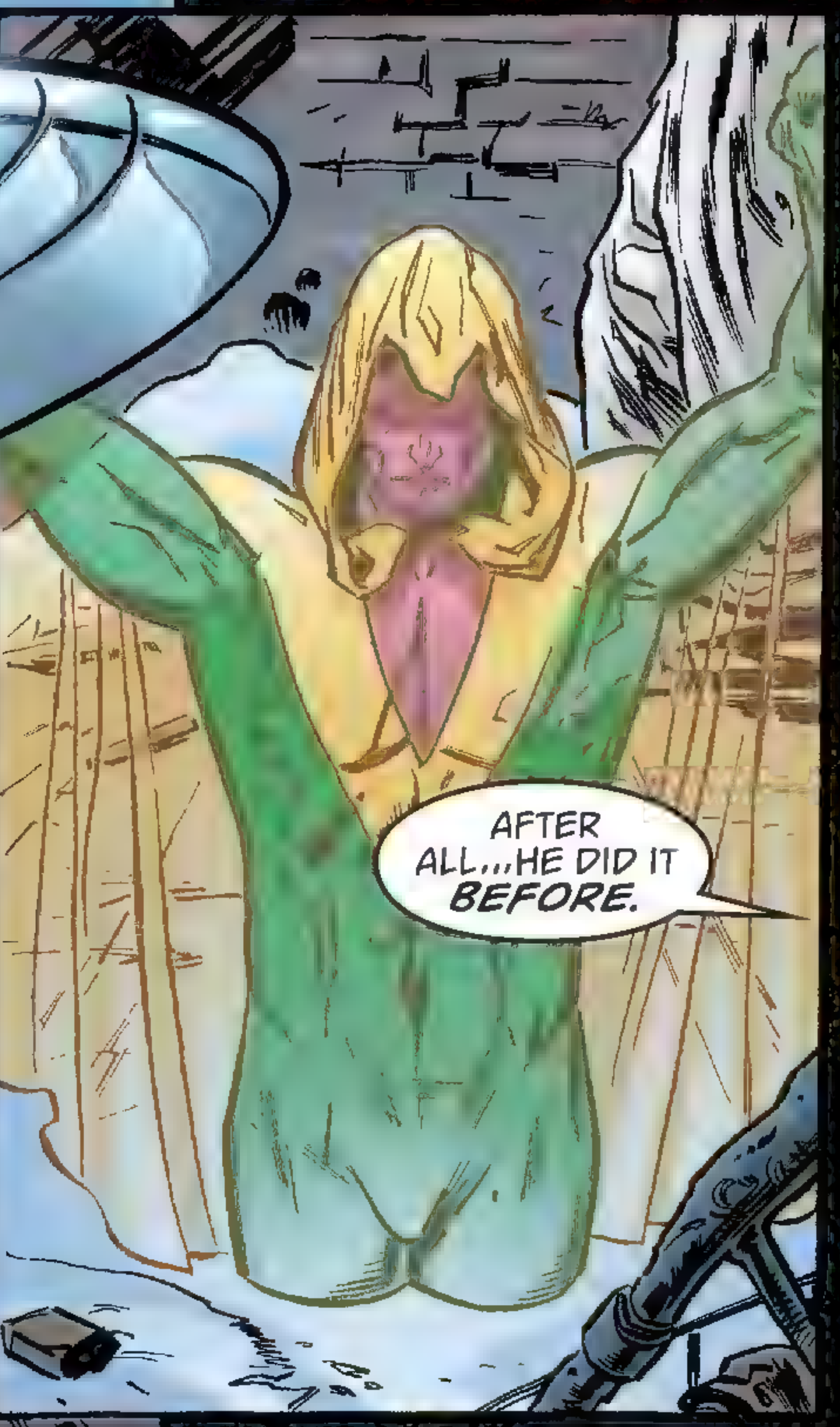


"THE CELESTIALS MADE US GODS, SO WHO DO WE PRAY TO NOW?"



GOOD JOB ON THE **SURFER ILLUSION**, SPIDERS MAN! I THINK WE BOTH KNOW THIS DISTRACTION WON'T **LAST** FOR TOO LONG!

IT WON'T HAVE TO, PETER. THERE'S SOMEONE WHO KNOWS HOW TO **DEFEAT** HIM.



AFTER ALL...HE DID IT **BEFORE**.



HOW COULD YOU LET THIS **HAPPEN?**

IT WASN'T **PETER'S** FAULT, VISION. HE WASN'T RESPONSIBLE.



YOU ARE **WRONG**, WARREN. THIS...THIS IS **ALL ABOUT** RESPONSIBILITY.

"AND WHAT OF ADAM WARLOCK, MAR-VELL? IS HE NOT THE **GREATEST** ENEMY OF HIMSELF? HE TORTURED HIMSELF BY PROTECTING A **GEM** THAT KEPT HIS SOUL AND HEART FREE FROM LOVE.

"HE FOUGHT MEPHISTO AND THANOS AND THE MAGUS ALL TO PROTECT THE **VERY THING** THAT KEPT HIM FROM EVER TRULY EXPERIENCING LIFE.

"BUT THIS IS **NO LONGER** THE CASE."

DO YOU HAVE **ANY IDEA** WHAT YOU'VE DONE BY **KIDNAPPING** HER? THIS IS MY **WIFE!**

ADAM!

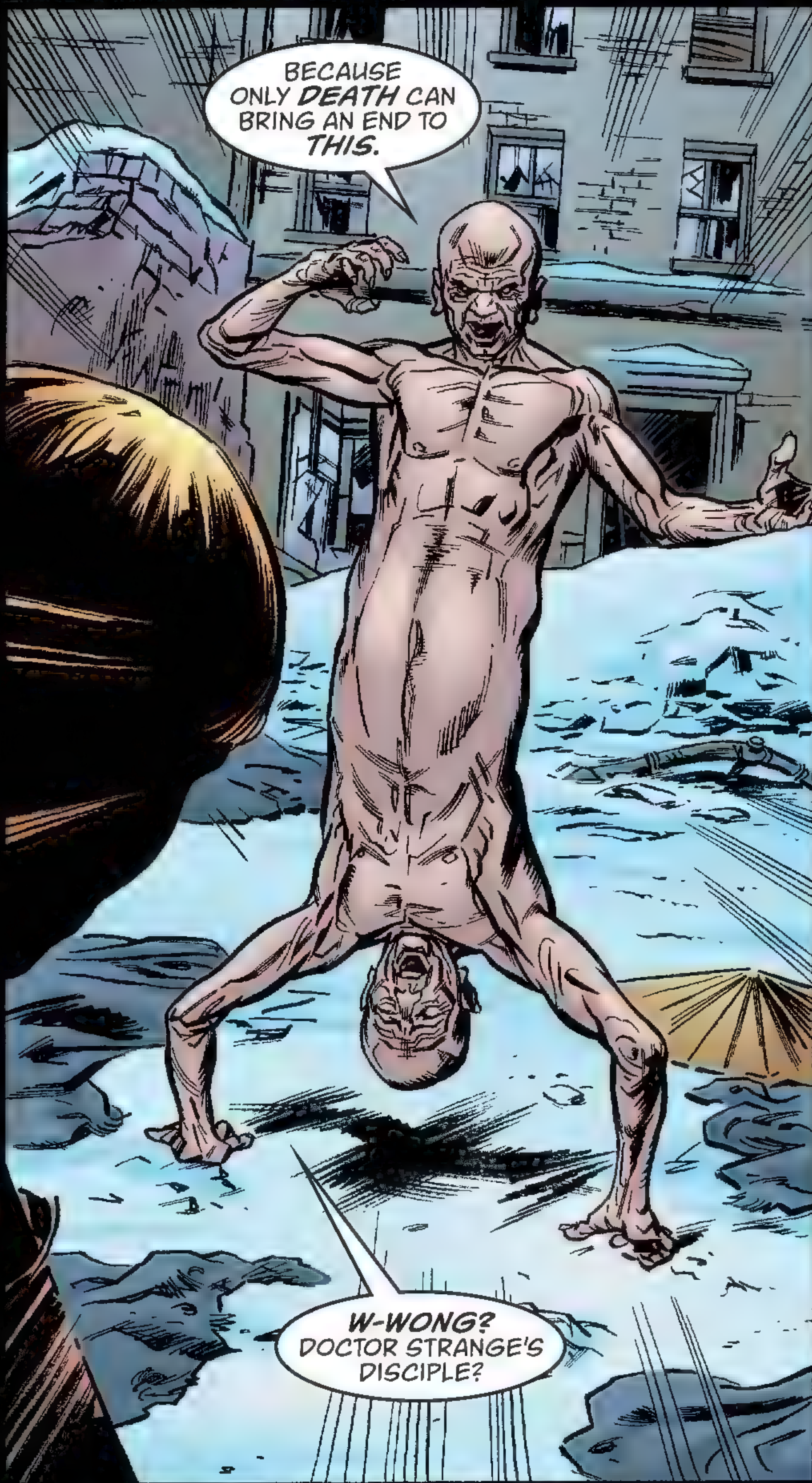
SHE'S NOT WORTH THE **EFFORT**, ADAM!

SHE'LL **BETRAY** YOU IN THE END...JUST AS **CLEA** DID **STRANGE!**

YOU SHOULD **THANK ME**, ADAM. YOU SHOULD **ALL** THANK ME FOR ENDING YOUR CRUSADE BEFORE YOU LEARNED THE **TRUE NATURE** OF DEATH!

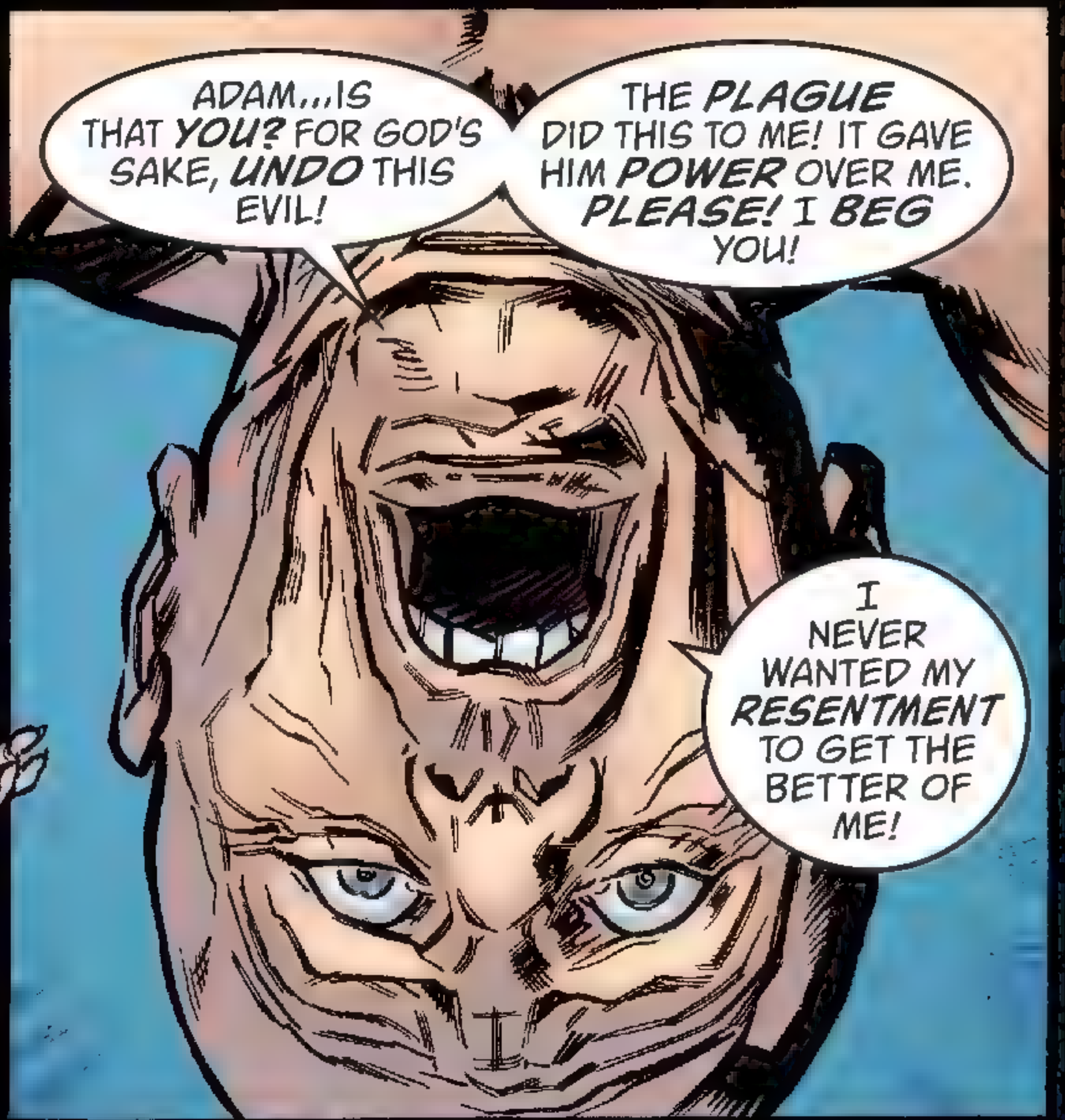
YOU BROUGHT **CREEL** BACK TO LIFE, YOU **MONSTER!**

WHY?
WHY DO YOU SERVE **DEATH?**



BECAUSE ONLY **DEATH** CAN BRING AN END TO **THIS**.

W-WONG?
DOCTOR STRANGE'S DISCIPLE?



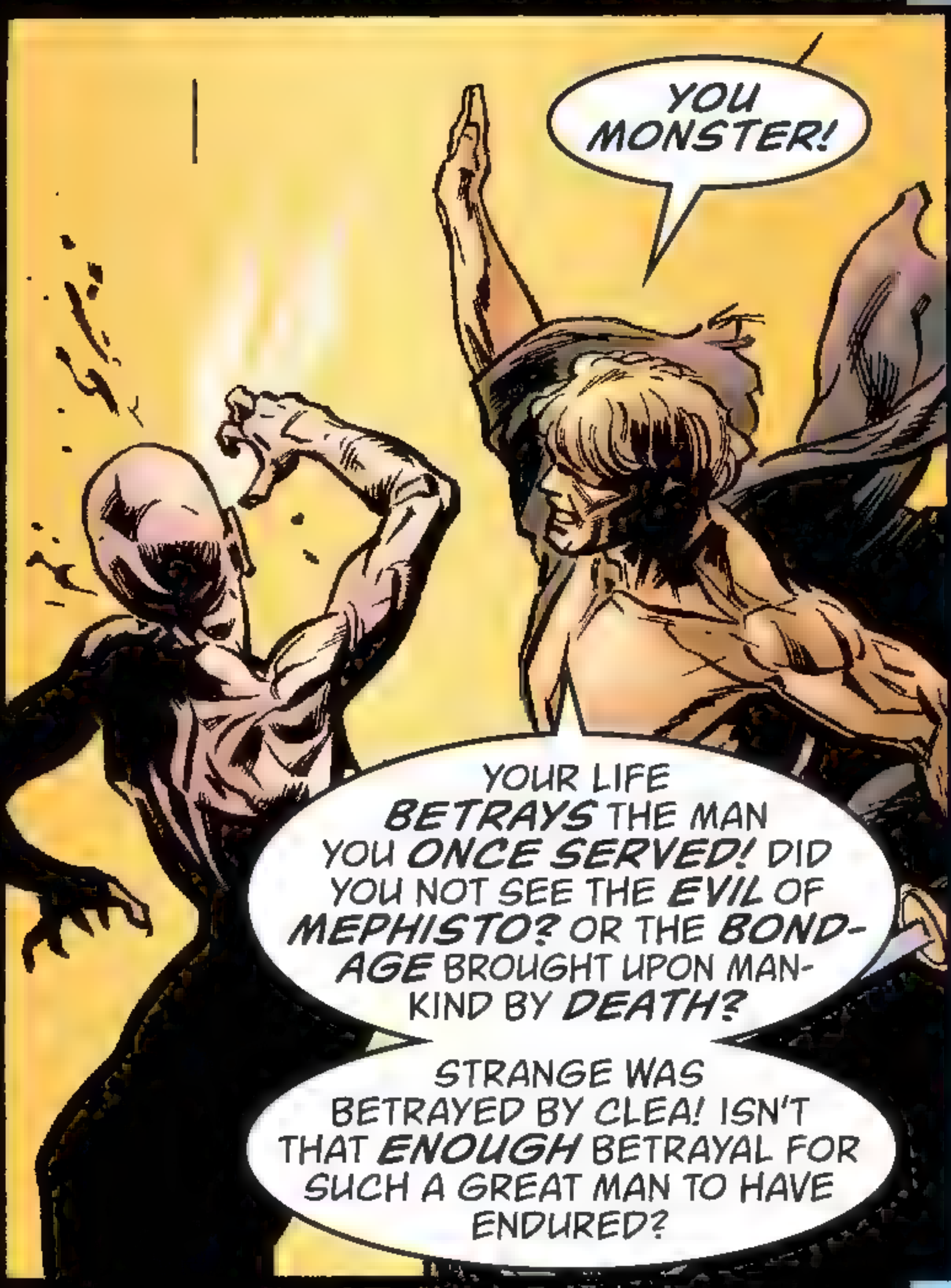
ADAM... IS THAT YOU? FOR GOD'S SAKE, **UNDO** THIS EVIL!

THE **PLAGUE** DID THIS TO ME! IT GAVE HIM **POWER** OVER ME. **PLEASE!** I **BEG** YOU!

I NEVER WANTED MY **RESENTMENT** TO GET THE BETTER OF ME!



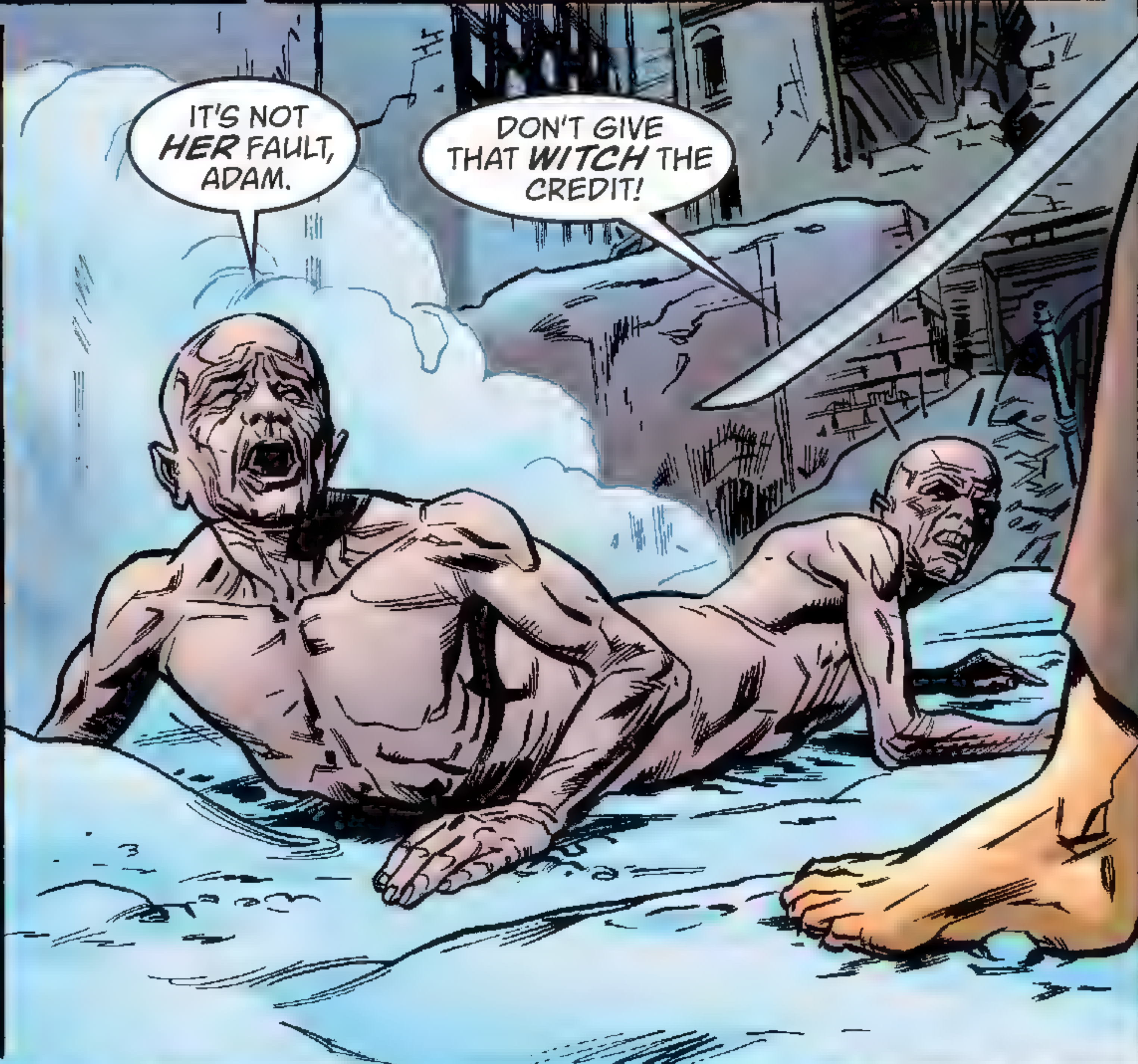
I WILL NEVER BE A **SERVANT** AGAIN!



YOU MONSTER!

YOUR LIFE **BETRAYS** THE MAN YOU **ONCE SERVED!** DID YOU NOT SEE THE **EVIL** OF **MEPHISTO?** OR THE **BOND-AGE** BROUGHT UPON MAN-KIND BY **DEATH?**

STRANGE WAS BETRAYED BY **CLEA!** ISN'T THAT **ENOUGH** BETRAYAL FOR SUCH A GREAT MAN TO HAVE ENDURED?



IT'S NOT **HER** FAULT, ADAM.

DON'T GIVE THAT **WITCH** THE CREDIT!

"I HAD ALREADY TRANSFERRED MY LOYALTIES TO MY **NEW MASTER** WHEN I BEGAN USING STRANGE'S OWN MAGIC TO SUGGEST THE '**MASTER'S NEGLIGENCE**' OF CLEA WITH HIS EVERY SERVILE GESTURE.

"I WAS TOLD WHAT TO **SAY** TO HER... AND HOW TO MAKE **CERTAIN** THAT MY MASTER WAS RENDERED POWERLESS IN BOTH THIS WORLD AND THE **NEXT**. I SUGGESTED HER LIAISON WITH **LOKI**. I--"

BUT...I THOUGHT YOU WERE WITH THE **TONG OF CREEL**? I DON'T UNDERSTAND.

YOU WILL, EVE.

HE PROMISED ME A **WORLD** OF MY OWN.

I SERVE **DEATH**. AND HER FATHER, **MEPHISTO**.

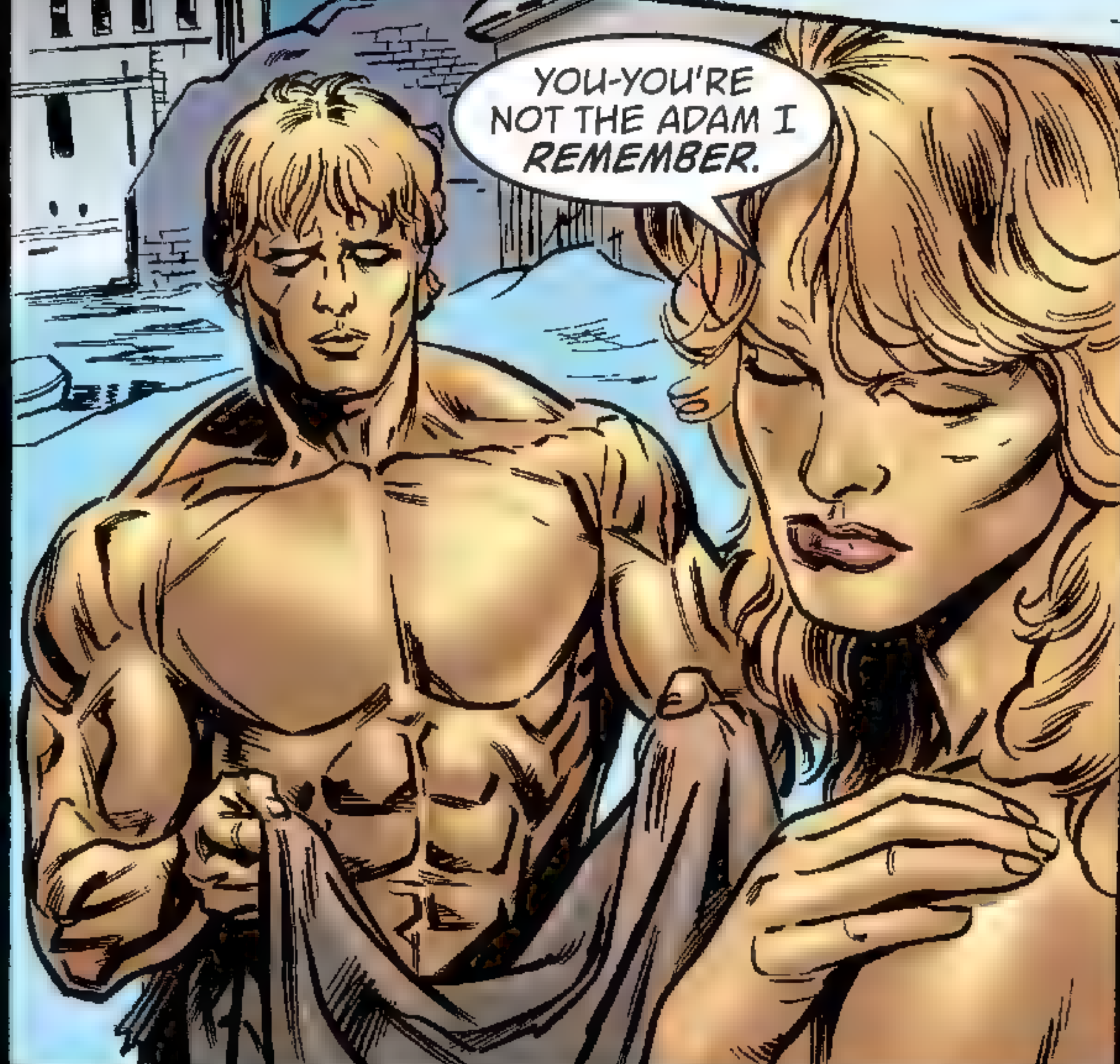
IF THAT IS WHO YOU SERVE, THEN YOU SHOULD JOIN THEM.

BOTH OF YOU.



EVE...

...MY
EVE.

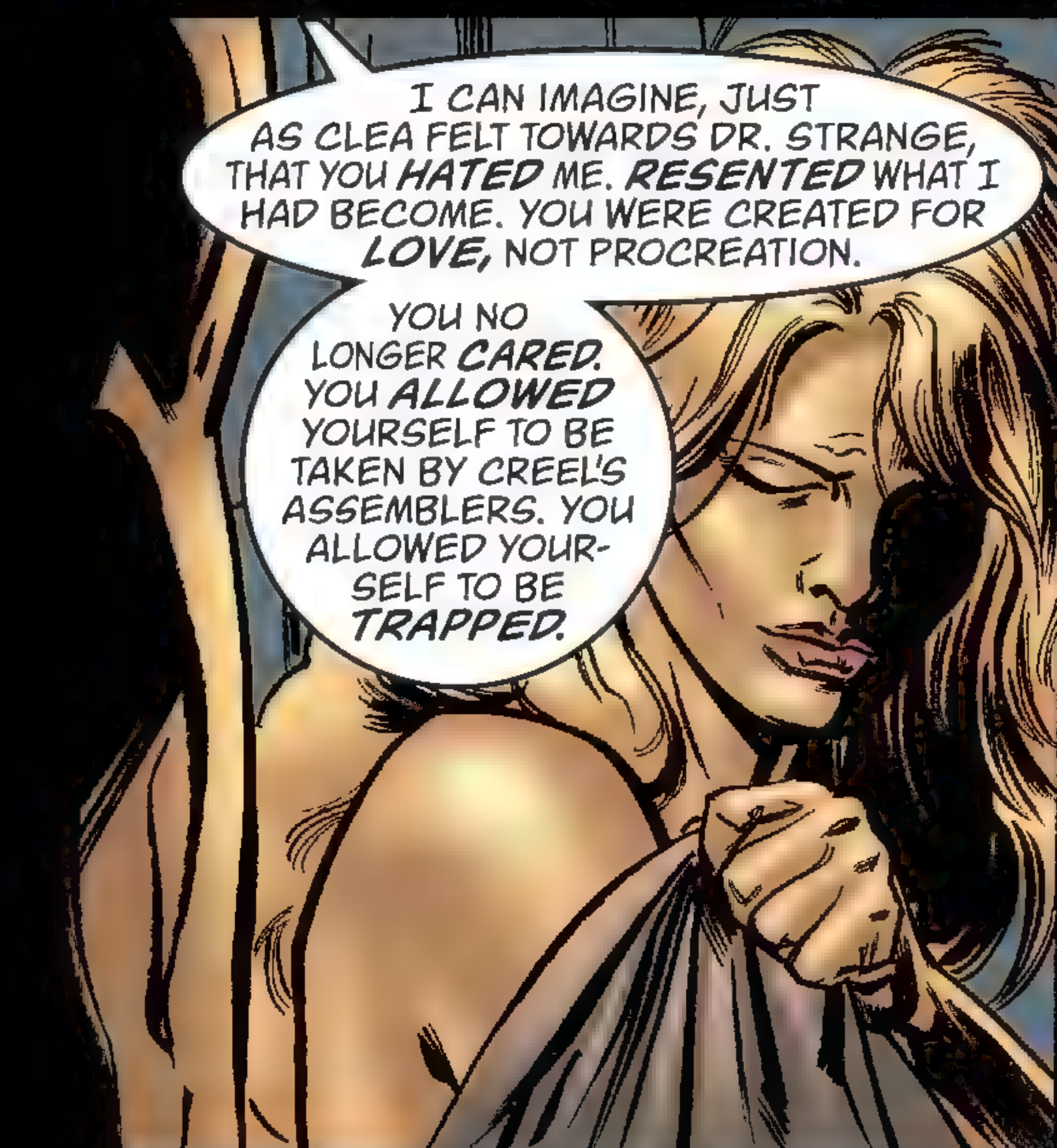


YOU-YOU'RE
NOT THE ADAM I
REMEMBER.



YOU'VE
NEVER EVEN
SEEN ME
BEFORE,
EVE.

I AM THE **ADAM** YOU
WERE CREATED TO BE THE **EVE**
FOR, NOT **WARLOCK**. NOT SOME
MANIPULATED CHAMPION WITH A SOUL
GEM THAT KEPT HIM FROM **LOVING**.
I AM **HIM** FOR WHOM YOU
WERE MADE **HER**.



I CAN IMAGINE, JUST
AS CLEA FELT TOWARDS DR. STRANGE,
THAT YOU **HATED** ME. **RESENTED** WHAT I
HAD BECOME. YOU WERE CREATED FOR
LOVE, NOT PROCREATION.

YOU NO
LONGER **CARED**.
YOU **ALLOWED**
YOURSELF TO BE
TAKEN BY CREEL'S
ASSEMBLERS. YOU
ALLOWED YOUR-
SELF TO BE
TRAPPED.



BUT I
AM **FREE** NOW,
EVE.

I AM **FREE**.
AND SO CAN **YOU**
BE...BUT ONLY IF YOU
ARE **WILLING** TO
LOVE ME AGAIN.

"REED RICHARDS WANTED HIS WIFE BACK, AND IS NOW PLANNING TO *LEAVE* THIS WORLD HE HAS SAVED OVER AND OVER AGAIN, FOR ONLY THE *HOPE* THAT SHE WILL NOT DIE AGAIN.

"HE HAS FORGOTTEN THE *WORLD* HE HAS SACRIFICED HIMSELF FOR TIME AND TIME AGAIN, BUT HE WON'T SACRIFICE *HER*."

IT IS NOT SURPRISING, TRITON, THAT *QUEEN MEDUSA* WILL NOT LEAVE EARTH WITHOUT HER *SON*. HER *LOVE* IS HER FLAW.

DOCTOR RICHARDS?

YOU'RE LEAVING?

AS SOON AS *BEN* AND *ALICIA* RETURN FROM FINISHING THEIR PROJECT FOR MARSHALL MULDOON.

YOU CAN JOIN US, IF YOU WISH. ACCORDING TO MY CALCULATIONS, THE EARTH HAS ONLY A *FEW WEEKS* LEFT.

BUT YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND! I KNOW HOW TO *SAVE* THE EARTH! *NATHAN SUMMERS* TOLD ME. I MET HIM IN THE SAVAGE LAND.

MY DATA SAYS THE *RE-POLARIZATION* IS DESTROYING THE EARTH. THE MELTING OF THE POLAR ICE CAPS, THE COLLAPSE OF THE VARIOUS CRUSTS ON EARTH, EXTREME CLIMATE CHANGES--*TAKE YOUR PICK*.

I COULD *RESTORE* THE BALANCE OF VIBRANIUM. I CAN *CONTROL* IT. *REDISTRIBUTE* IT.

BUT THERE ISN'T *ENOUGH* VIBRANIUM ON THE PLANET TO DO THAT!

YES, THERE IS.

"I'M *TIRED* OF SEEING EVERYTHING
THAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN, MAR-VELL.

"I'M TIRED OF SEEING OUR *WEAKNESSES*
GROW INSIDE OF US...STEALING MY FRIENDS,
MY FAMILY, MY CITY."

LIKE I *ALWAYS*
DO, HONEY. BY CLOSING
MY EYES AND CROSSING
MY FINGERS..."

HOW DO
WE FIGHT SOME-
THING LIKE *THAT*,
DAD?

"...AND WAITING FOR
THE *CAVALRY*."



"I WANT YOU TO **TAKE**
THESE EYES, MAR-VELL!
IT'S **YOUR** CONSCIOUS-
NESS. TAKE THEM..."

"...DAMN YOU,
TAKE MY EYES."

"HERE. I'VE
SEEN ALL I
WANT TO."

"HERE...
HERE..."

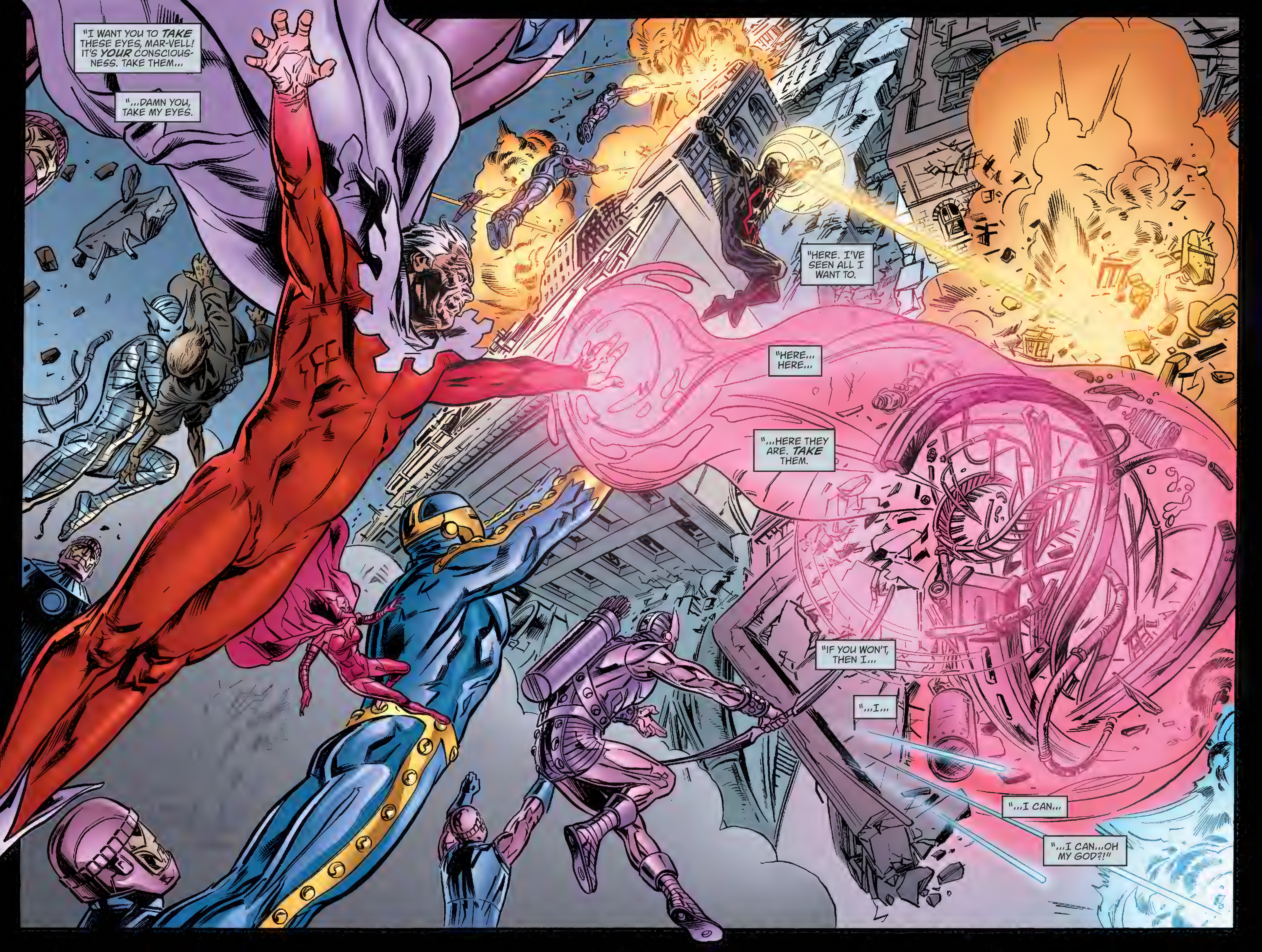
"...HERE THEY
ARE. TAKE
THEM."

"IF YOU WON'T,
THEN I..."

"...I..."

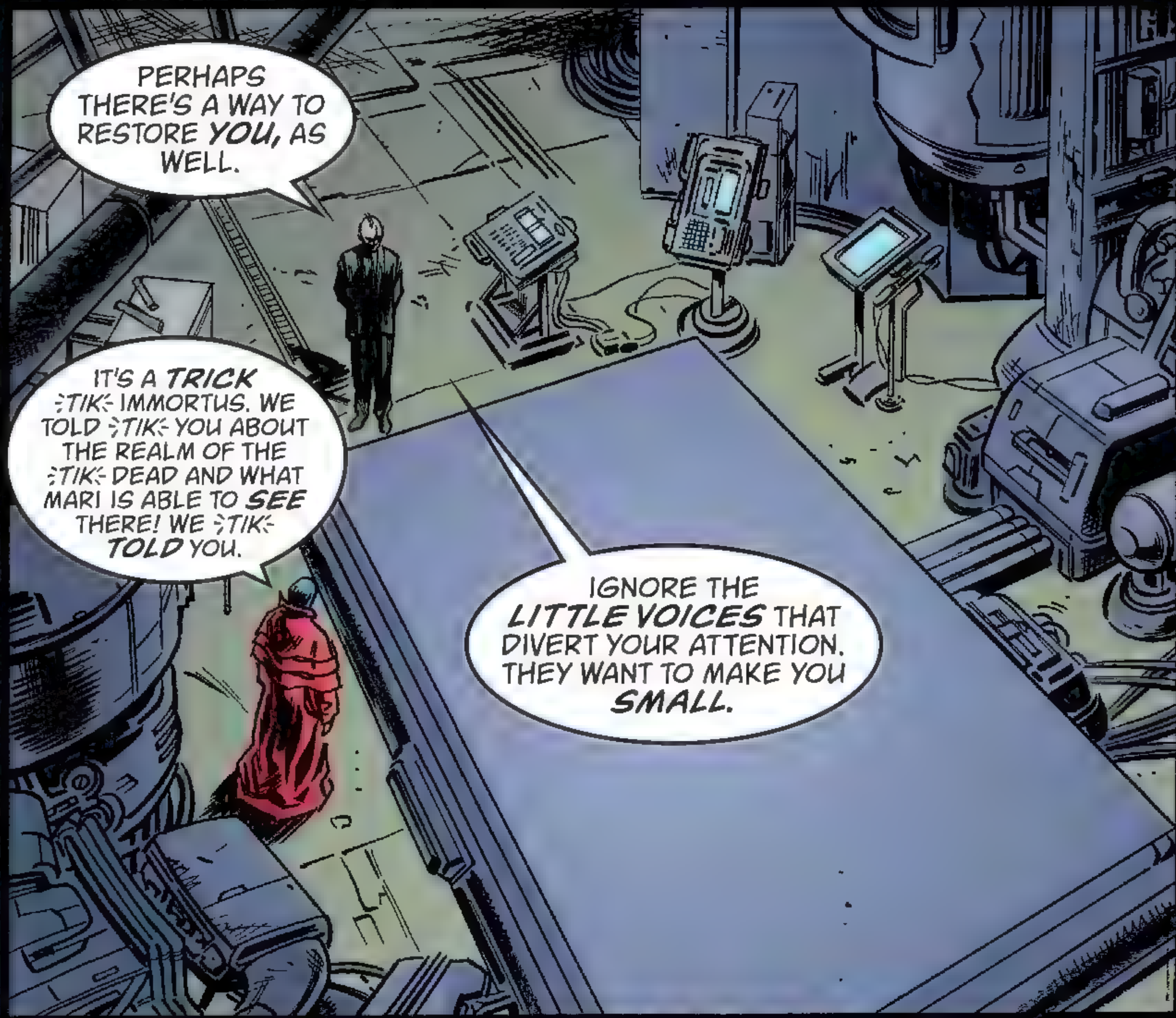
"...I CAN..."

"...I CAN...OH
MY GOD?!"





"I TOOK IT FROM RICHARDS. IT CAN RESTORE YOU TO **LIMBO**. YOU CAN **CHANGE EVERYTHING** AGAIN. IT'S DOOM'S **TIME MACHINE**, IMMORTUS."



PERHAPS THERE'S A WAY TO RESTORE **YOU**, AS WELL.

IT'S A **TRICK** ~~TIK~~ IMMORTUS. WE TOLD ~~TIK~~ YOU ABOUT THE REALM OF THE ~~TIK~~ DEAD AND WHAT MARI IS ABLE TO **SEE** THERE! WE ~~TIK~~ TOLD YOU.

IGNORE THE **LITTLE VOICES** THAT DIVERT YOUR ATTENTION. THEY WANT TO MAKE YOU **SMALL**.

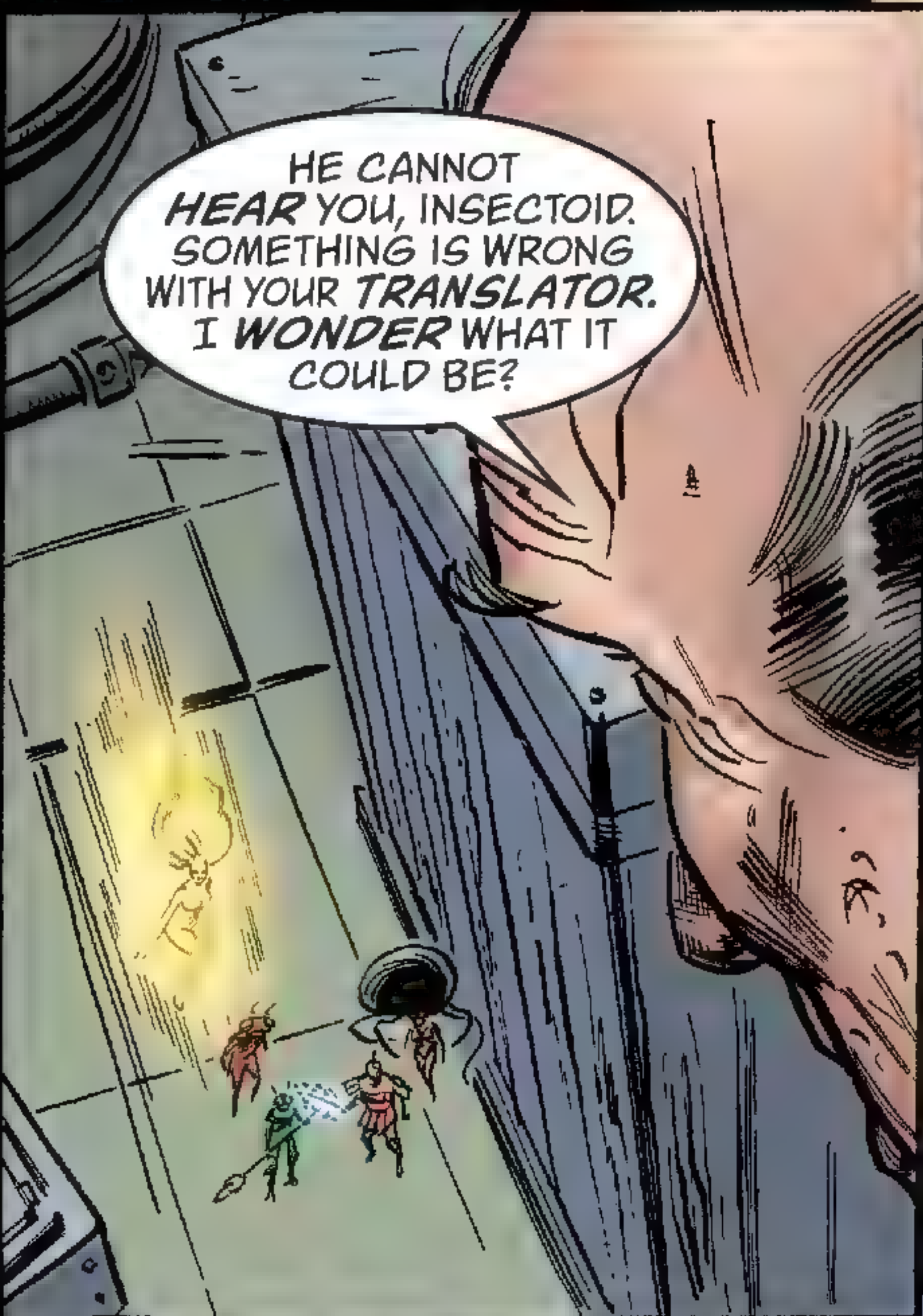


THINK ABOUT THE **DESTINY** OF MANKIND.



YOU ARE THE REASON WE'RE HERE, IMMORTUS! WE WERE SENT TO **WARN** YOU FROM DEATH'S REALM!

MR. CHURCH IS ~~TIK~~ **MEPHISTO**. HE LOCKED YOU OUT OF **LIMBO**! MARI SAYS THAT HER **HUSBAND** ~~TIK~~ WHO FIGHTS AGAINST DEATH IN THE LAND OF THE DEAD, CAN ~~TIK~~ **VERIFY** THIS.



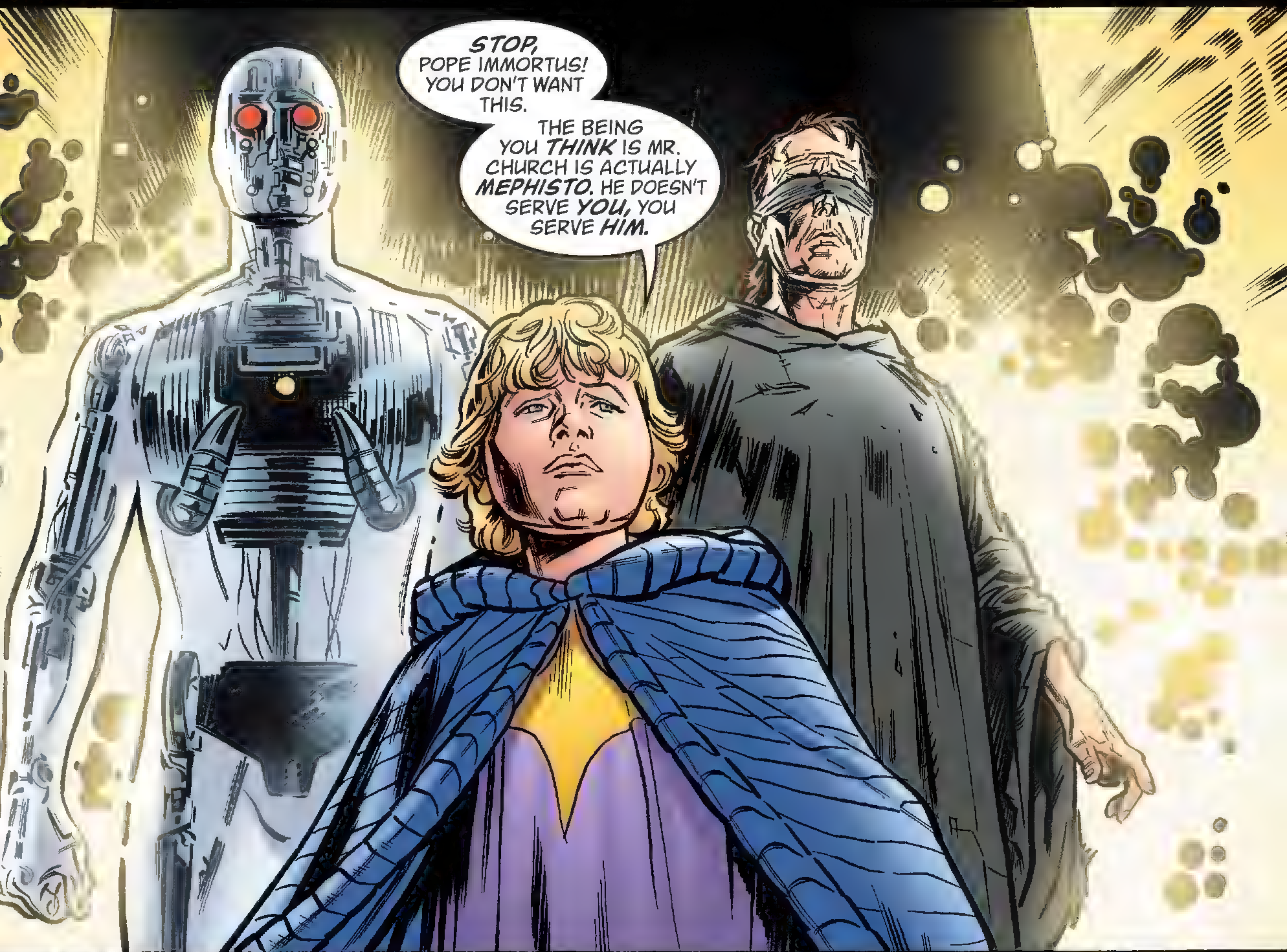
HE CANNOT **HEAR** YOU, INSECTOID. SOMETHING IS WRONG WITH YOUR **TRANSLATOR**. I **WONDER** WHAT IT COULD BE?

I CAN STEP OUT OF **TIME** AGAIN? I CAN BE THE **LORD** OF **LIMBO** AGAIN?

AND SO MUCH **MORE**. YOU COULD GO **BACK**. MAKE CERTAIN YOU **NEVER** GET LOCKED OUT OF **LIMBO** AGAIN.



UNDO THIS **TERRIBLE** TURN OF EVENTS.



STOP,
POPE IMMORTUS!
YOU DON'T WANT
THIS.

THE BEING
YOU *THINK* IS MR.
CHURCH IS ACTUALLY
MEPHISTO. HE DOESN'T
SERVE *YOU*, YOU
SERVE *HIM*.



THIS IS *NOT*
THE DESTINY YOU
WISHED FOR, IMMORTUS.
CREATE A **NEW**
WORLD.

A
BETTER
WORLD.



I
HAVE IT,
MAR-
VELL!



I WILL NOT BE
STOPPED AGAIN! YOU
TOOK **WAGNER** FROM ME!
I WON'T LET YOU TAKE
KANG, AS WELL!

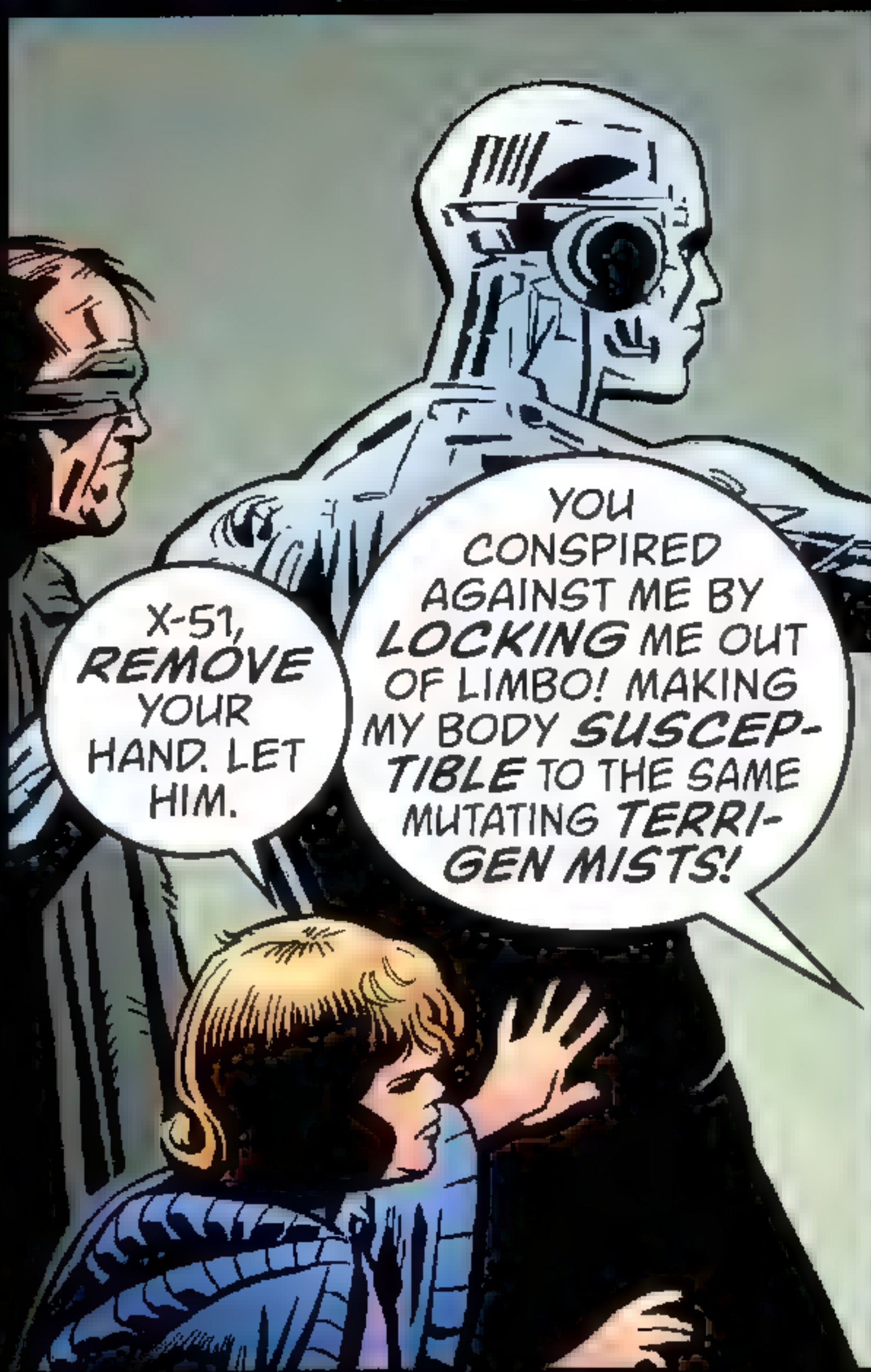
KANG?



I AM NOT KANG!



YOU DID THIS! YOU TOLD ME HOW I COULD MAKE MY DREAM OF MANKIND'S DESTINY A *REALITY*! YOU PITTED ME AGAINST *RICHARDS*!



X-51, REMOVE YOUR HAND. LET HIM.

YOU CONSPIRED AGAINST ME BY **LOCKING** ME OUT OF LIMBO! MAKING MY BODY **SUSCEPTIBLE** TO THE SAME MUTATING **TERRIGEN MISTS**!



NO! STOP!

YOU HAVE REASSEMBLED THE **MONSTER** THAT DESTROYED THE **AVENGERS**! THEY WERE MEN OF **HONOR**!



AFTER THE **TORCH** FALLS, WILL CREEEL THEN DESTROY MY **CHURCH**? HAS THIS ALL BEEN TO CREATE A WORLD OF SUCH **CHAOS** THAT I WOULD USE THIS DAMNABLE **MACHINE** TO CHANGE IT?



YOU HAVE MADE ME **KANG** AGAIN!

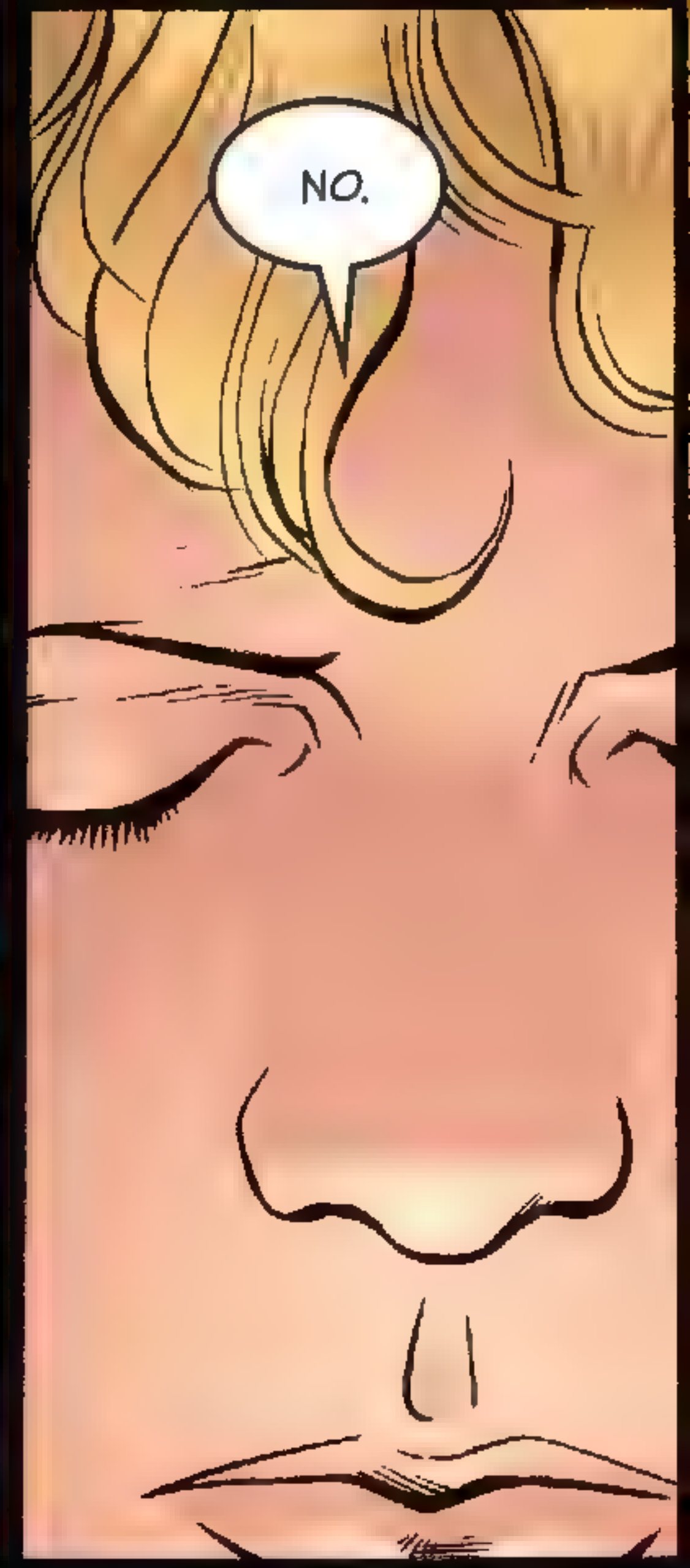
AND FOR **THAT**, DEVIL, I WILL **NEVER** FORGIVE YOU!



ACTUALLY,
YOU ARE **NOT** THE
DEVIL.



NO?



NO.



YOU
NEVER
WERE.

JUST
ANOTHER **STOUGE**
OF THE CELESTIALS
BELIEVING YOU WERE
SOMETHING YOU
WEREN'T.



MOLDED BY **MYTH**
AND **SUPERSTITION**
IS ALL. YOU CAUSED ALL THE
ALTERNATE REALITIES FOR
NOTHING, FOR A JUDGMENT
THAT **DIDN'T EXIST**. YOU
ARE **NOT** THE DEVIL.



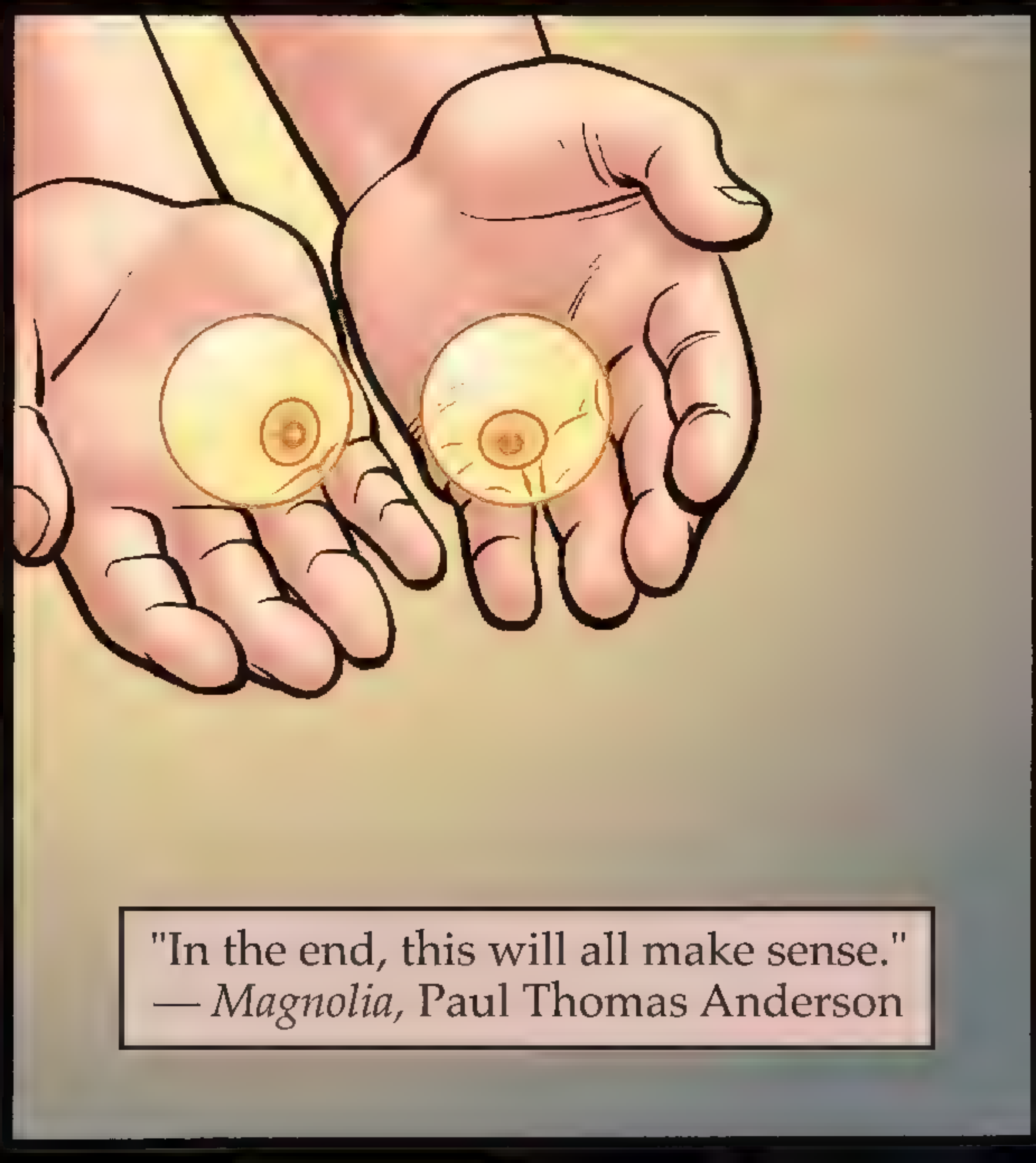
THE LORD OF
LIES IS A **LIE** HIMSELF.
THIS HAS ALL BEEN FOR
NOTHING.



HOW CAN
YOU **SAY** SUCH
A THING? YOU NO
LONGER HAVE THE
EYES I GAVE YOU!
THE CONSCIOUS-
NESS IS **GONE**!
I CAN **SENSE**
THIS!



I CAN
STILL
SEE.



"In the end, this will all make sense."
— Magnolia, Paul Thomas Anderson

UNIVERSE



UNIVERSE X

I S S U E X

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YOU WERE NEVER THE **DEVIL**, MEPHISTO.

I SHOULD BE **BLIND**...

...BUT INSTEAD, I WATCH MYSELF FROM WHERE MY **EYES** REST IN MAR-VELL'S HANDS. HE HAS NOT YET ADDED THEIR POWER TO HIS OWN.



THE EYES WERE GIVEN TO ME BY **MEPHISTO**. THEY ALLOWED ME TO **SEE THE FUTURE**, BECAUSE THEY WERE A PIECE OF OMNISCIENCE.

THEY ALSO ALLOW ME TO SEE MEPHISTO FOR WHAT HE **TRULY** IS.



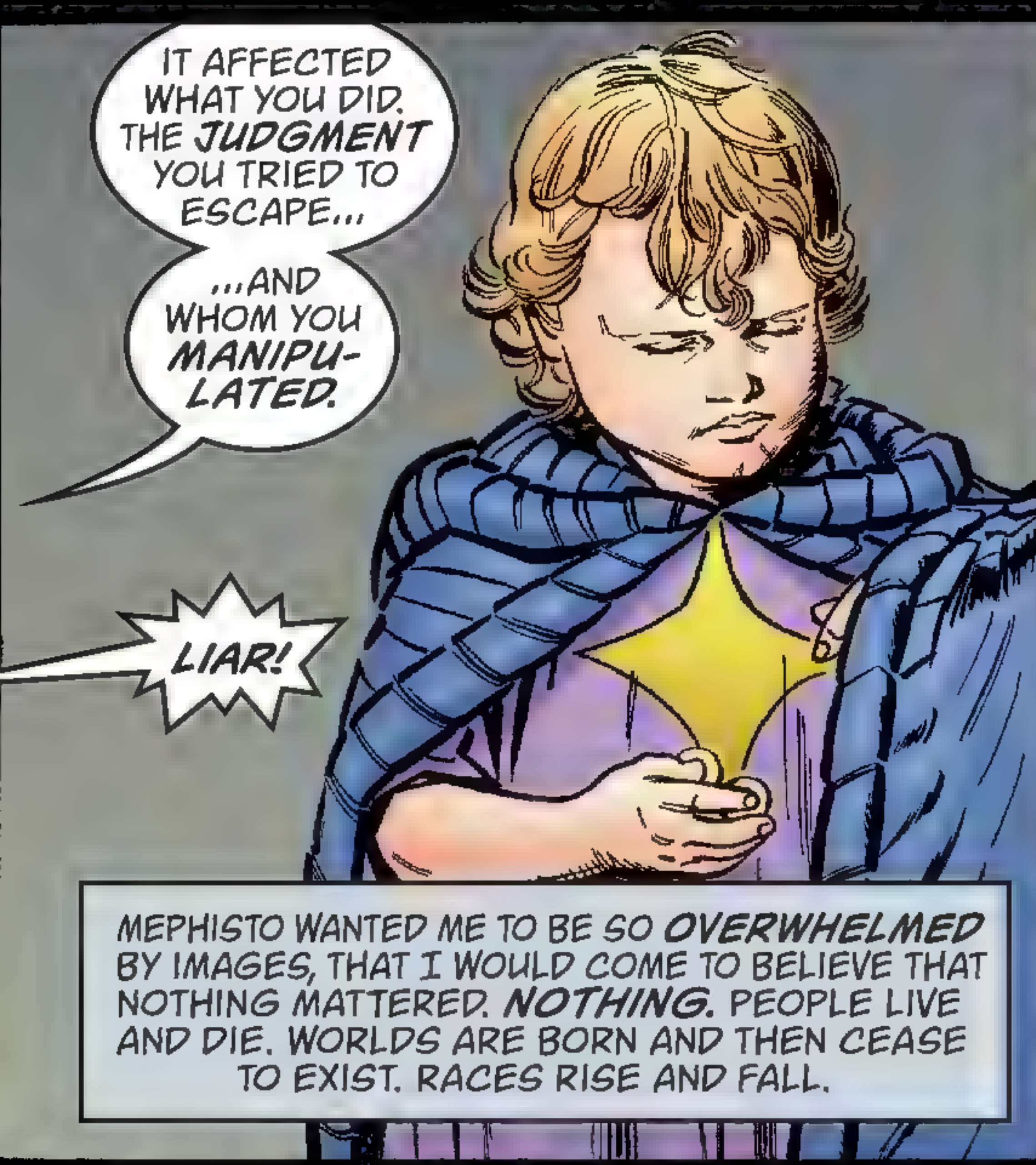
YOU'RE ONLY ANOTHER POOR FOOL...

SHUT UP, RICHMOND! PLUCKING YOUR **EYES** OUT MADE YOU **MAD**!

YOU DID IT BECAUSE YOU AND THE REST OF THE WORLD BELIEVED SOMETHING ABOUT YOU THAT **WASN'T TRUE**...



...IT GAVE YOU **FORM** AND **AFFECTED** WHAT YOU BECAME.

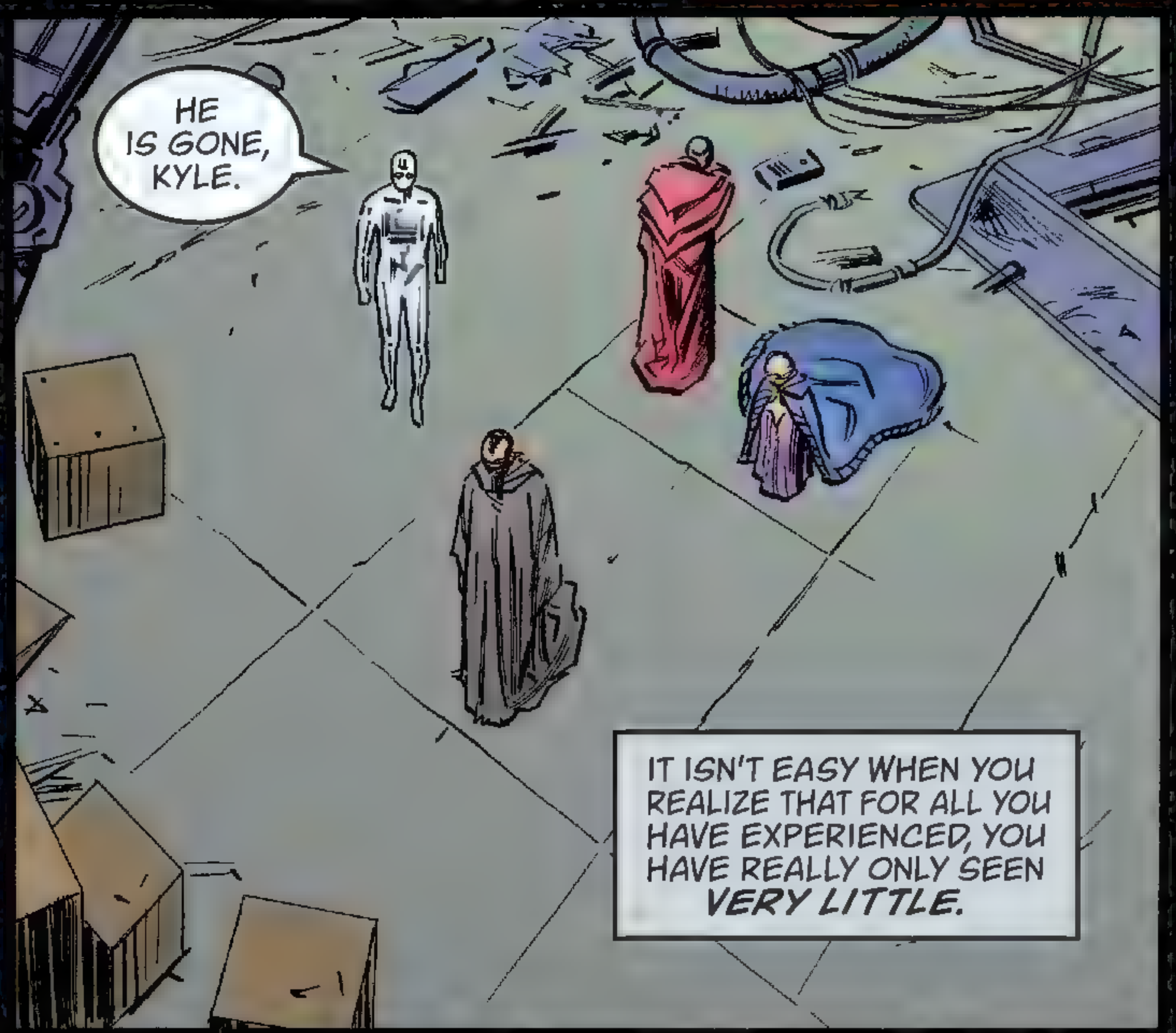


IT AFFECTED WHAT YOU DID. THE **JUDGMENT** YOU TRIED TO ESCAPE...

...AND WHOM YOU **MANIPULATED**.

LIAR!

MEPHISTO WANTED ME TO BE SO **OVERWHELMED** BY IMAGES, THAT I WOULD COME TO BELIEVE THAT NOTHING MATTERED. **NOTHING**. PEOPLE LIVE AND DIE. WORLDS ARE BORN AND THEN CEASE TO EXIST. RACES RISE AND FALL.



HE IS GONE, KYLE.

IT ISN'T EASY WHEN YOU REALIZE THAT FOR ALL YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED, YOU HAVE REALLY ONLY SEEN **VERY LITTLE**.

MY NAME IS **KYLE RICHMOND**. I WASN'T A VERY GOOD SUPER HERO. I WAS AN EVEN **WORSE** HUMAN BEING. PERHAPS THAT IS WHY **MEPHISTO** CHOSE ME AS THE **HIDING PLACE** FOR OMNISCIENCE.

HOW COULD I HAVE **KNOWN** WHAT WAS INSIDE OF ME?

HOW COULD I, OF ALL PEOPLE, HAVE **GUESSED** HOW IT WOULD ALL FIT TOGETHER?

THE KREE/ SKRULL WAR.

THE SEDUCTION OF ISAAC CHRISTIANS.

THE FIRST COMING OF CAPTAIN MAR-VELL TO EARTH.

THE MUTATION OF IMMORTUS.

THE DEATH OF THE GARGOYLE.

THE CORRUPTION OF NIGHTCRAWLER.

THE WAR OVER THE CURE FOR MANKIND'S MUTATION.

THE REASSEMBLY OF THE AVENGERS' KILLER.

THE KIDNAPPING OF ADAM WARLOCK'S WIFE.

GALACTUS.

DR. DOOM'S TIME MACHINE.

THE CAPTAIN BRITAIN CORPS.

THE CREATION OF ALTERNATE REALITIES AND HISTORIES.

I SEE THAT WHAT HAPPENS HERE AFFECTS OTHER WORLDS. WHAT EXISTS HERE IS **CARRIED ON** INTO OTHER REALMS.

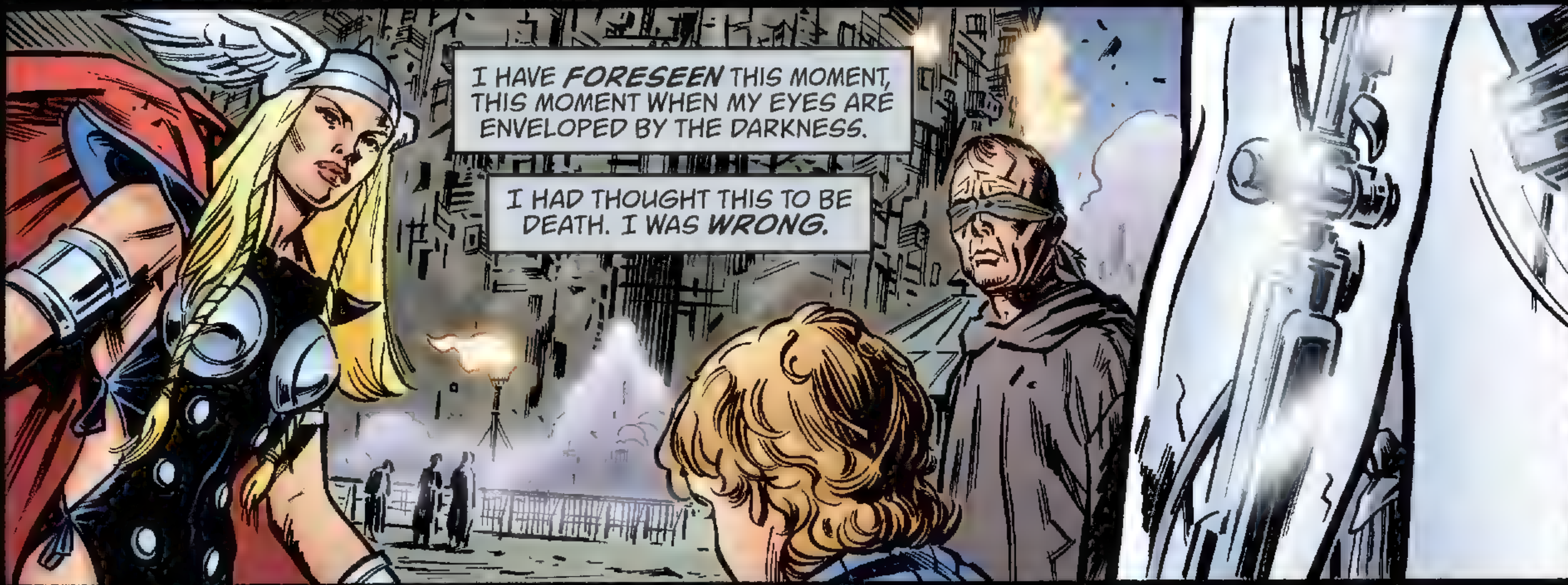
IT **ALL** MATTERS. EVERY MOMENT.

WE JUST DON'T **SEE** IT.

I JUST GOT THE **BIG PICTURE**.

DESPITE MEPHISTO'S HOPES THAT I WOULD REMAIN AS I WAS, EVEN HAVING A PIECE OF OMNISCIENCE HAS **CHANGED** ME.

IT'S NOT EVERY DAY YOU DISCOVER JUST HOW **POWERLESS** ANY OF US REALLY ARE.



I HAVE *FORESEEN* THIS MOMENT, THIS MOMENT WHEN MY EYES ARE ENVELOPED BY THE DARKNESS.

I HAD THOUGHT THIS TO BE DEATH. I WAS *WRONG*.

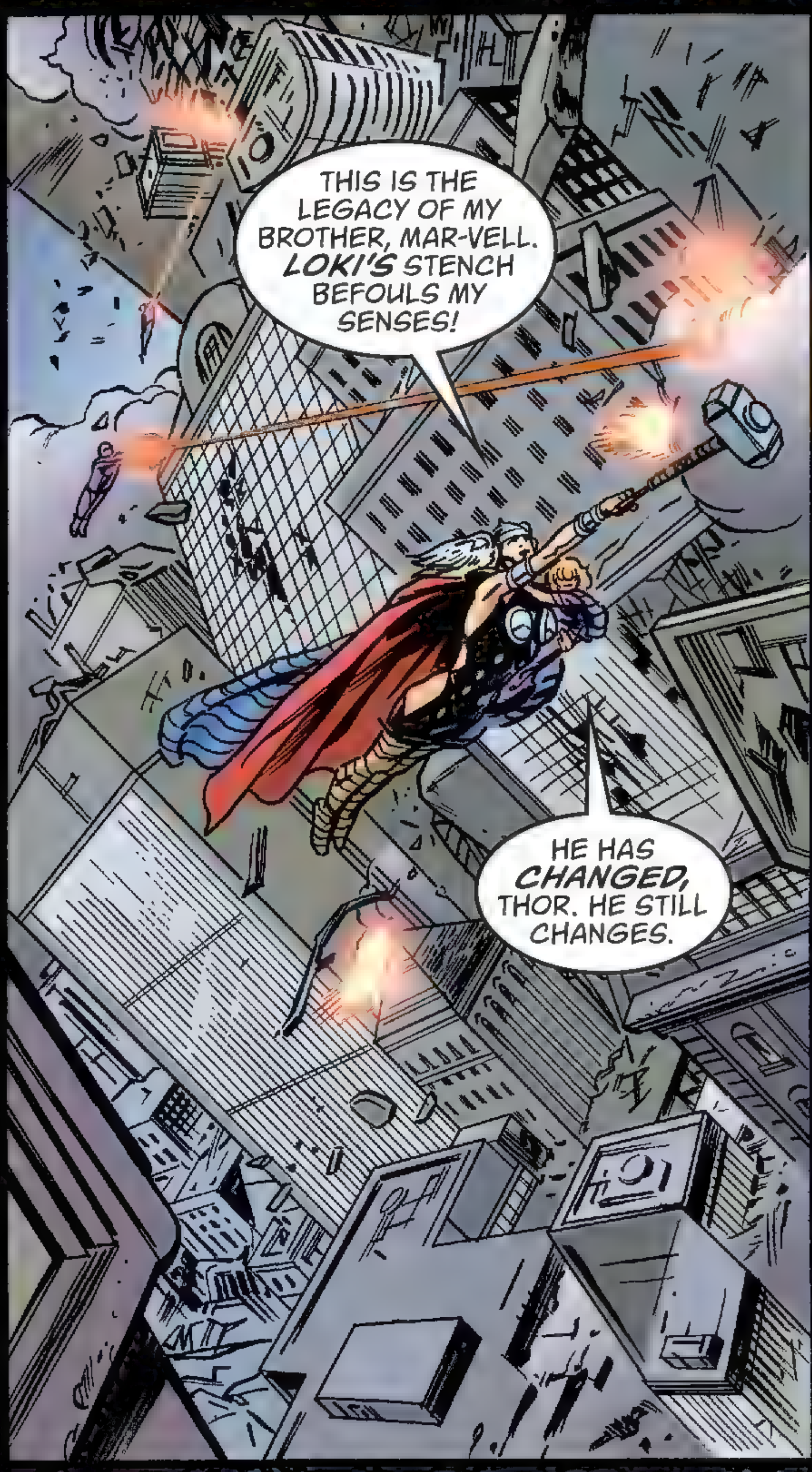


THANK YOU, KYLE. YOU'RE A GOOD MAN.

IF YOU ONLY KNEW, I THINK TO MYSELF. AND THEN I REALIZE, *HE DOES*. AND I BEGIN TO WEEP. BUT I CAN'T BECAUSE I DON'T HAVE *EYES*.



THE *SILVER SURFER* FELL THROUGH THE STREET, THOR! HE'S UNDER THE SURFACE. WE NEED TO GET CLOSER!



THIS IS THE LEGACY OF MY BROTHER, MAR-VELL. *LOKI'S* STENCH BEFOULS MY SENSES!

HE HAS *CHANGED*, THOR. HE STILL CHANGES.



THERE IS THE *SURFER*!



MAR-VELL!
TAKE THEE
CARE!



WHAT--?



SO NOBLE A
SOUL **CANNOT** MEET
HELA ON HER ANCIENT
SHORE! NOT ONE WHO
CAN LIFT MY **SACRED**
HAMMER!



'TIS A
MIRACLE INDEED!
CAPTAIN AMERICA'S
SHIELD!

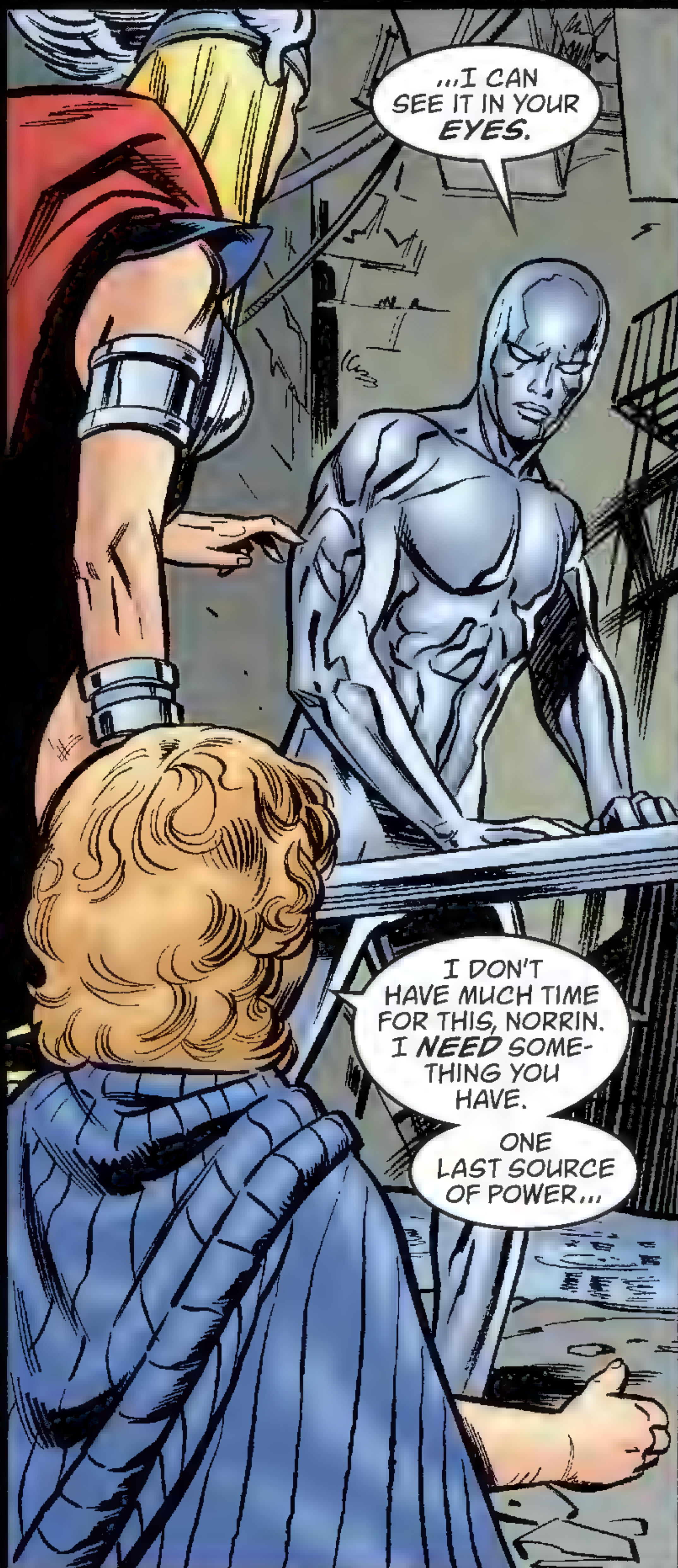
WHEN THIS
IS ALL OVER, THOR,
WE MUST SPEAK
ABOUT THE NATURE
OF **MJOLNIR**...

...AND ABOUT
THE **TRUTH** YOUR
BROTHER SPEAKS
OF.



MAR-VELL?

IT IS
YOU...



...I CAN
SEE IT IN YOUR
EYES.

I DON'T
HAVE MUCH TIME
FOR THIS, NORRIN.
I **NEED** SOME-
THING YOU
HAVE.

ONE
LAST SOURCE
OF POWER...

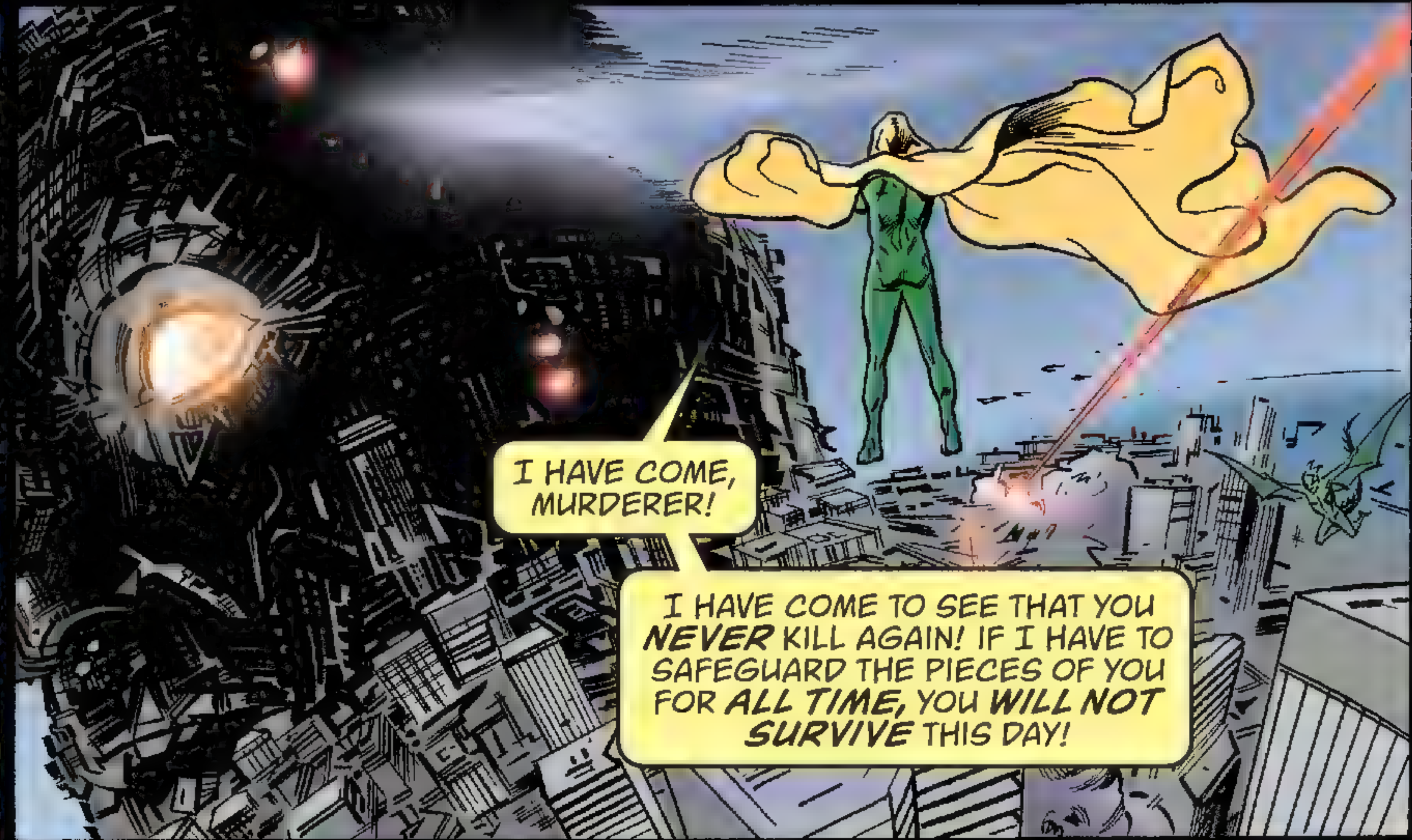


...I NEED
THE **POWER**
COSMIC.

I
NEED YOU
TO ENTER THE
CLOAK.

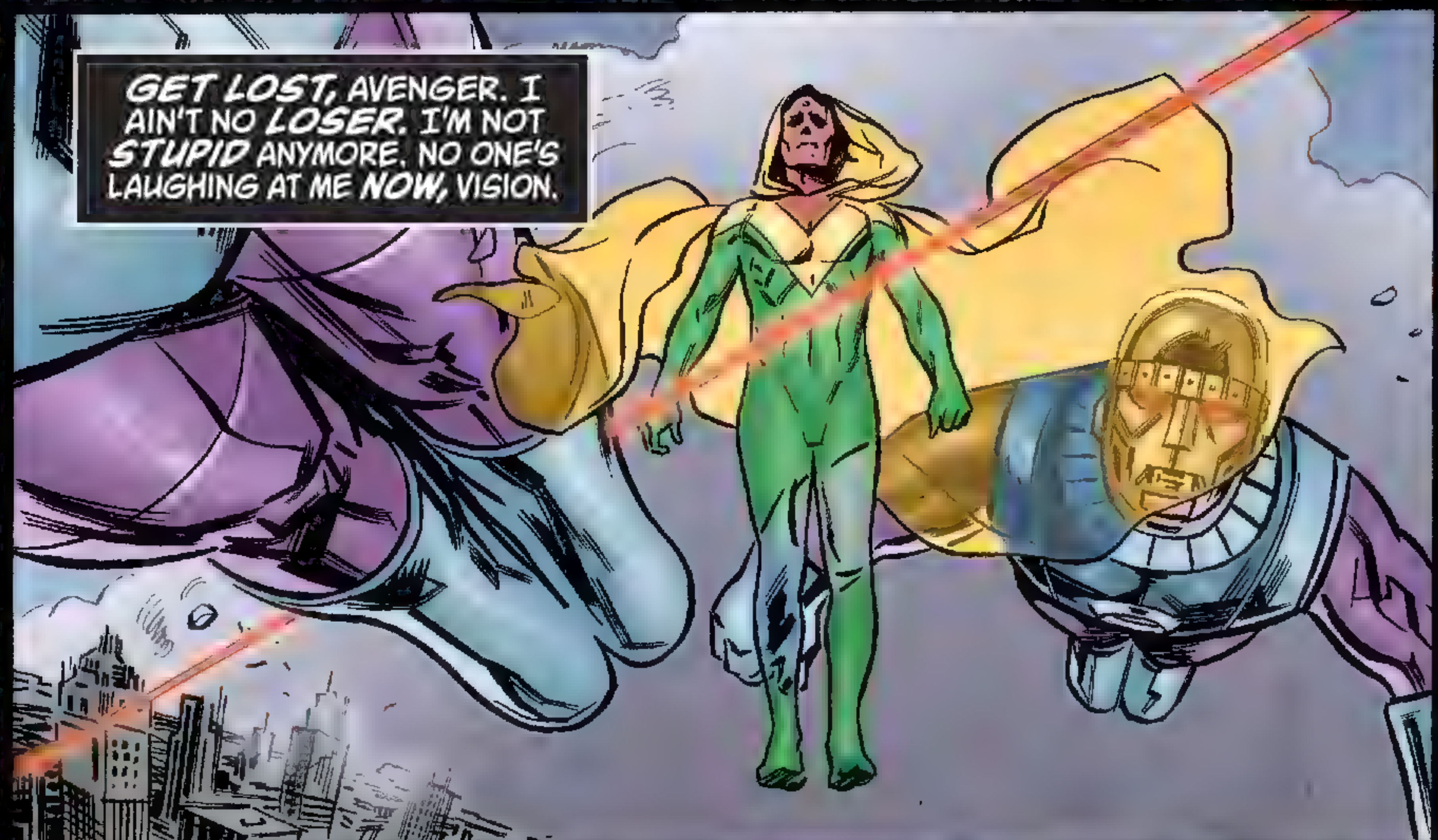


CREEL!

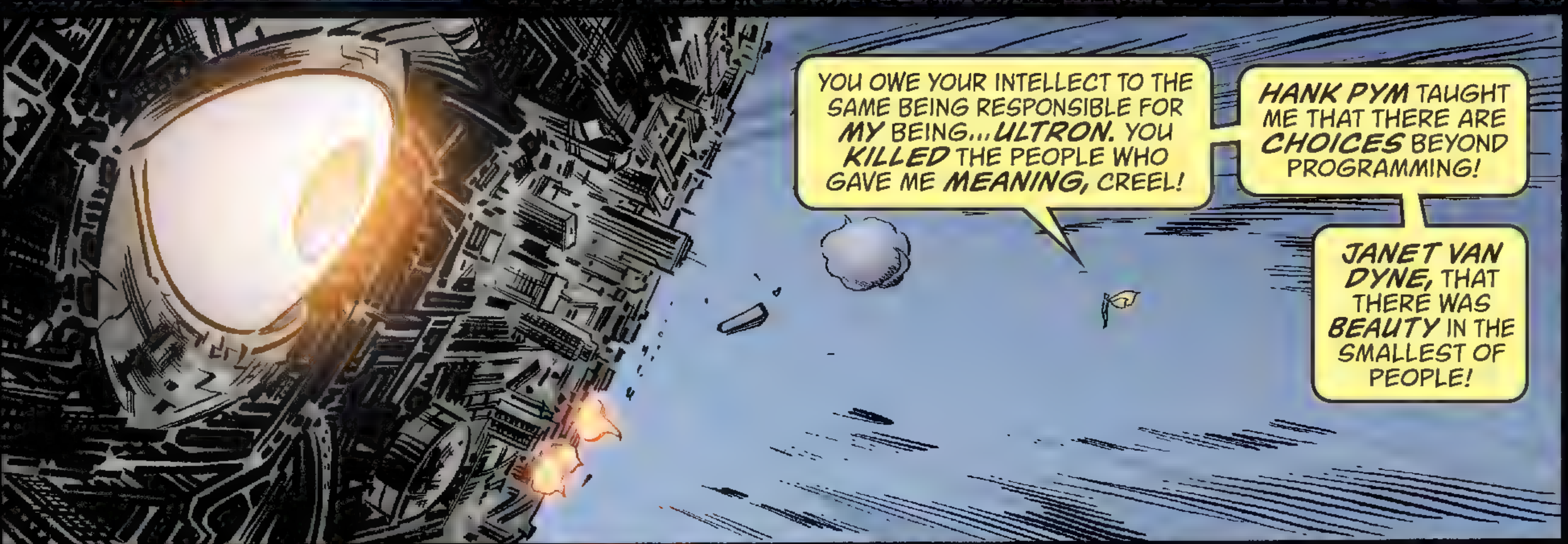


I HAVE COME, MURDERER!

I HAVE COME TO SEE THAT YOU NEVER KILL AGAIN! IF I HAVE TO SAFEGUARD THE PIECES OF YOU FOR ALL TIME, YOU WILL NOT SURVIVE THIS DAY!



GET LOST, AVENGER. I AIN'T NO LOSER. I'M NOT STUPID ANYMORE. NO ONE'S LAUGHING AT ME NOW, VISION.



YOU OWE YOUR INTELLECT TO THE SAME BEING RESPONSIBLE FOR MY BEING... **ULTRON**. YOU KILLED THE PEOPLE WHO GAVE ME MEANING, CREEL!

HANK PYM TAUGHT ME THAT THERE ARE CHOICES BEYOND PROGRAMMING!

JANET VAN DYNE, THAT THERE WAS BEAUTY IN THE SMALLEST OF PEOPLE!



PIETRO MAXIMOFF, THAT IF ONE'S FATHER IS EVIL, IT DOES NOT MEAN THE CHILD MUST BE!

CLINT BARTON, THAT THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A POWERLESS MAN!

AND WANDA, MY DEAR WANDA... TAUGHT ME THAT EVEN AN ANDROID CAN LOVE!



I GUESS
SAVING THE TORCH
IS THE **LEAST** OF
OUR WORRIES
NOW.



WE HAVE
TO **STOP HIM**,
LOKI. I'M AFRAID
THE VISION IS
REALLY GOING
TO **KILL**
CREEL!



AND THIS
WOULD BE A **BAD**
THING?

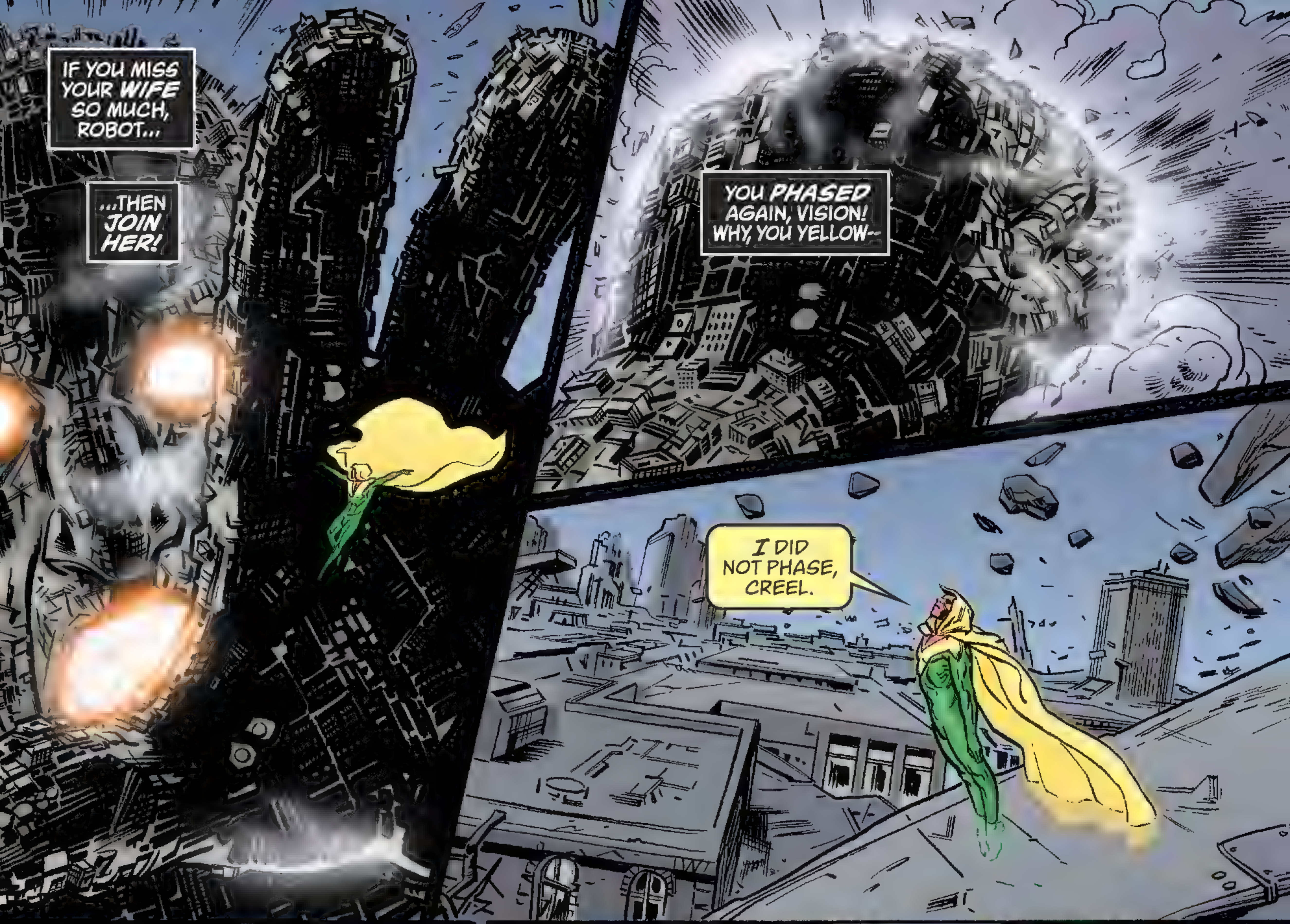


CREEL IS **CON-FUSED** ENOUGH...
BUT I STILL KNOW
HE'LL DO IT.

I MUST
SPEAK TO THE
VISION.



CONSERVE
YOUR **STRENGTH**,
KAREN, UNTIL IT
IS TIME!



IF YOU MISS
YOUR WIFE
SO MUCH,
ROBOT...

...THEN
JOIN
HER!

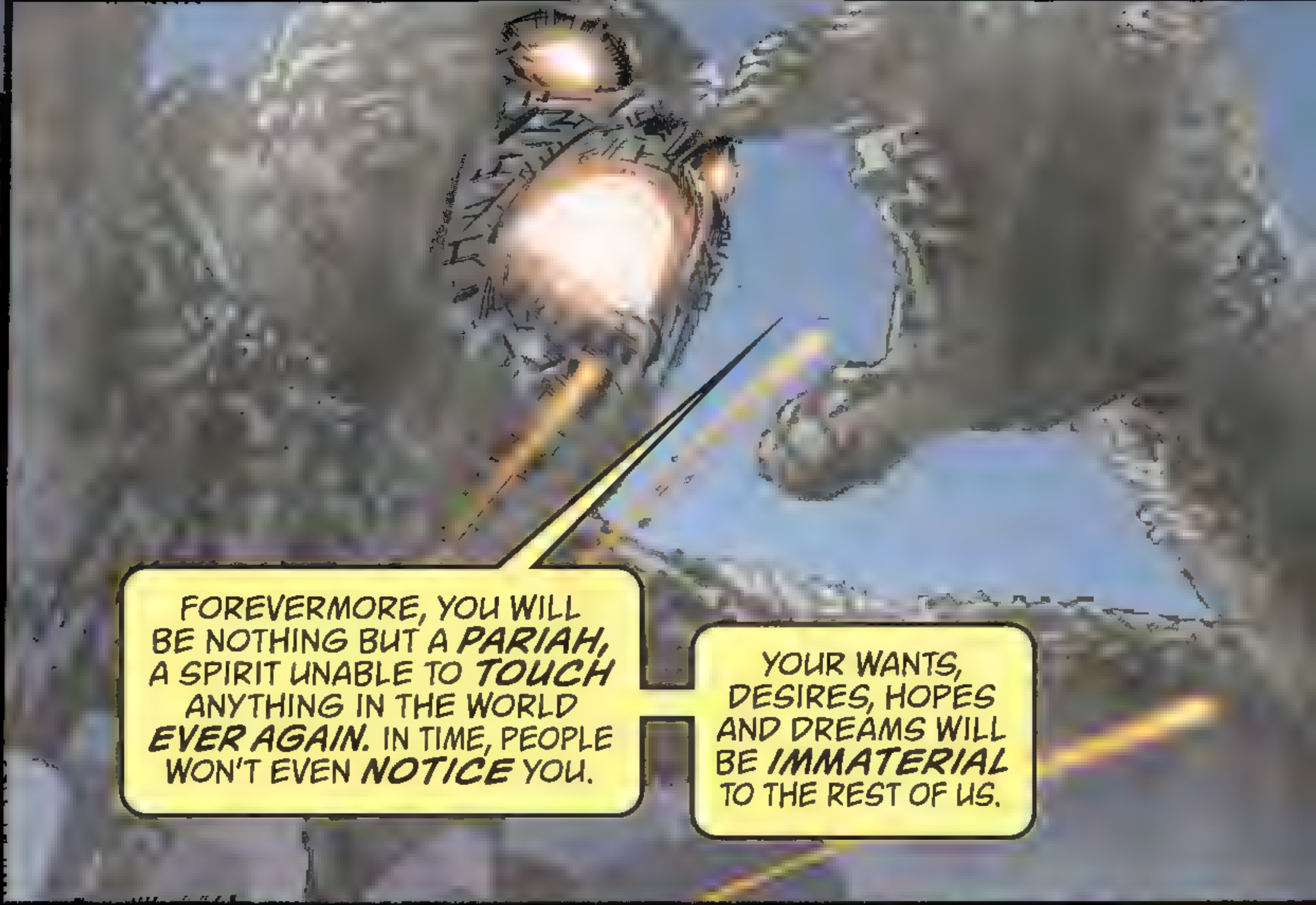
YOU PHASED
AGAIN, VISION!
WHY, YOU YELLOW--



I DID
NOT PHASE,
CREEL.

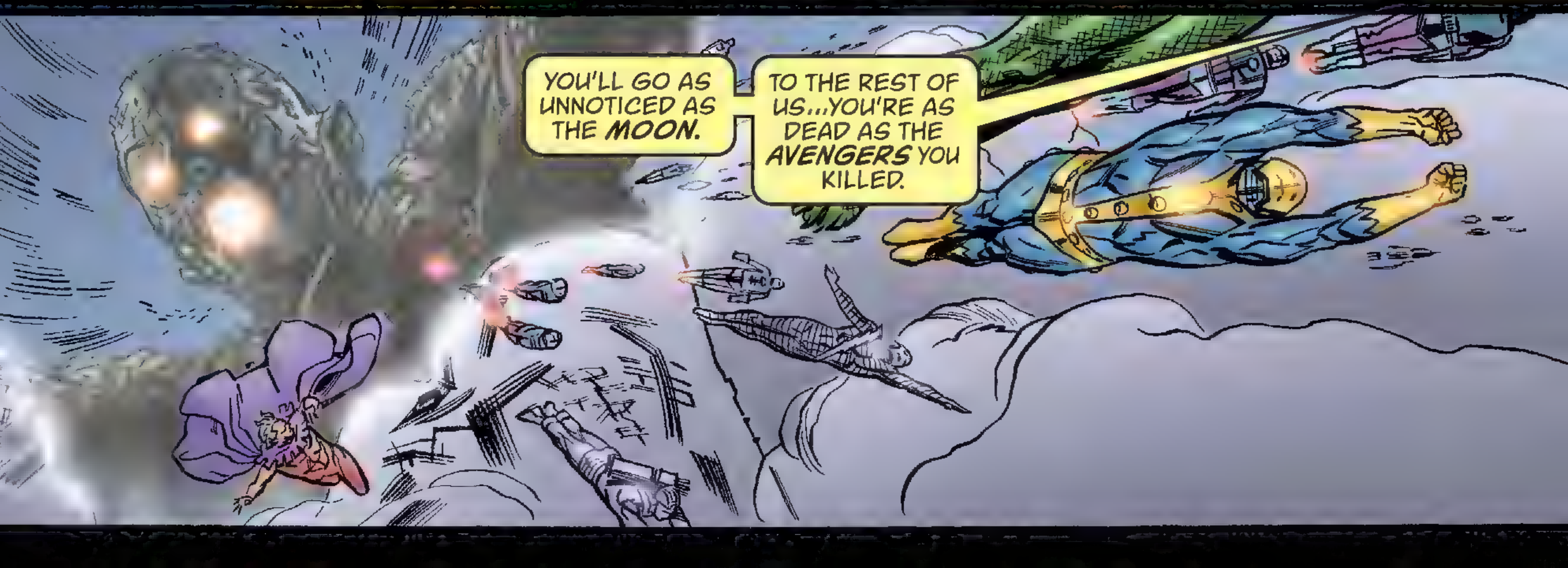


YOU
DID.



FOREVERMORE, YOU WILL
BE NOTHING BUT A *PARIAH*,
A SPIRIT UNABLE TO *TOUCH*
ANYTHING IN THE WORLD
EVER AGAIN. IN TIME, PEOPLE
WON'T EVEN *NOTICE* YOU.

YOUR WANTS,
DESIRES, HOPES
AND DREAMS WILL
BE *IMMATERIAL*
TO THE REST OF US.



YOU'LL GO AS
UNNOTICED AS
THE *MOON*.

TO THE REST OF
US...YOU'RE AS
DEAD AS THE
AVENGERS YOU
KILLED.



WHAT'S
WRONG WITH
MAR-VELL,
STRANGE?

I CAN ONLY
ASSUME THAT THE
COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS
WAS **COMPLETED** WITHIN
HIM, VICTOR. HE'S NOT STRONG
ENOUGH HERE AMONGST
THE DEAD TO HANDLE
OMNISCIENCE.



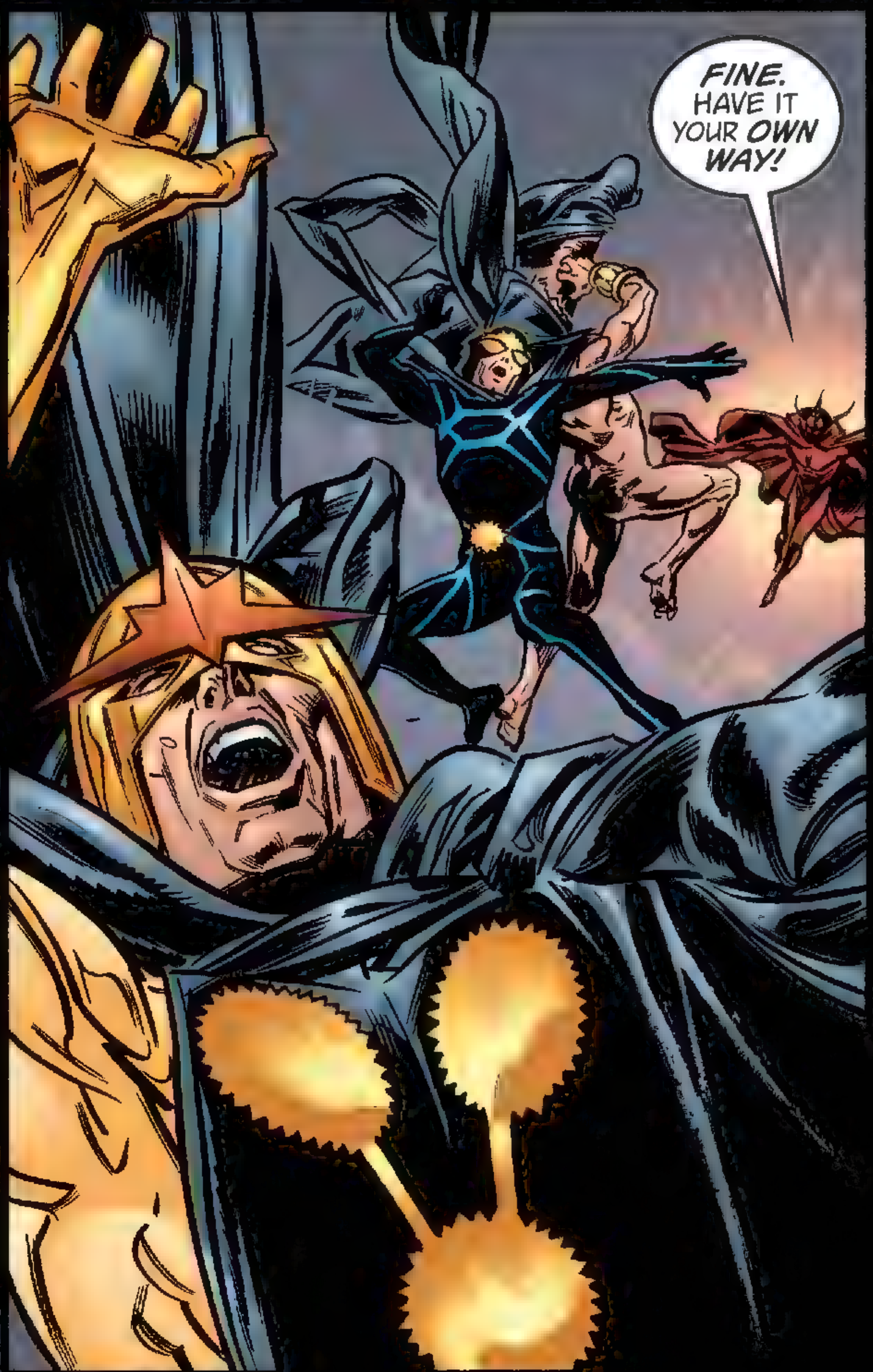
IN THE
LAND OF THE
LIVING, MAR-VELL
LIED TO
ME!

HE
SHOULD HAVE
GIVEN UP **LONG**
AGO!



WE WILL
CONTINUE TO
FIGHT!

TO
OUR LAST
BREATH!



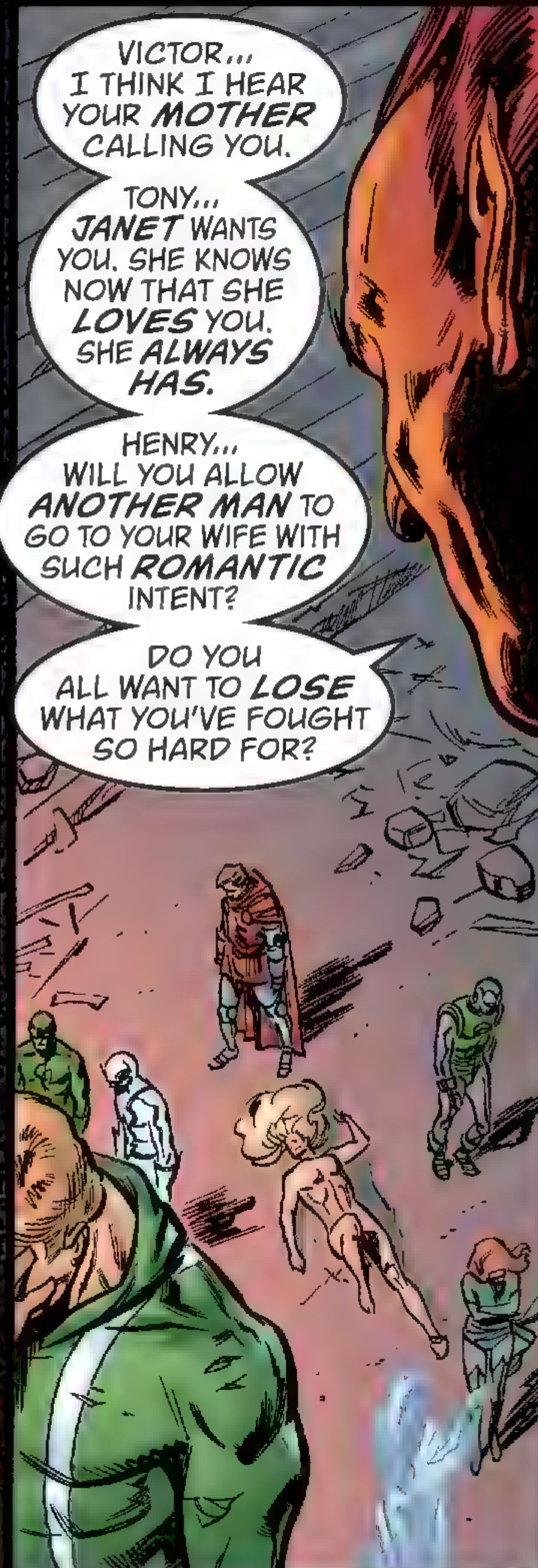
FINE.
HAVE IT
YOUR OWN
WAY!



NOW...
WHERE WAS I
BEFORE I WAS
SO **RUDELY**
INTERRUPTED?



OH YES, HE
TRIED TO **TRICK ME**
BY SAYING THAT I WAS
LIKE THE **ASGARDIANS**,
GIVEN FORM BY THOSE
AROUND HIM. BUT YOU
CAN'T DECEIVE A
DECEIVER...



VICTOR...
I THINK I HEAR
YOUR **MOTHER**
CALLING YOU.

TONY...
JANET WANTS
YOU. SHE KNOWS
NOW THAT SHE
LOVES YOU.
SHE **ALWAYS**
HAS.

HENRY...
WILL YOU ALLOW
ANOTHER MAN TO
GO TO YOUR WIFE WITH
SUCH **ROMANTIC**
INTENT?

DO YOU
ALL WANT TO **LOSE**
WHAT YOU'VE FOUGHT
SO HARD FOR?



I DON'T
KNOW WHAT HE'S
MAKING YOU SEE!
I DON'T KNOW WHERE
YOU THINK YOU ARE!
TONY! VICTOR!
LISTEN TO ME!

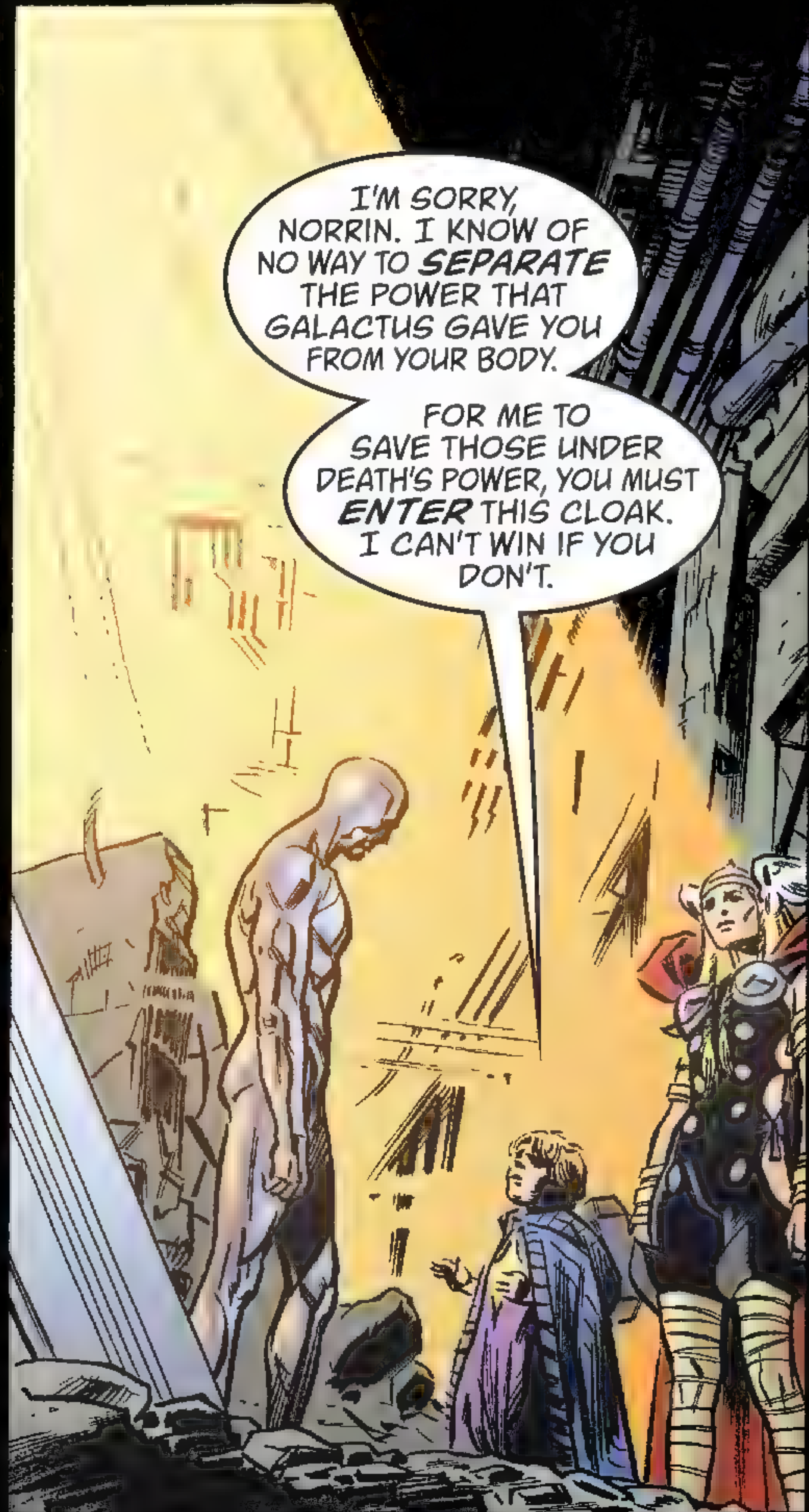
YOUR LIVES
ARE **OVER!** YOU'RE
DEAD! MEPHISTO'S
SEDUCING YOU WITH
GHOSTS OF WHAT
LIFE WAS!



COME
BACK...

...WE HAVEN'T
WON YET. WE HAVEN'T...
WON.

FOR THAT,
MY DEAR DOCTOR,
YOU CAN THANK
THE VISION.



I'M SORRY, NORRIN. I KNOW OF NO WAY TO **SEPARATE** THE POWER THAT GALACTUS GAVE YOU FROM YOUR BODY.

FOR ME TO SAVE THOSE UNDER DEATH'S POWER, YOU MUST **ENTER** THIS CLOAK. I CAN'T WIN IF YOU DON'T.



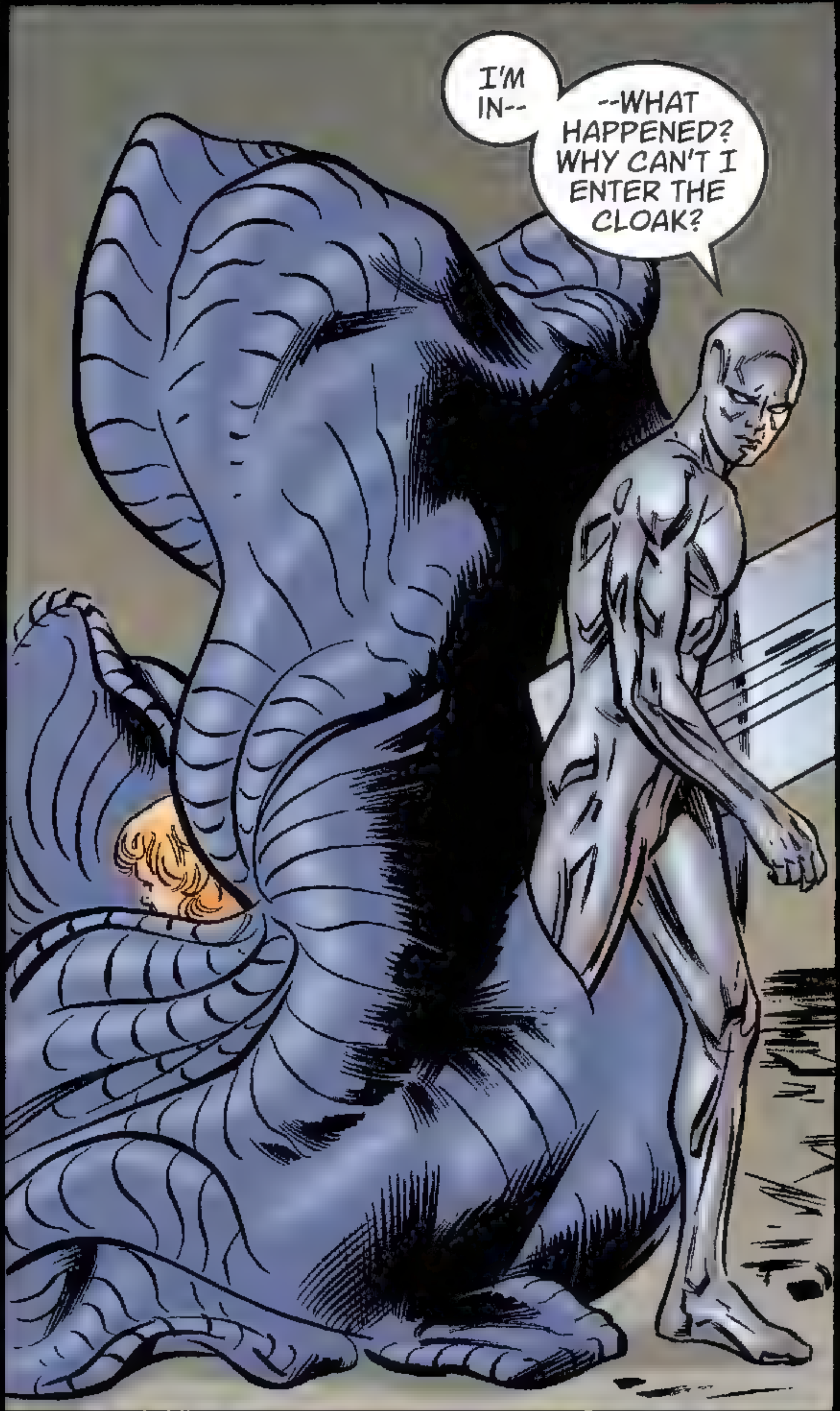
SHALLA-BAL... DIED IN THE FIGHT AGAINST THE CELESTIALS.



I KNOW, NORRIN.



IF THIS IS WHAT IT TAKES TO MAKE THINGS **RIGHT**, MAR-VELL...OF COURSE.



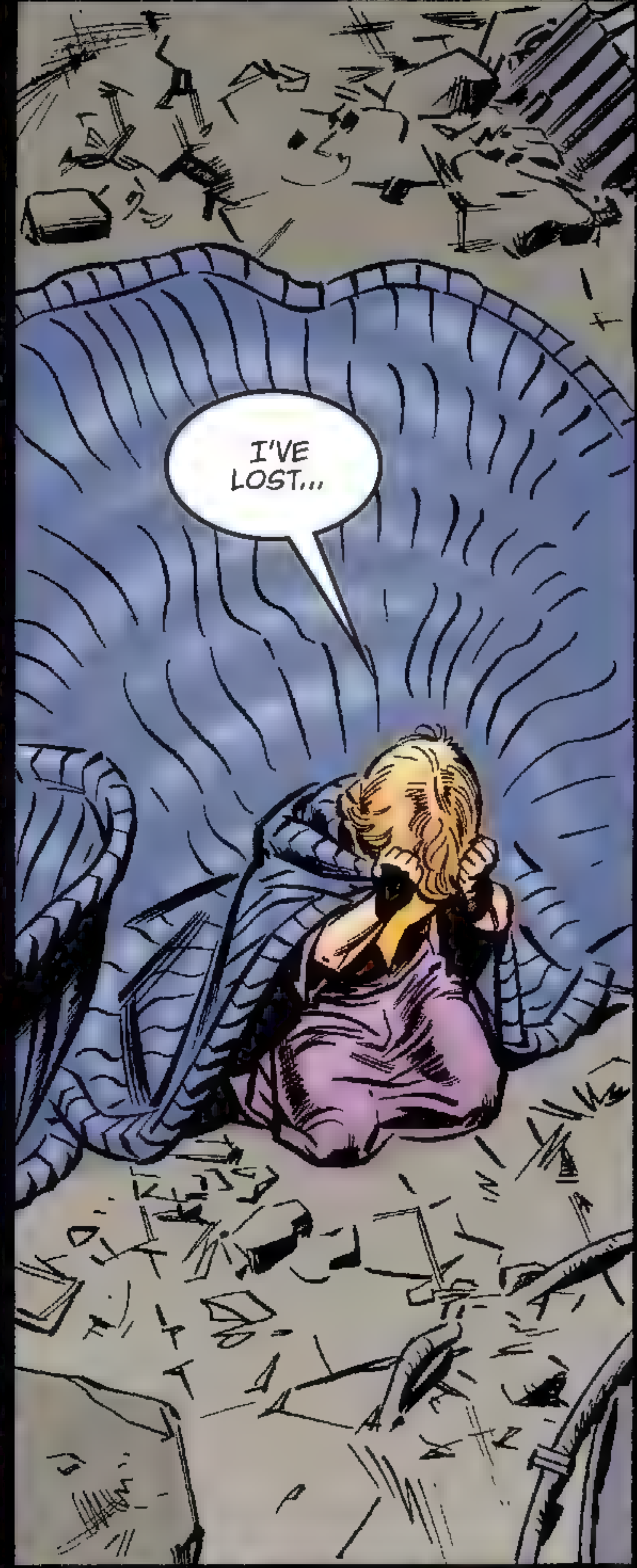
I'M IN--

--WHAT HAPPENED? WHY CAN'T I ENTER THE CLOAK?

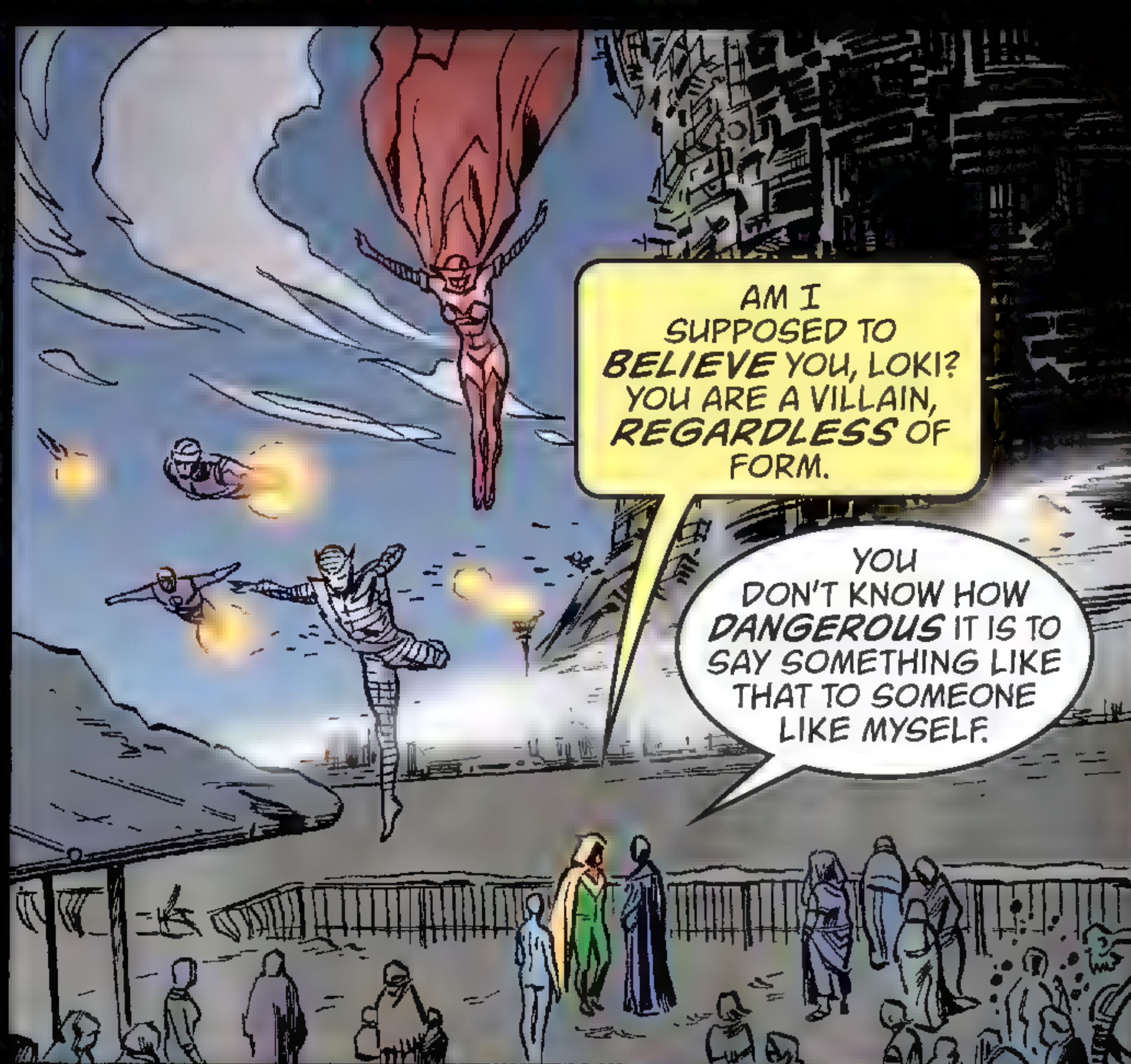


THE VISION MADE CREEL **IMMATERIAL**.

THAT MEANS **WE ARE**, AS WELL.



I'VE LOST...



AM I SUPPOSED TO **BELIEVE** YOU, LOKI? YOU ARE A VILLAIN, **REGARDLESS** OF FORM.

YOU DON'T KNOW HOW **DANGEROUS** IT IS TO SAY SOMETHING LIKE THAT TO SOMEONE LIKE MYSELF.



STAY **STRONG**, LOKI. REMEMBER WHO YOU **CAN** BE...**IG-**NORE WHAT YOU ONCE WERE.



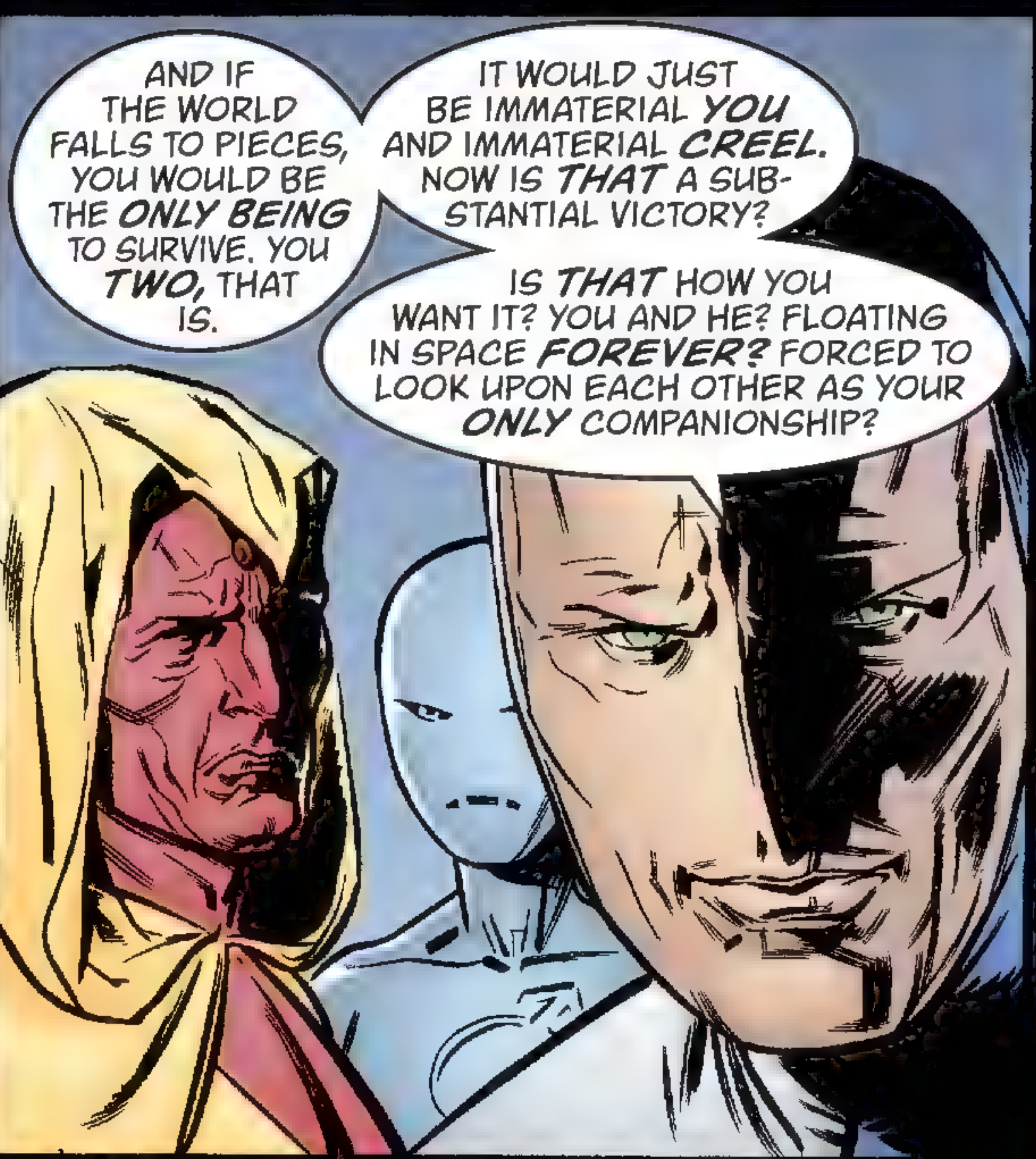
STARK ALLIED HIMSELF WITH OSBORN AND HE **DIED!**

CREEL **KILLED** THE AVENGERS!



VISION. I **CREATED** THE AVENGERS.

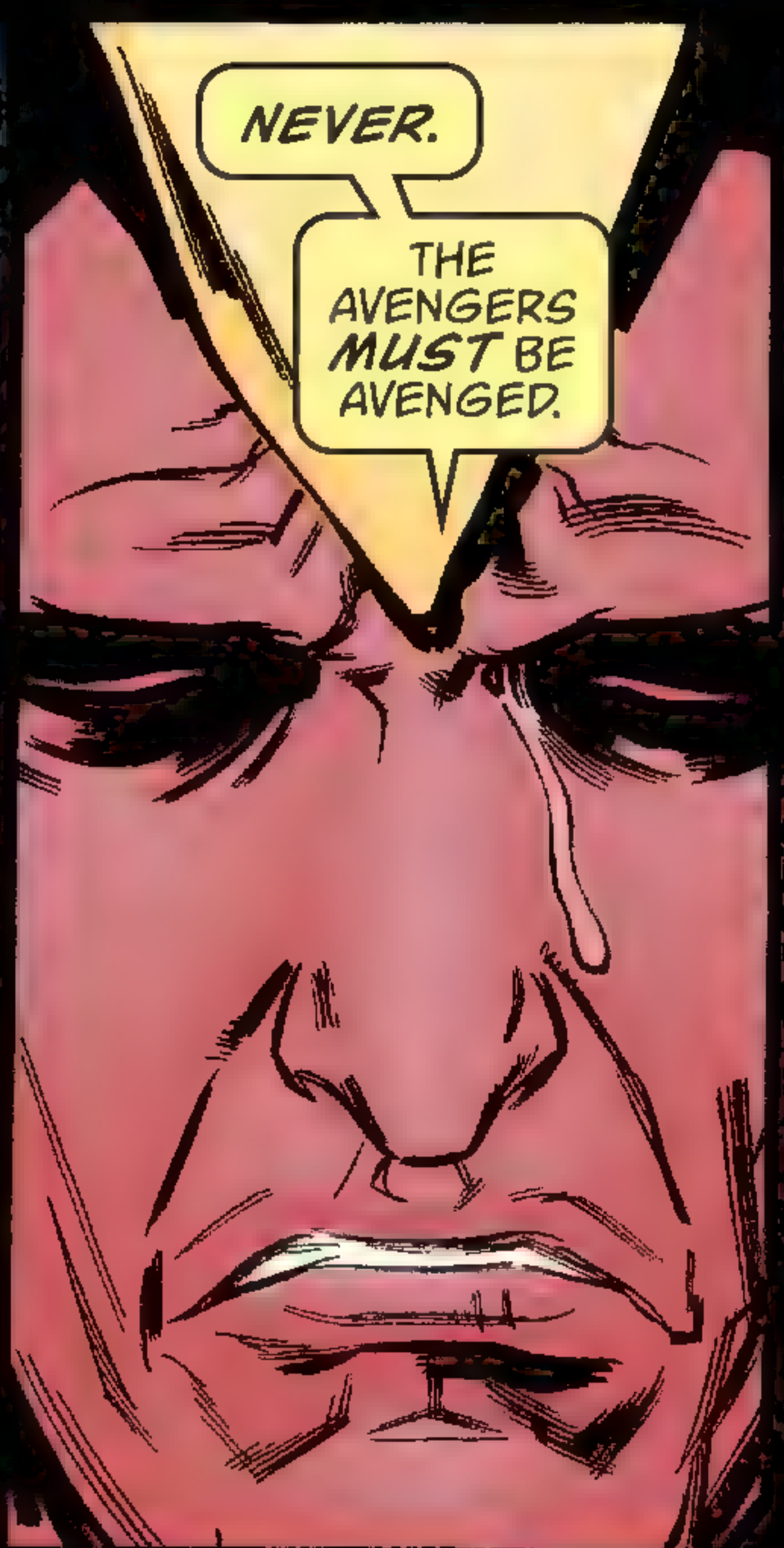
IF YOU DON'T DO THIS, THE **ENTIRE** WORLD IS GOING TO DIE.



AND IF THE WORLD FALLS TO PIECES, YOU WOULD BE THE **ONLY BEING** TO SURVIVE. YOU **TWO**, THAT IS.

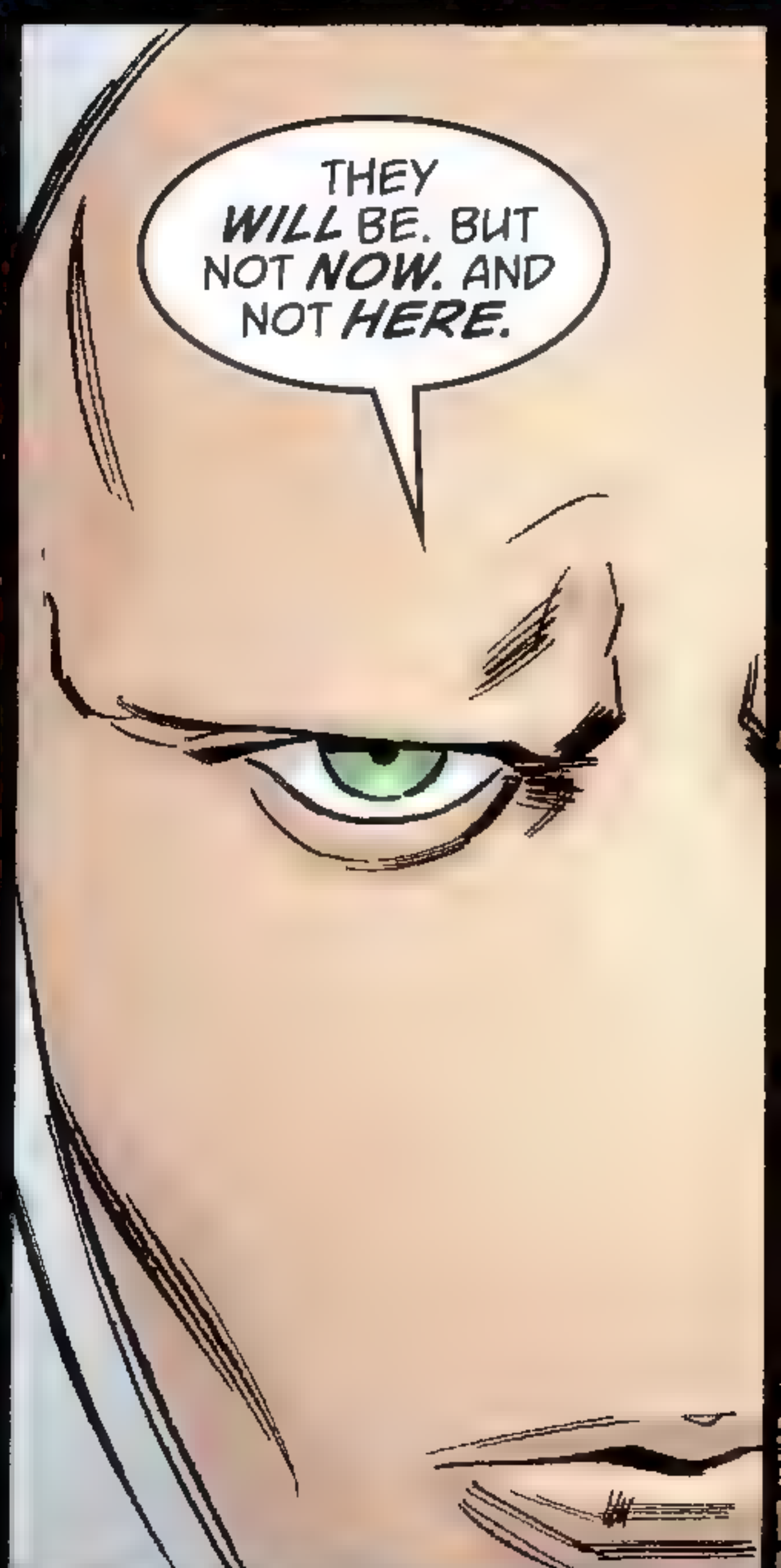
IT WOULD JUST BE IMMATERIAL YOU AND IMMATERIAL **CREEL**. NOW IS **THAT** A SUB-STANTIAL VICTORY?

IS **THAT** HOW YOU WANT IT? YOU AND HE? FLOATING IN SPACE **FOREVER**? FORCED TO LOOK UPON EACH OTHER AS YOUR **ONLY** COMPANIONSHIP?

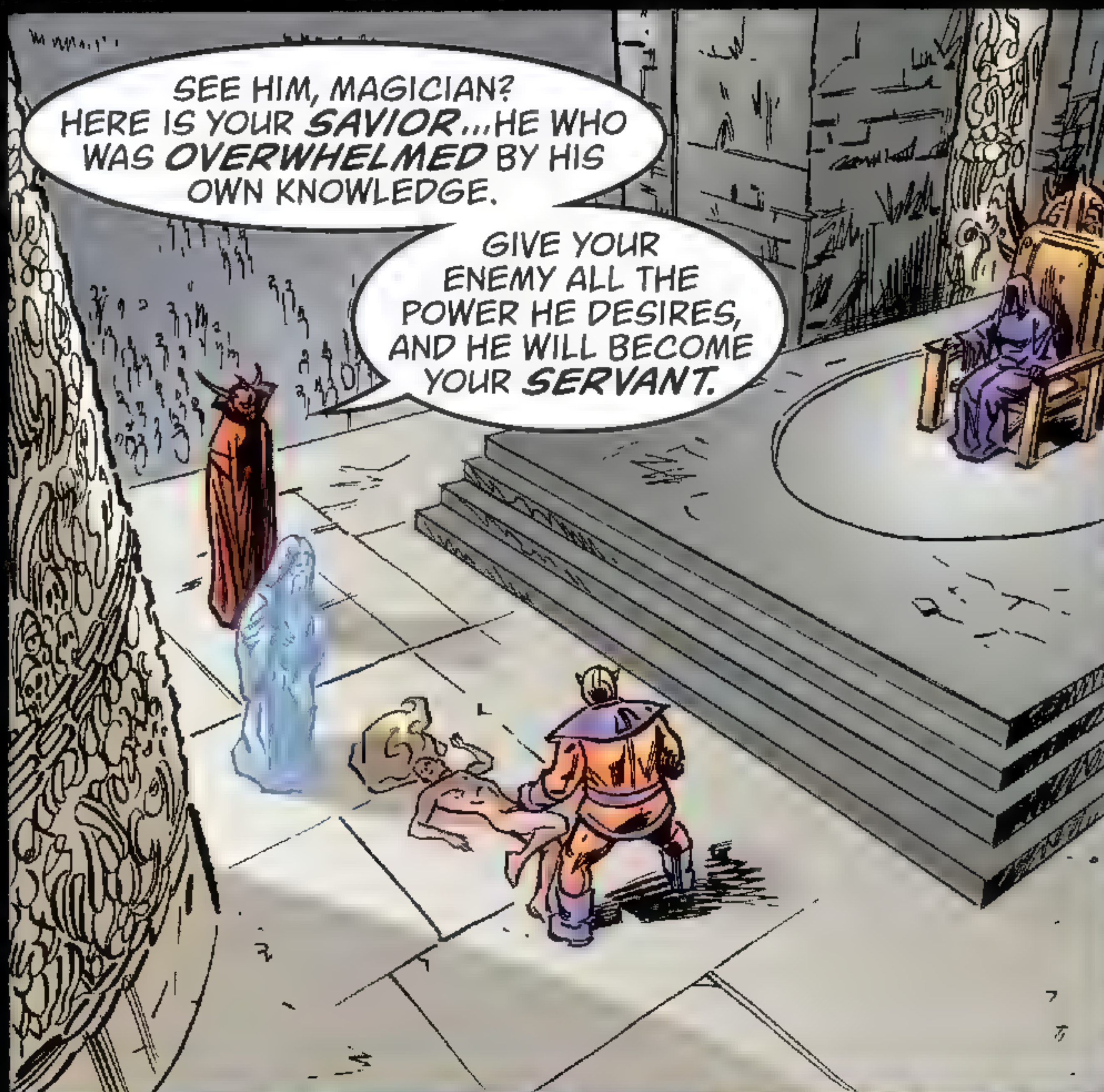


NEVER.

THE AVENGERS **MUST** BE AVENGED.



THEY **WILL** BE. BUT NOT **NOW**. AND NOT **HERE**.



SEE HIM, MAGICIAN?
HERE IS YOUR **SAVIOR**...HE WHO
WAS **OVERWHELMED** BY HIS
OWN KNOWLEDGE.

GIVE YOUR
ENEMY ALL THE
POWER HE DESIRES,
AND HE WILL BECOME
YOUR **SERVANT**.



I HAVE
HATED YOU, MY
ENEMY! YOU ALMOST
COST ME **EVERY-**
THING!



YOU
ALMOST COST
ME **LOVE**.



YOU
KNOW **NOTHING** OF
LOVE, THANOS. ONLY
DEATH!



AH, BUT
TO LOVE **TRULY**
IS TO **DIE**,
MAGICIAN.

YOU **FAILED**
TO LEARN THIS, AND
PERHAPS THAT IS WHY
CLEA **BETRAYED**
YOU.



YOU
THOUGHT
YOU HAD POWER,
STRANGE. YOU
HAVE **NONE**.

IT'S
ALL BEEN AN
ILLUSION.



I-I'M SO
SORRY, CLEA.
I DIDN'T...I
COULDN'T...

...I'M SO
ALONE.



YOU WON'T
BE ALONE FOR **LONG,**
MAGICIAN.

THIS
PLACE IS ABOUT
TO BECOME **MUCH**
LARGER. EVERYONE
IN THE LAND OF THE
LIVING IS GOING
TO **DIE.**

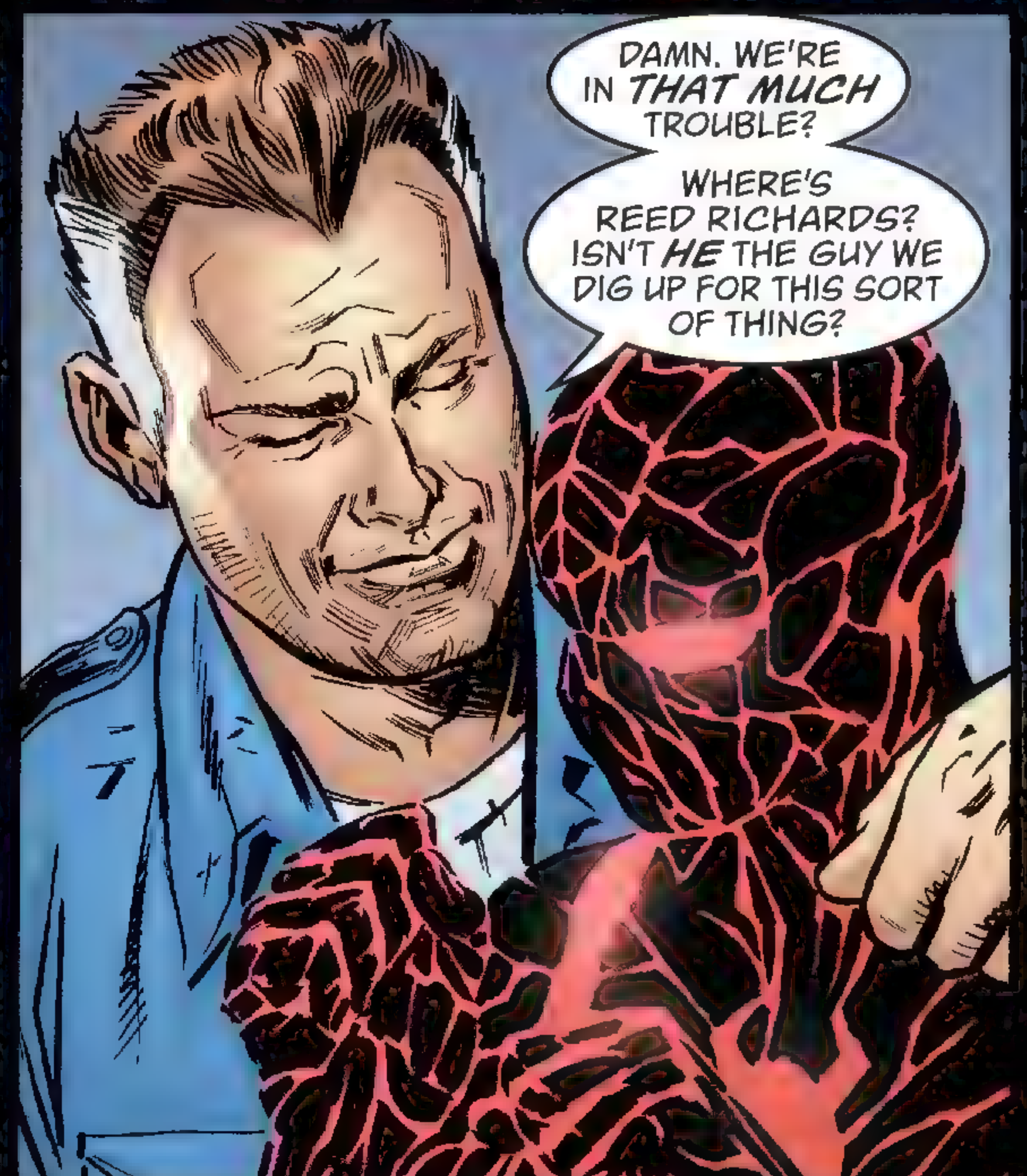


BUT YOU
SHOULD BE **HAPPY...**
WHEN THE EARTH FALLS
APART, YOUR BODY THAT
STILL LIVES WILL BE
DESTROYED.

YOU WILL
BECOME **WHOLE**
AGAIN HERE.



OF COURSE,
THEN YOU'LL ONLY BE
LIKE THE **REST** OF YOUR
KIND, UNABLE TO DISTINGUISH
BETWEEN **DEATH** AND
LIFE.



"YEAH...WHERE IS REED RICHARDS?!"

MONTHS?
WEEKS? I HAVE NO IDEA. THAT IS ALL THIS WORLD HAS LEFT.

THE WORLD'S LOST TOO MUCH **VIBRANIUM**. THE REPOLARIZATION IS CAUSING TOO MUCH DAMAGE. IT'S AS I FEARED..."

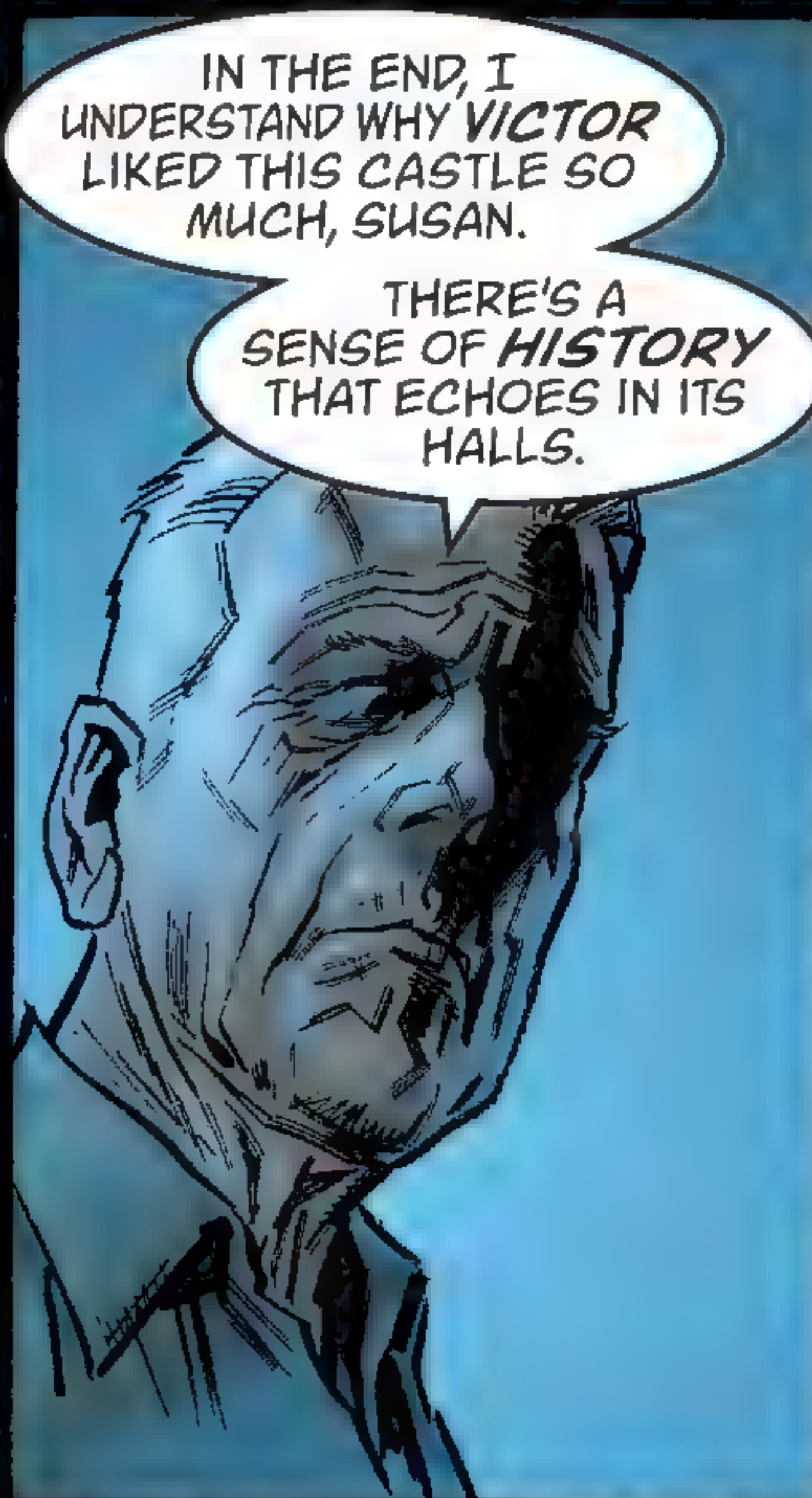


THEY'RE READY, REED. IF WE'RE GOING TO DO THIS, WE NEED TO LEAVE **NOW**.



IN THE END, I UNDERSTAND WHY **VICTOR** LIKED THIS CASTLE SO MUCH, SUSAN.

THERE'S A SENSE OF **HISTORY** THAT ECHOES IN ITS HALLS.



I HATE TO LEAVE IT BEHIND. **ANY** OF IT.

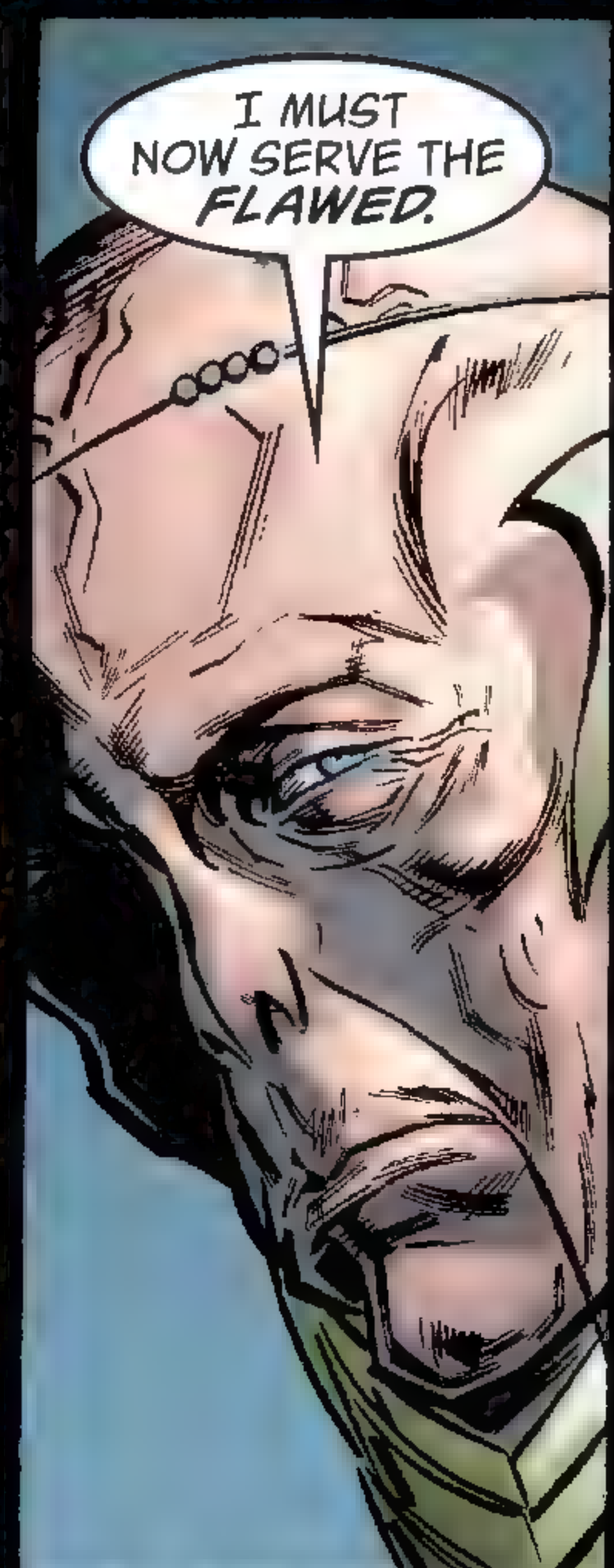


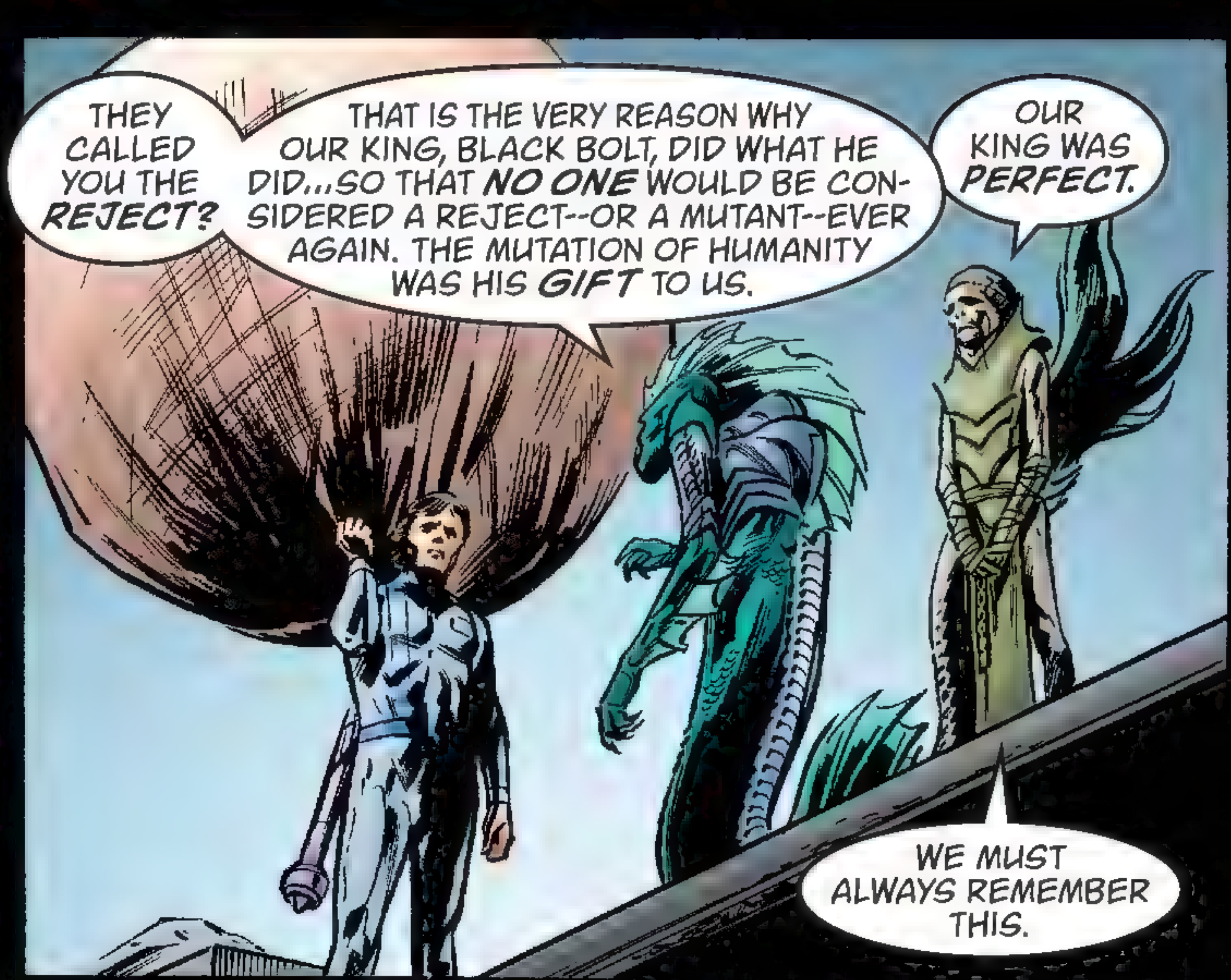
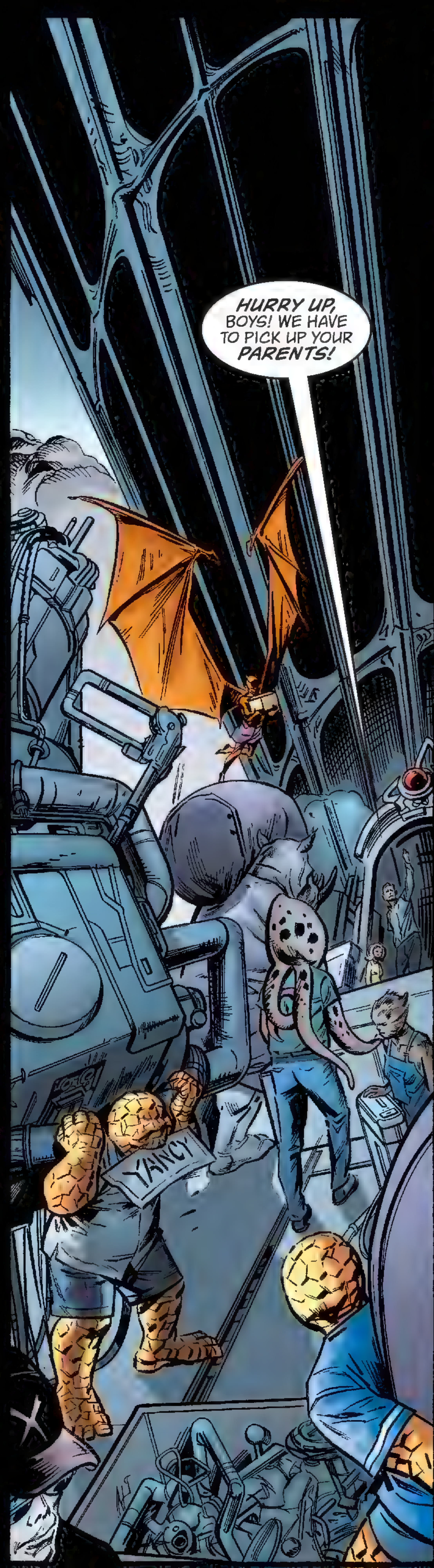
AH, SO RICHARDS AT LAST CHOOSES TO **SHOW HIMSELF**.

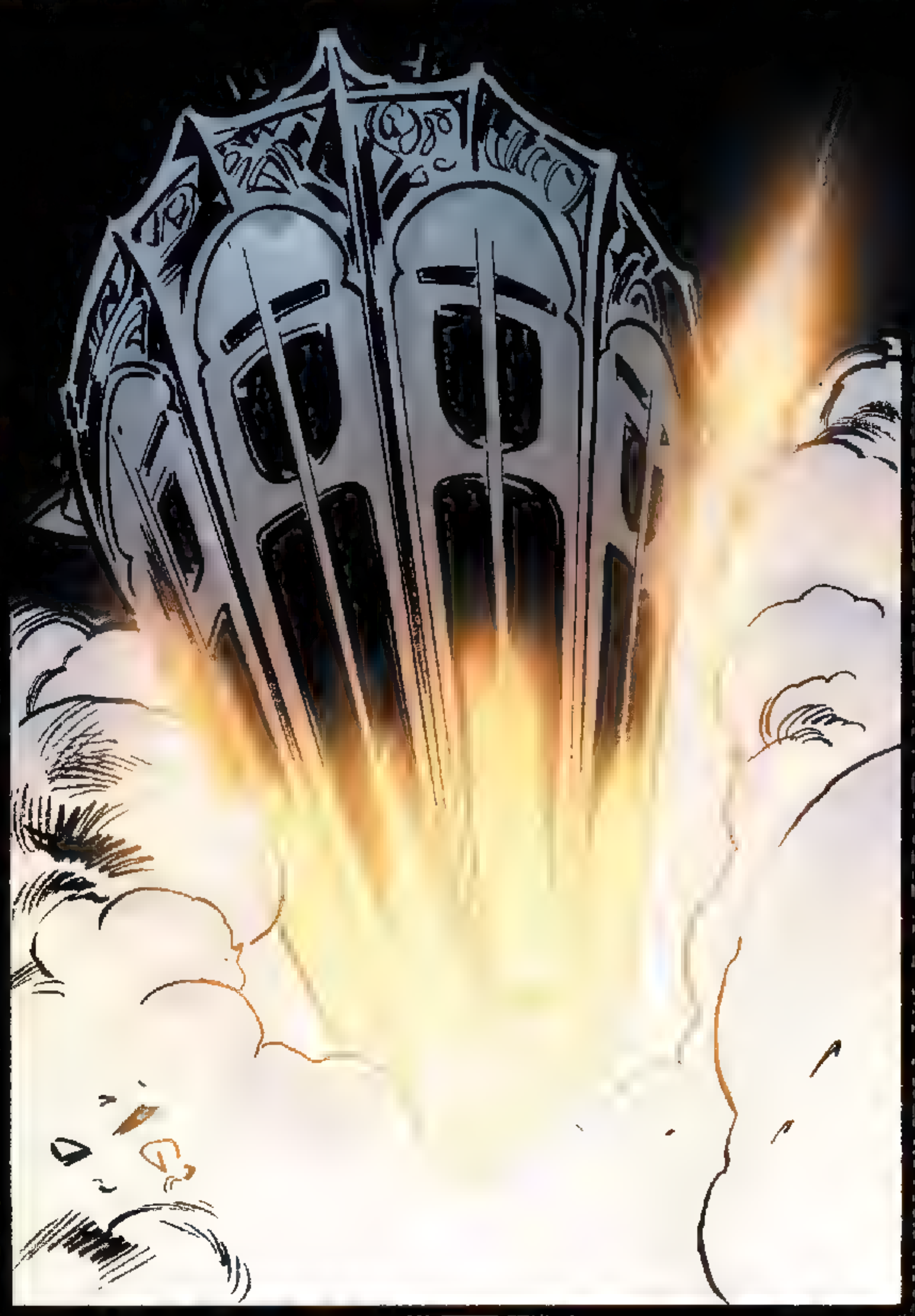
THIS IS MY PUNISHMENT, I SUPPOSE, FOR NOT GUARDING MY **KING** AS WELL AS I **SHOULD** HAVE.



I MUST NOW SERVE THE **FLAWED**.







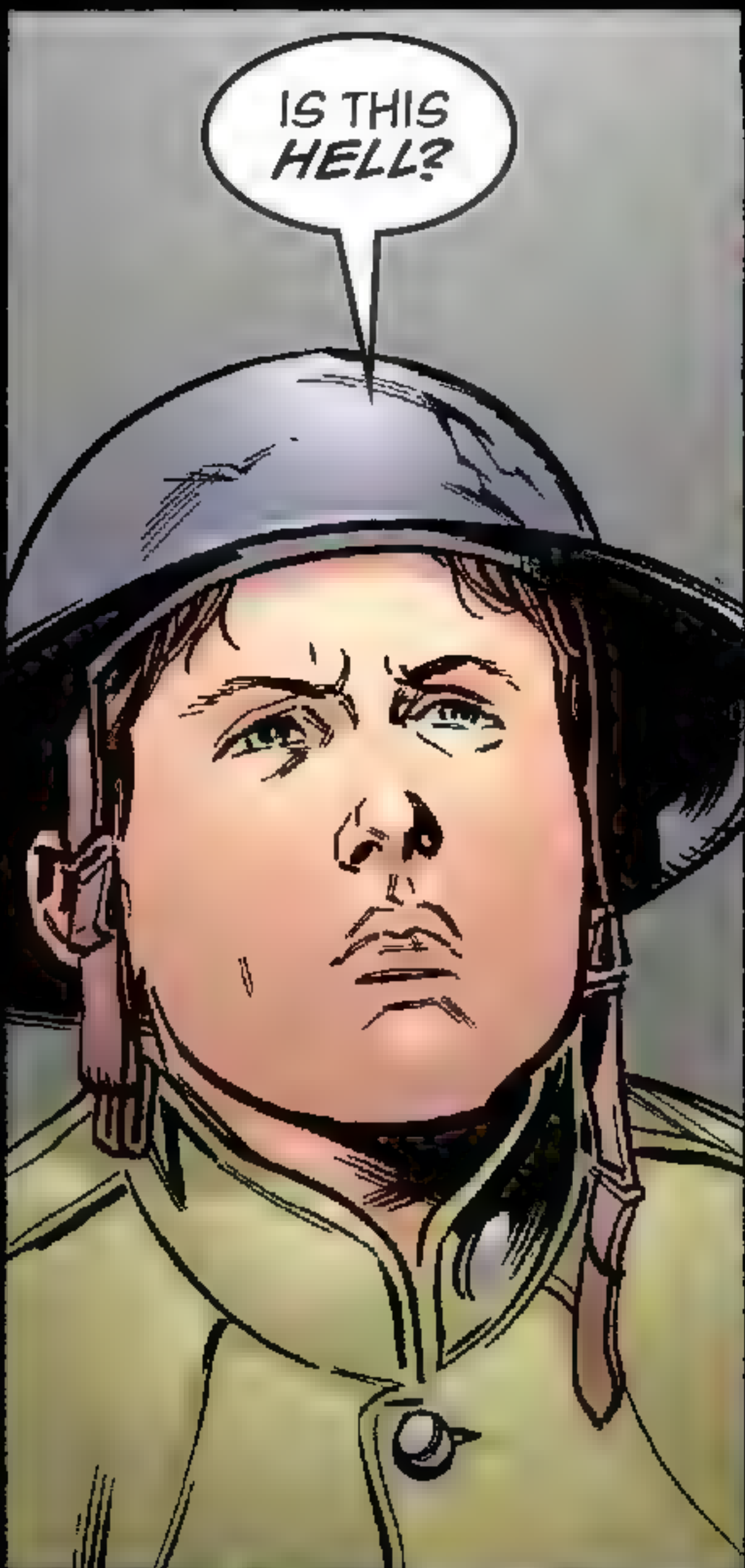


COME,
ISAAC,
COME.

WH-WHERE
AM I? WHO ARE
YOU?



I AM
YOUR HOST, YOUR
AMBASSADOR
TO THIS WORLD.



IS THIS
HELL?



WELCOME,
CHRISTIANS.

YOU CAN'T
KNOW **HOW LONG**
I HAVE WANTED TO
SAY THAT.



DO
I KNOW YOU,
SIR?



YOU
DID, ISAAC. HE
WAS **BETRAYED** BY
HIS LOVER. HE CANNOT
TOUCH ANYONE IN THIS
STATE. OF COURSE, THAT
WAS PROBABLY HER
COMPLAINT **BE-
FORE**.



I KNOW WHAT
THAT IS LIKE, NOT
BEING ABLE TO
TOUCH...

...I KNOW
WHAT IT IS LIKE
TO THINK YOU
CANNOT **BE**
TOUCHED.

HER
NAME WAS
ELAINE...



WHAT
OF **CLEA**,
MEPHISTO?

WHAT
WILL HAPPEN
TO HER?



I SUPPOSE SHE WILL **DIE** A FEW MOMENTS AFTER EVERYONE ON **EARTH** DOES.

WHEN NO ONE ON EARTH IS ABLE TO BELIEVE THAT THE **NORSE GODS** EXIST, THEY WILL DIE...OR BECOME **FORM-LESS** AGAIN.



SHE WILL PROBABLY DIE IN **SPACE**.

WANTING FOR **AIR**.

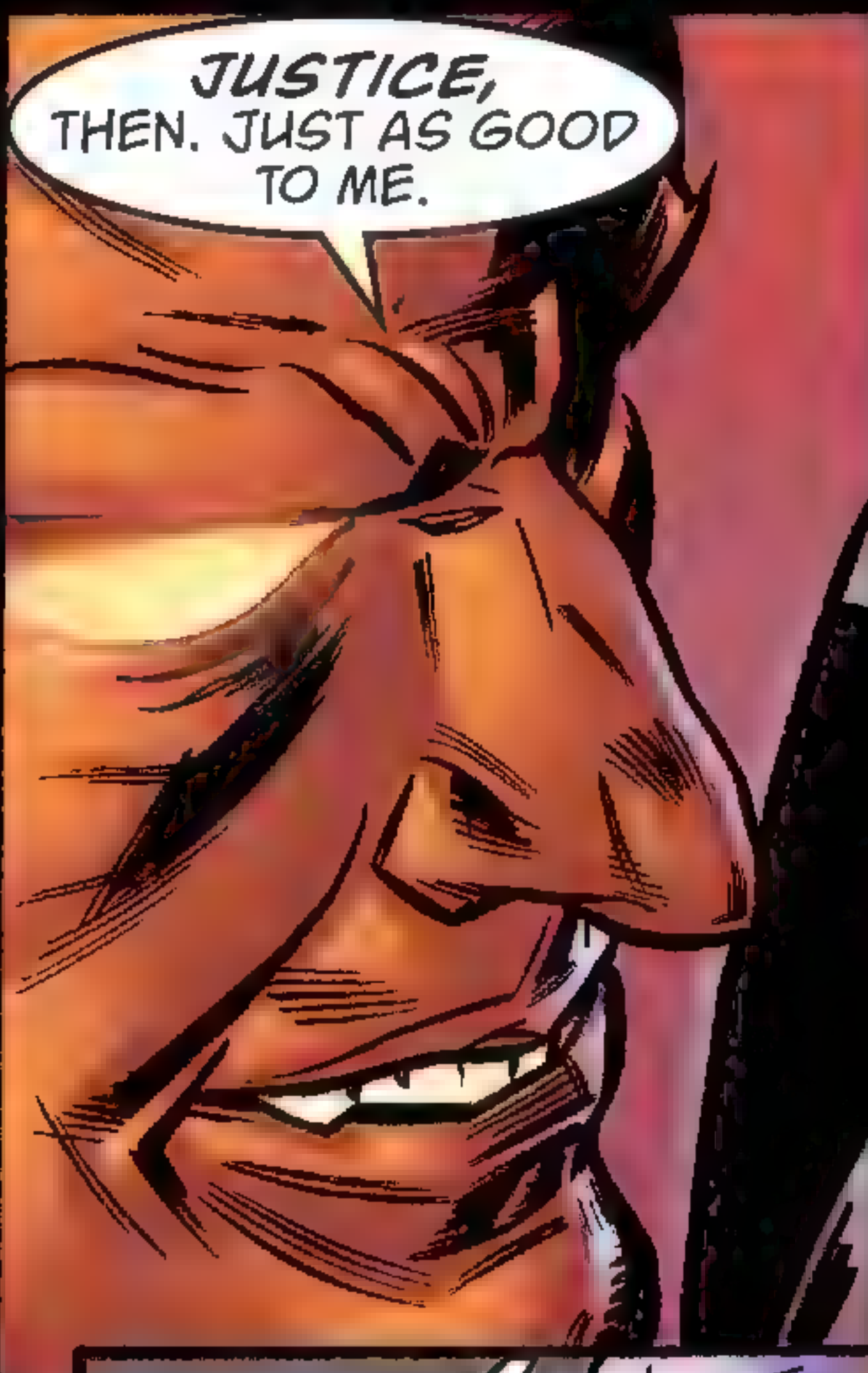
BEGGING FOR **GRAVITY** TO HOLD HER DOWN, TO KEEP HER FROM FALLING AWAY **FOREVER**.

LIKE **ALL** YOUR PEOPLE.



I AM PLEASED WITH YOUR WANT FOR **VENGEANCE**, DOCTOR. THIS IS THE PLACE WHERE SUCH DESIRE IS GROWN.

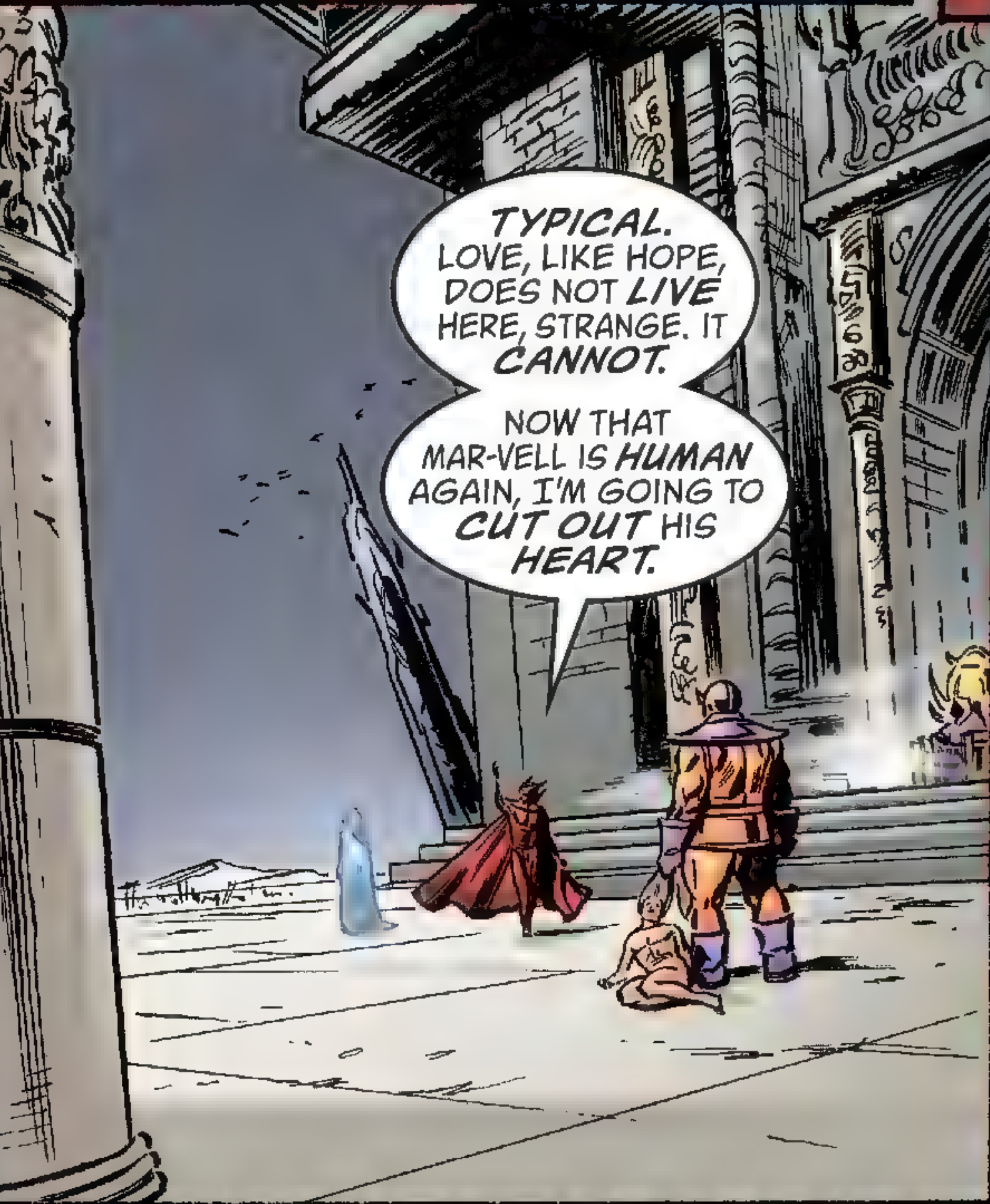
IT'S NOT VENGEANCE I WANT...



JUSTICE, THEN. JUST AS GOOD TO ME.

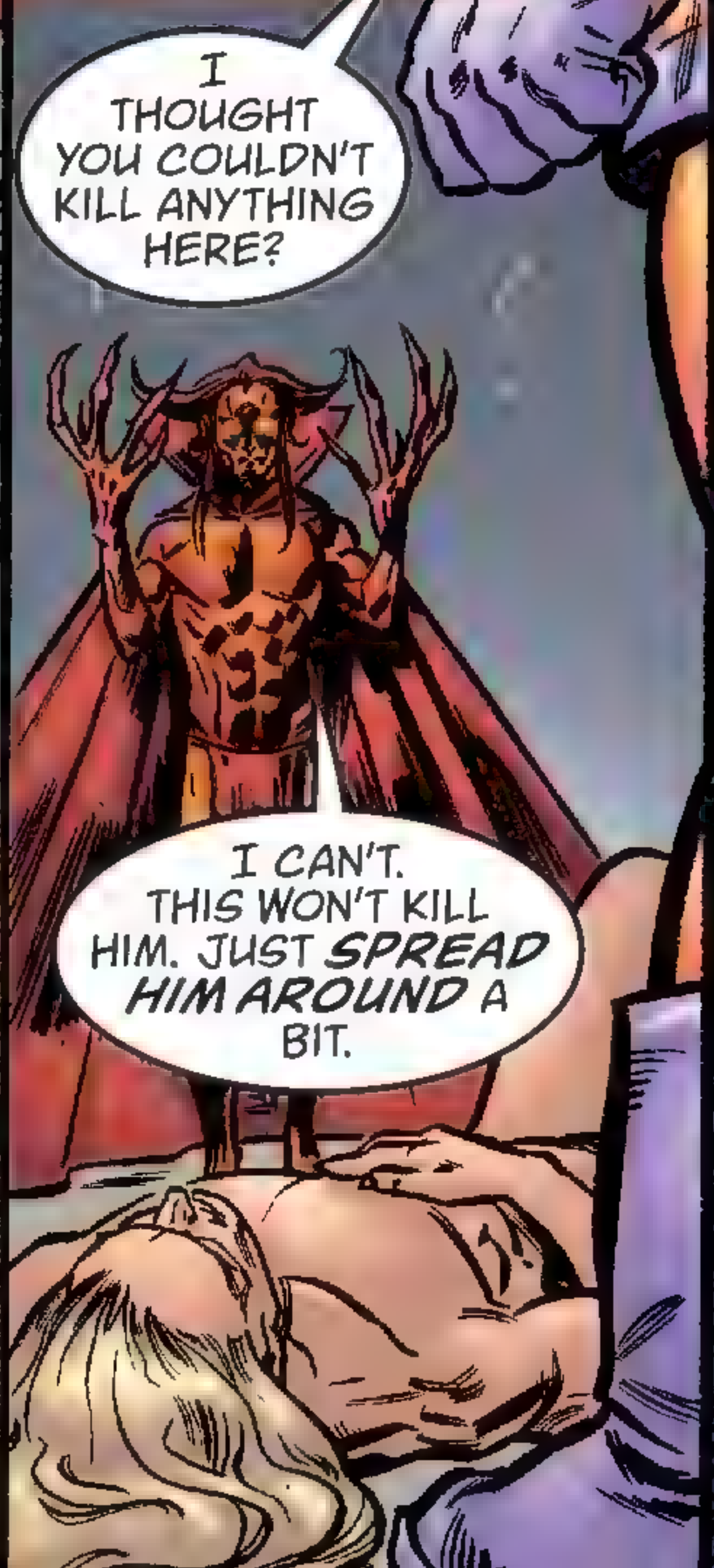


...IT'S **LOVE**.



TYPICAL. LOVE, LIKE HOPE, DOES NOT **LIVE** HERE, STRANGE. IT **CANNOT**.

NOW THAT MAR-VELL IS **HUMAN** AGAIN, I'M GOING TO **CUT OUT HIS HEART**.



I THOUGHT YOU COULDN'T KILL ANYTHING HERE?

I CAN'T. THIS WON'T KILL HIM. JUST **SPREAD HIM AROUND** A BIT.



SOME PEOPLE SAY I DON'T HAVE A **HEART**.

I **WILL** NOW.

"HOPE CANNOT LIVE HERE,
MEPHISTO? THEN WHAT DO
YOU CALL *THAT*?"



"THE LAST
CHARGE
OF THE LIGHT
BRIGADE."



FOR GOD AND THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY!



YOU'RE RIGHT, MEPHISTO. IT DOESN'T MATTER.

SOMETHING DIDN'T WORK...SOMEHOW MAR-VELL FAILED.

"IT DIDN'T MATTER THAT BEFORE CAPTAIN AMERICA DIED, HE LOOKED INTO MAR-VELL'S EYES AND SAW WHAT IT WOULD TAKE TO REMEMBER WHO HE WAS IN THIS REALM OF THE DEAD."



I COULDN'T BELIEVE THAT I WAS THE ONLY ONE WHO HAD LIVED, CAP. I COULDN'T BELIEVE THAT YOU DIED AND I DIDN'T! IT DIDN'T SEEM RIGHT!



THE COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS IS COMPLETE NOW. IT LOOKS LIKE WE'RE WINNING. BUT MEPHISTO IS RIGHT. THIS IS ALL AN ILLUSION.



"TIMING WAS EVERYTHING."

"AND WE'VE RUN OUT OF TIME."

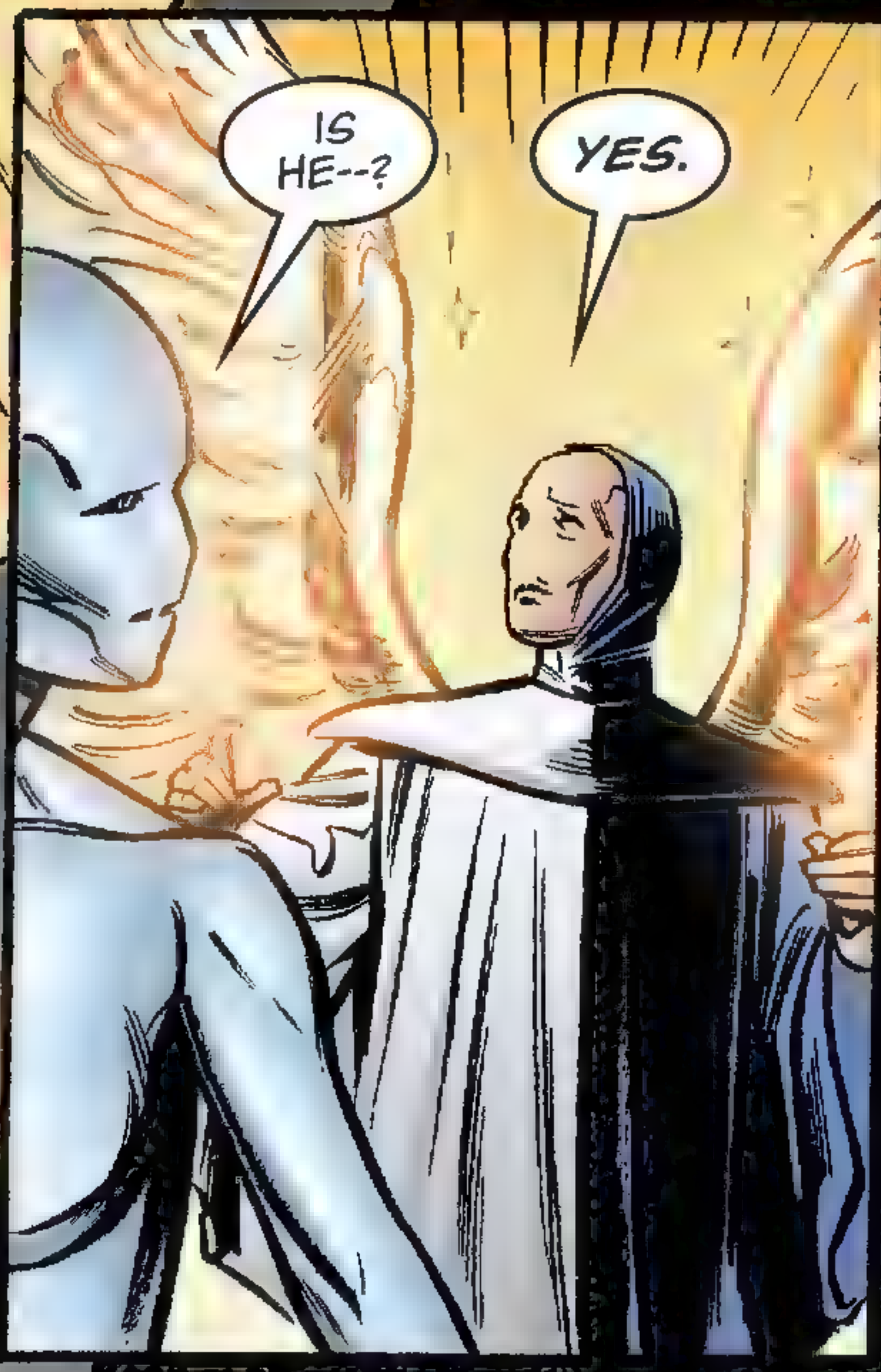
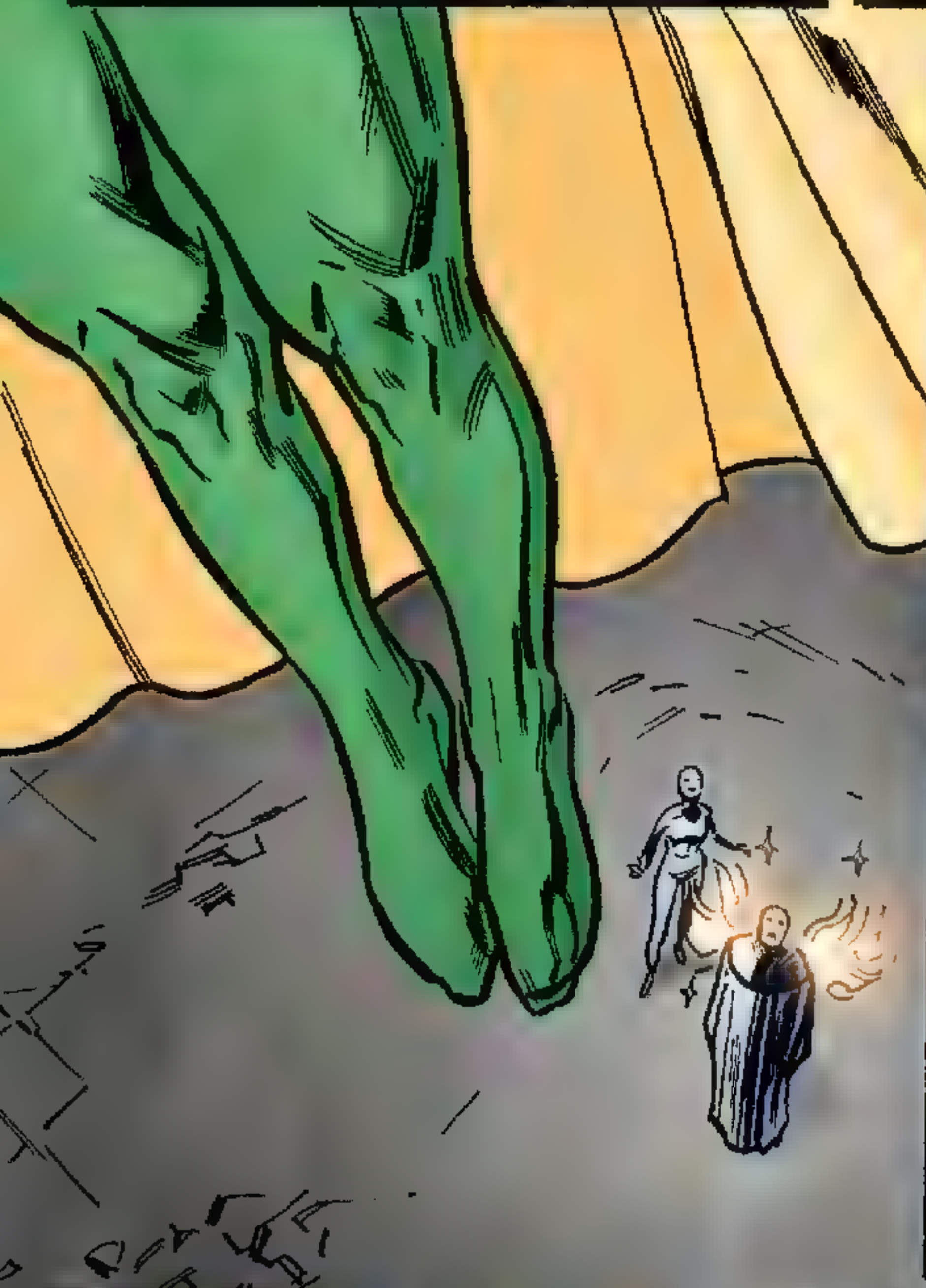


THIS SHOULD HAVE BEEN A VICTORY.



THIS WILL SAVE EARTH? THIS **MONSTER** WILL SAVE US?

YOU'RE GOING TO BE PARTICULAR?



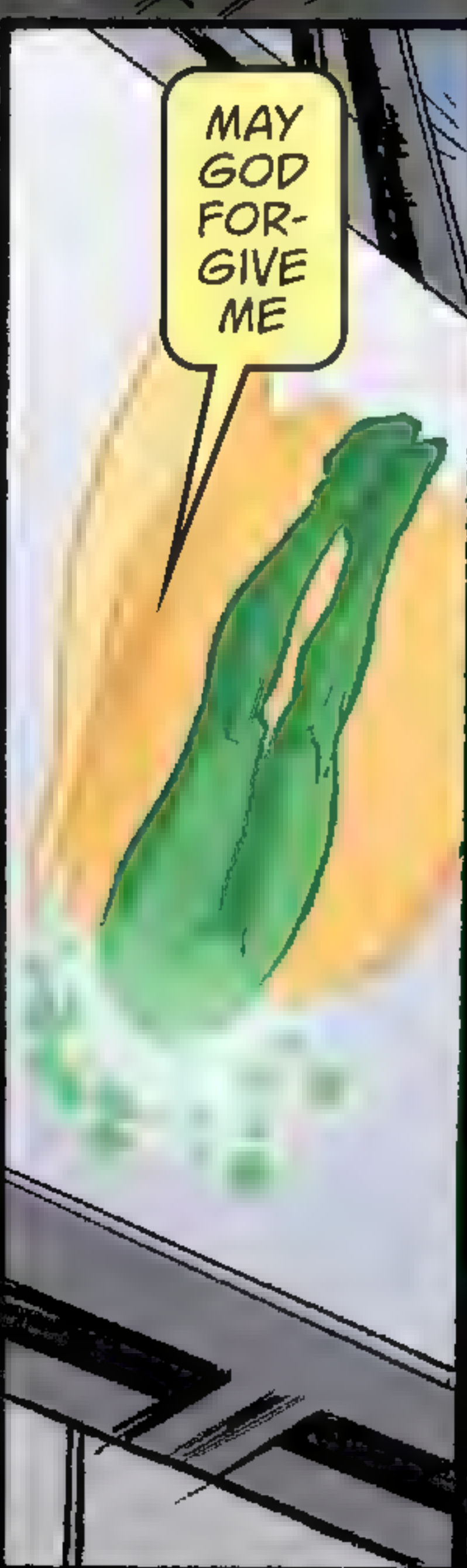
IS HE--?

YES.

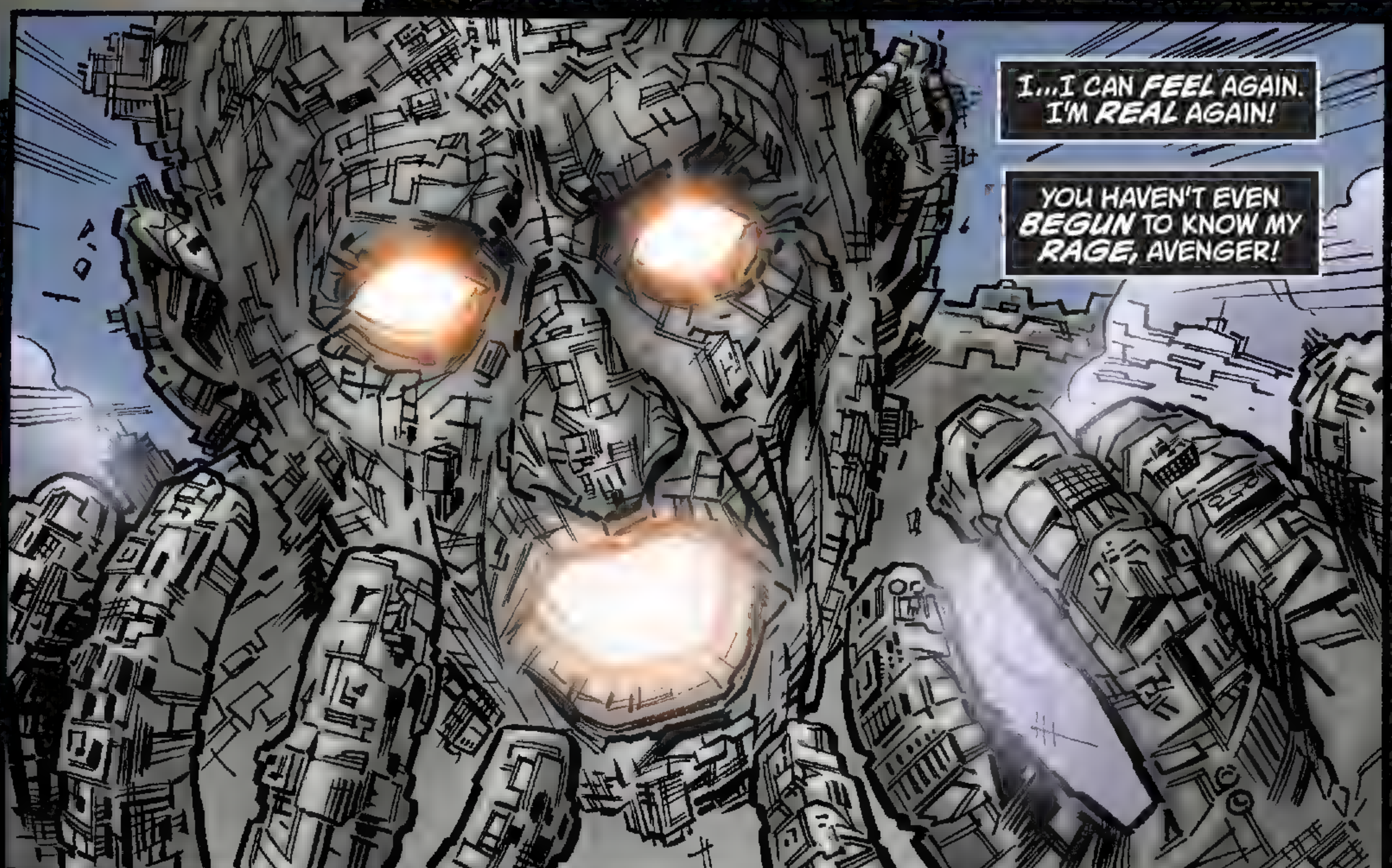


KILL ME, VISION. AT LEAST DO THAT. YOU WERE A HERO ONCE. BE ONE AGAIN.

I'M NOT DOING THIS FOR YOU, CREEL.



MAY GOD FORGIVE ME

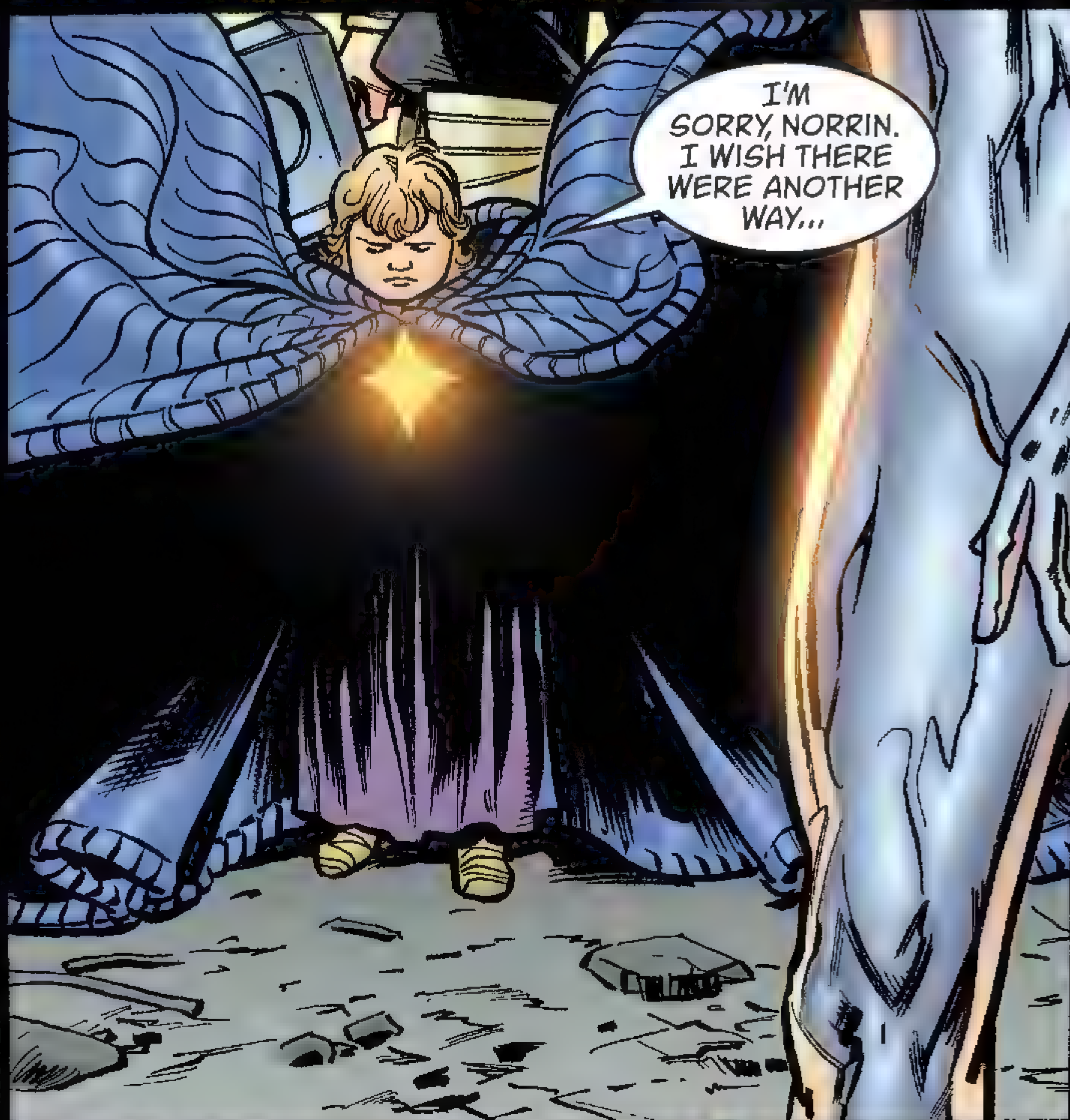


I...I CAN FEEL AGAIN. I'M REAL AGAIN!

YOU HAVEN'T EVEN **BEGUN** TO KNOW MY RAGE, AVENGER!



MAR-VELL.
I'M BACK TO
NORMAL. I CAN
FEEL...I HAVE
SUBSTANCE
AGAIN.



I'M
SORRY, NORRIN.
I WISH THERE
WERE ANOTHER
WAY...



MAY YOU FIND
LOVE ON THE OTHER
SIDE AND ESCAPE HELA'S
EMBRACE.



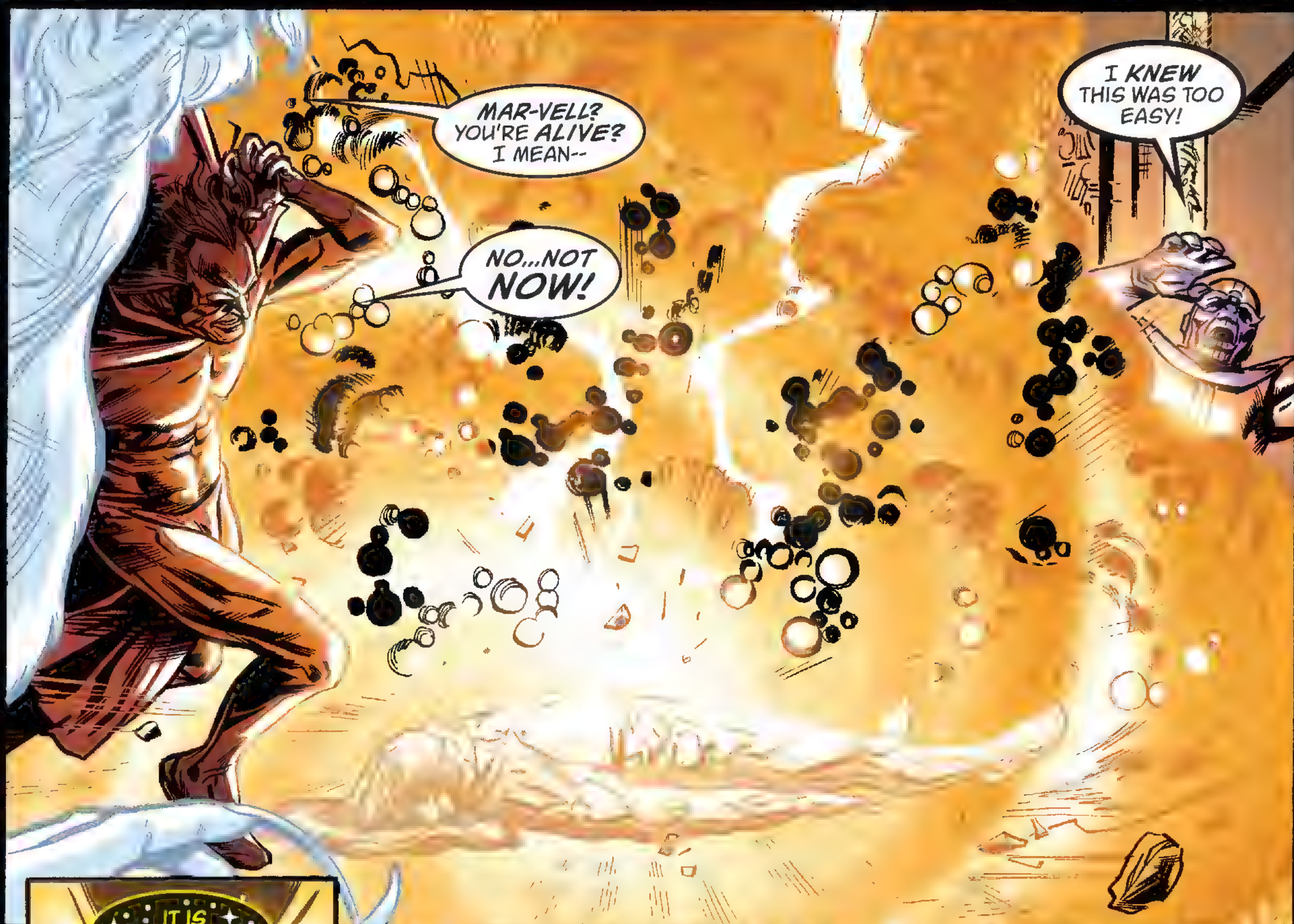
IT
MATTERS,
MAR-VELL.
WHAT WE DO,
IT MATTERS
IN THE OTHER
WORLD.



RIGHT.



GOOD-BYE.



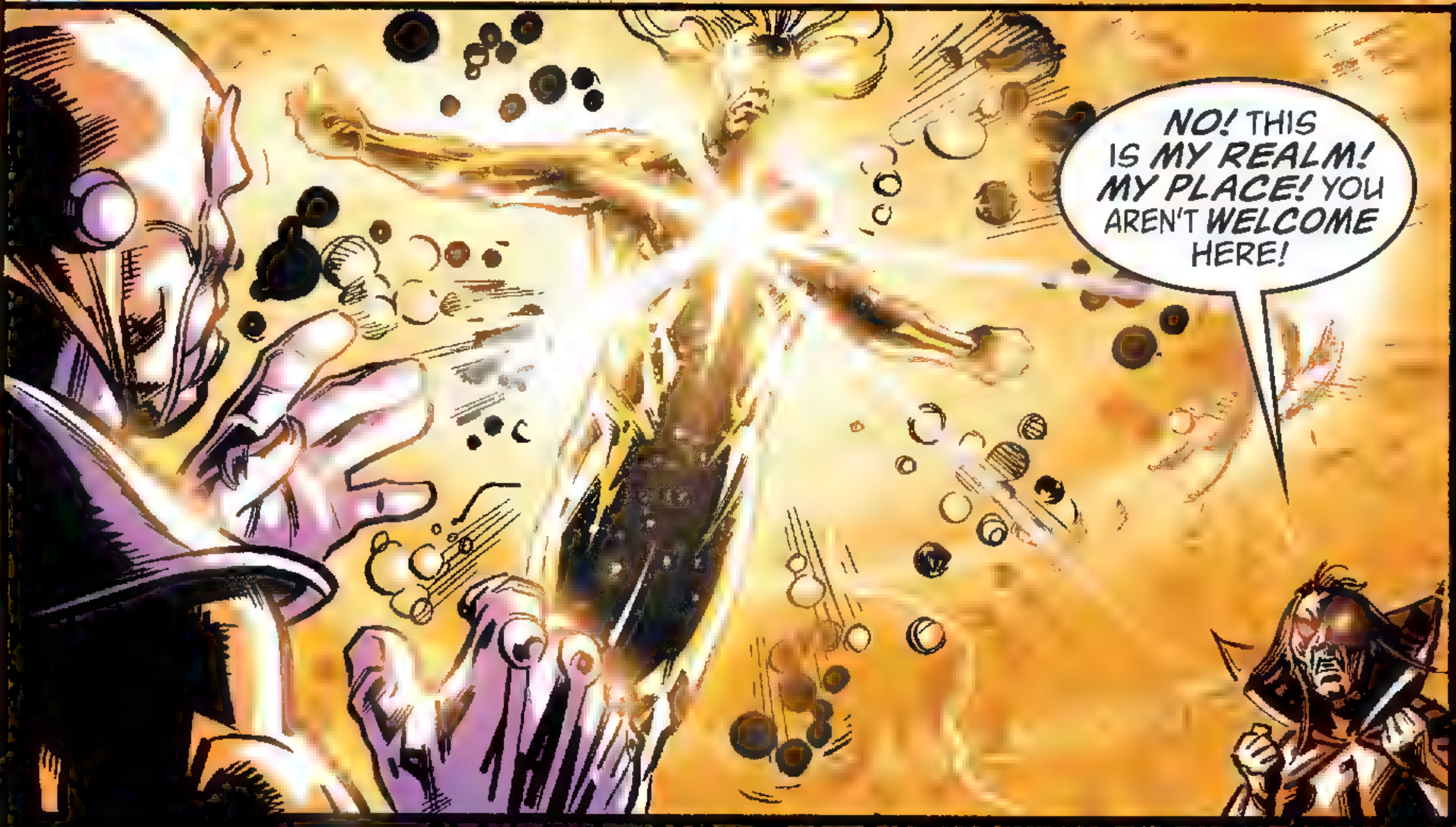
MAR-VELL?
YOU'RE ALIVE?
I MEAN--

NO...NOT
NOW!

I KNEW
THIS WAS TOO
EASY!



IT IS
FINISHED.



NO! THIS
IS MY REALM!
MY PLACE! YOU
AREN'T WELCOME
HERE!



YOU
CANNOT--

THIS ISN'T
YOUR REALM,
MEPHISTO. IT IS
HERS.

AND
YOU ARE NOT
WELCOME
HERE.



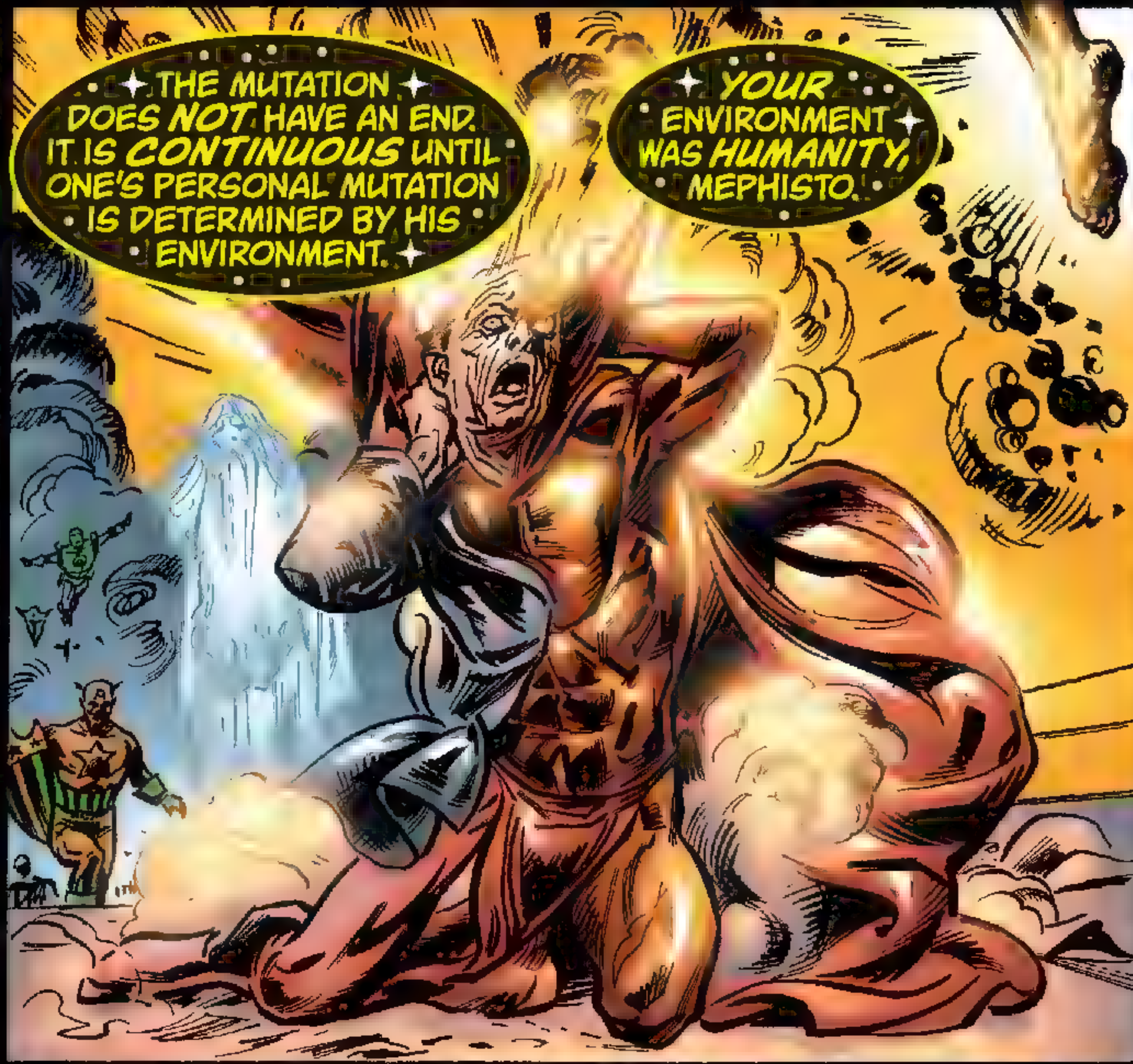
YOU
ARE NOT
MEPHISTO.

YOU
ARE NOT THE
FATHER OF
DEATH.



★ A LIVING HUMAN HAS NO RIGHTS IN THE REALM OF THE DEAD... ★

★ ...THE CELESTIALS MUTATED MANKIND FOR THEIR OWN BIOLOGICAL PURPOSES. ★



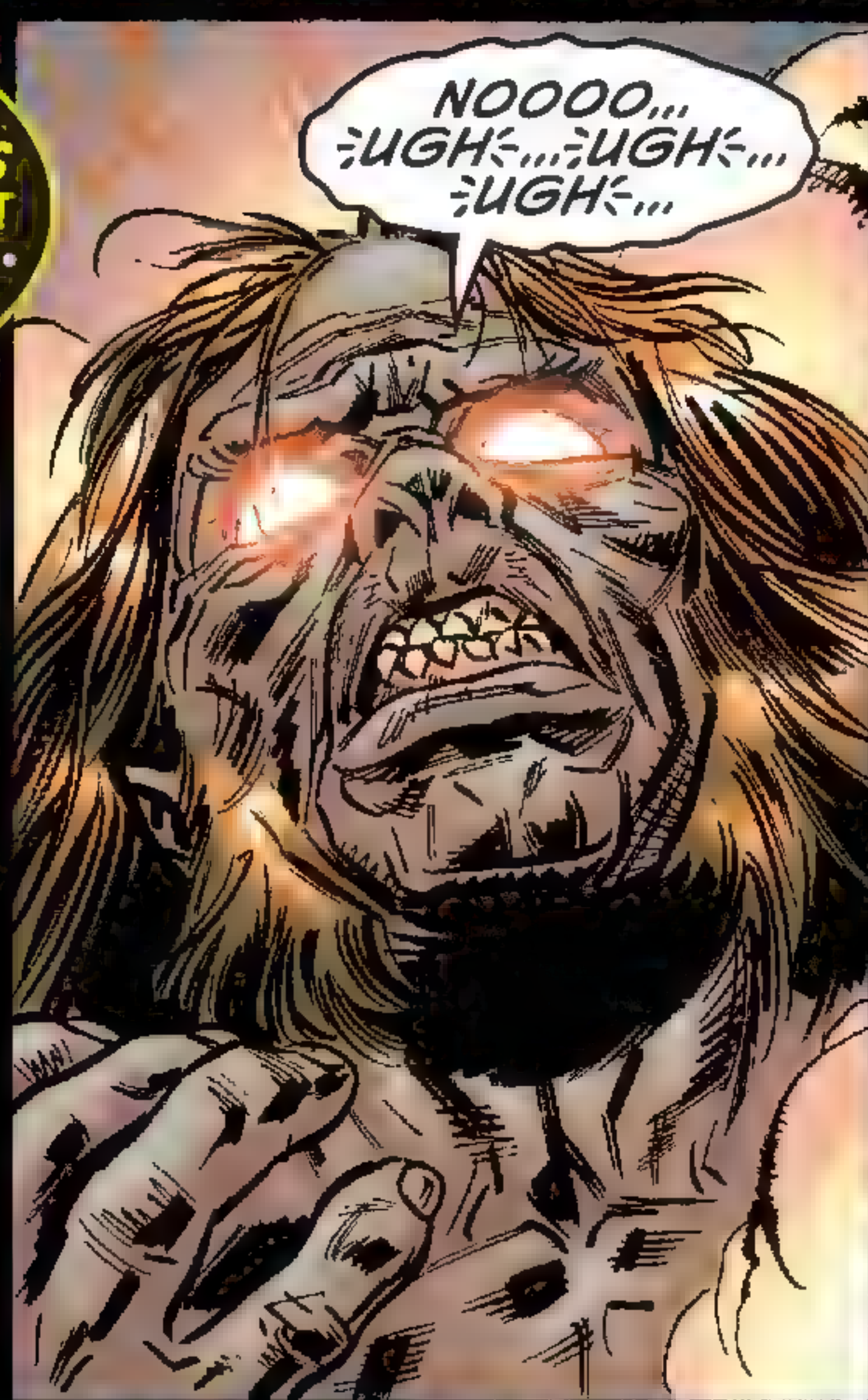
★ THE MUTATION DOES NOT HAVE AN END. IT IS CONTINUOUS UNTIL ONE'S PERSONAL MUTATION IS DETERMINED BY HIS ENVIRONMENT. ★

★ YOUR ENVIRONMENT WAS HUMANITY, MEPHISTO. ★

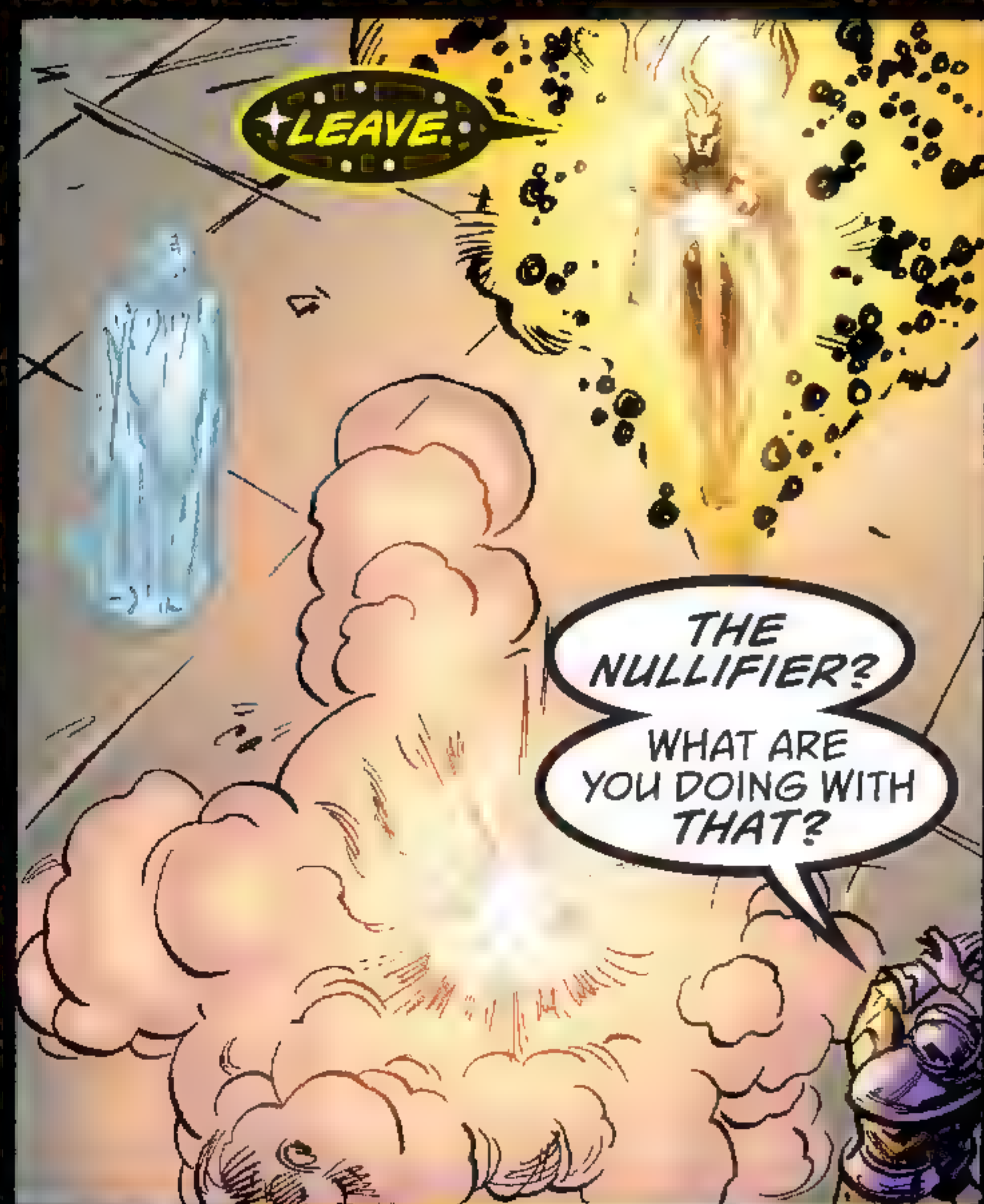


★ MAN-KIND'S FEAR OF THE DEVIL MADE YOU THE DEVIL. ★

★ YOU CAUSED A MULTITUDE OF ALTERNATIVE REALITIES TO ESCAPE A JUDGMENT NEVER MEANT FOR YOU. YOU ARE NOTHING. ★



NOOOO...
UGH... UGH...
UGH...



★ LEAVE. ★

THE NULLIFIER?

WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH THAT?



★ WHAT I CAME TO DO. DEATH IS GOING TO DIE. ★

YOU...ARE
YOU LOKI?

I AM YOUR
MAKER, CREEL.
AND FOR THAT, I
AM SORRY.

I DIDN'T
KNOW WHAT I
WAS DOING WHEN I
FED YOU THE ASGARDIAN-
GROWN HERBS THAT
GAVE YOU YOUR
POWER.

BUT I WANT
YOU TO KNOW, YOU ARE
NOT AN **ABSORBING MAN**.
YOU DON'T NEED TO TOUCH
SOMETHING TO ABSORB
ITS PROPERTIES.

YOU ARE MADE
OF **PURE IMAGINATION**.
PURE WILL-POWER. THAT'S
WHAT WE **ALL** WILL BECOME.
THAT'S WHAT **YOU** ARE
NOW.

THAT'S
ALL WE **EVER**
WERE.

YOU CAN
BE **ANYTHING** JUST
BY **CHOOSING** TO
BE.

YOU DON'T
HAVE TO BE WHAT
OTHERS **DEFINE**
YOU AS.

BUT I'M **SMART**
NOW. YOU CAN'T
TRICK ME AS YOU
DID BEFORE!

I WON'T BE
MANIPULATED!

WHO
SAYS YOU'RE
NOT BEING
MANIPULATED
NOW?

WHO'S TO
SAY YOU WEREN'T
BEING MANIPULATED
BY **ULTRON?**

HELL,
YES.

LOOK AT ME.
I WILL BE THE **HERO**
NOW, AND SO CAN
YOU.

YOU HAVE
THE **WHOLE WORLD**
IN YOUR HANDS.

YOU NEVER
WERE A **MURDERER**,
CREEL. TRUE, YOU DID KILL
THE AVENGERS...

...BUT ONLY
AFTER **ABSORBING**
THE **ULTRON SUPER-**
COMPUTER.

ARE YOU
MANIPULATING
ME, **TOO**, LOKI?



MY BROTHER WILL MAKE ALL WE HAVE LABORED FOR, **FOR NAUGHT!** I MUST **STOP HIM!**

NO, THOR. YOUR BROTHER IS AN **ALLY** NOW. THINGS HAVE CHANGED.



WHY DO YOU SAY THE WHOLE WORLD'S IN MY HANDS? I'M NOT **GOD.**

MAYBE NOT, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN YOU CAN'T **SAVE** EVERYONE ON THIS PLANET.

WHY WOULD I DO **THAT?**

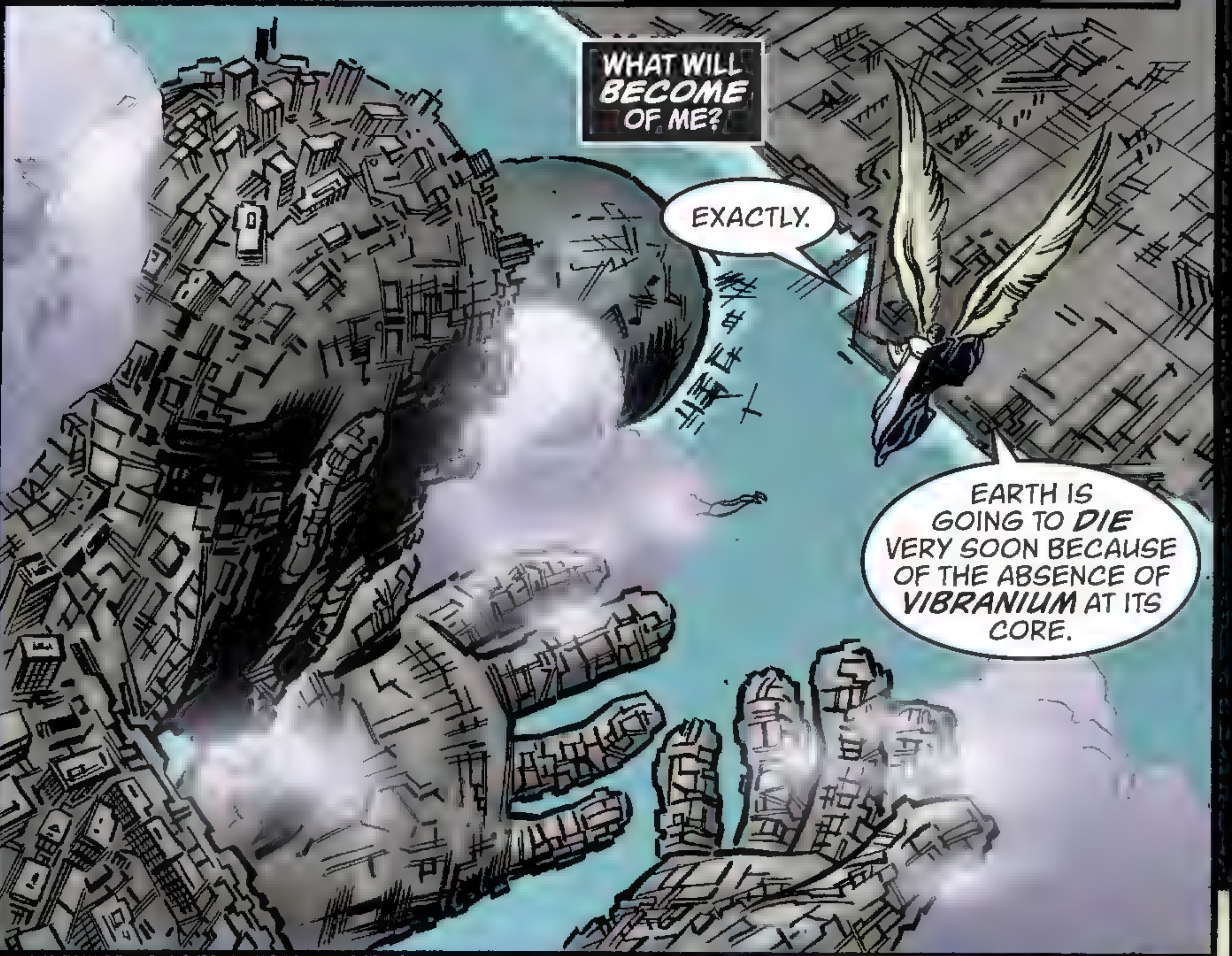


BECAUSE THEY THINK NOTHING **GOOD** COULD EVER COME FROM YOU.

THAT YOU WILL **ALWAYS** BE A CRIMINAL.

THAT YOU CAN ONLY **TAKE** LIFE AND NEVER **GIVE** IT.

THE SAME HAS BEEN SAID FOR **MYSELF**, AND **ANYONE ELSE** THAT EVER DID WRONG.



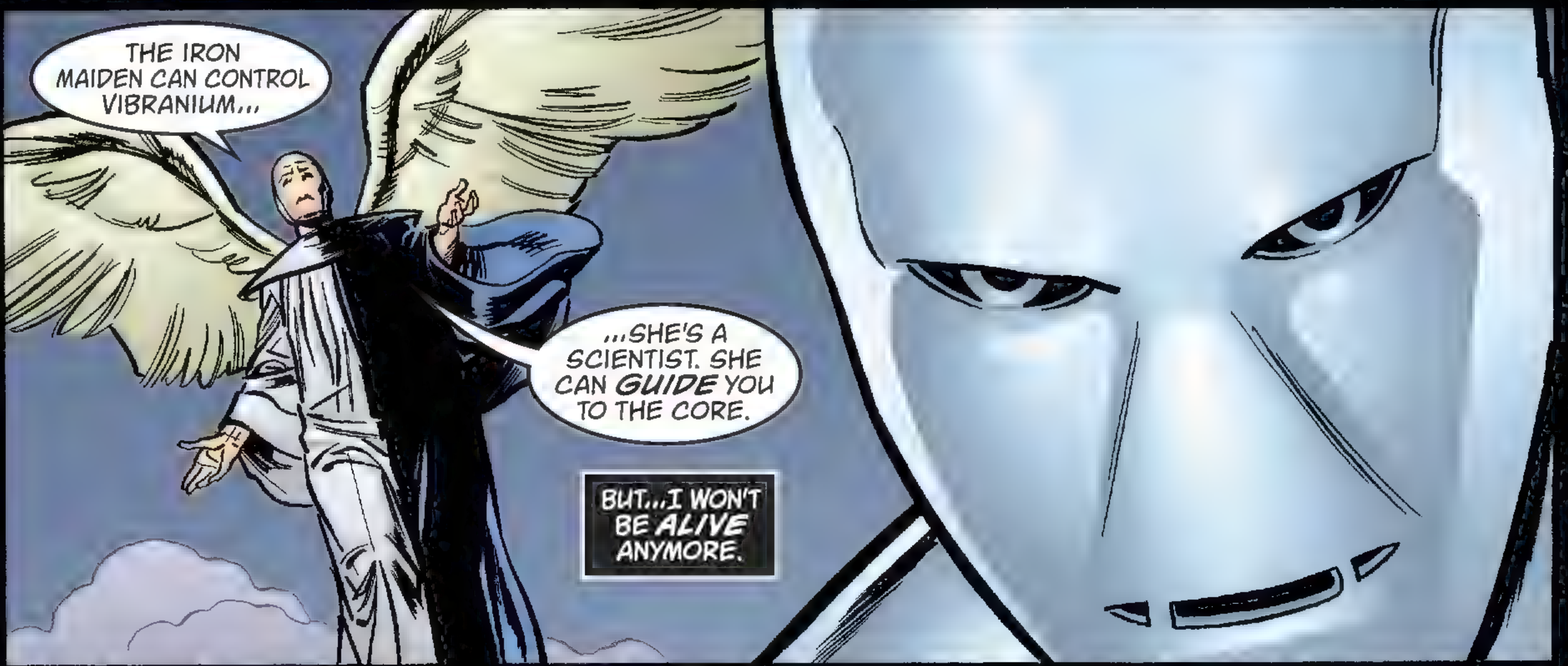
WHAT WILL **BECOME** OF ME?

EXACTLY.

EARTH IS GOING TO **DIE** VERY SOON BECAUSE OF THE ABSENCE OF **VIBRANIUM** AT ITS CORE.



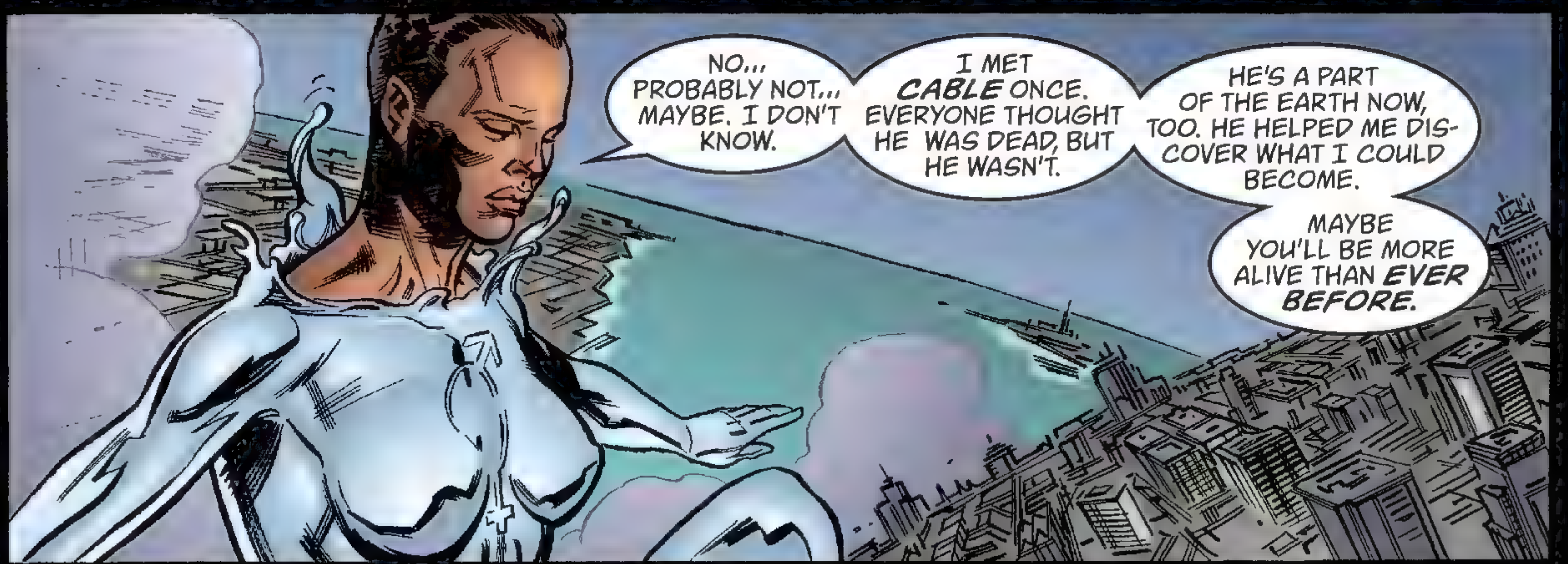
YOU CAN SAVE EARTH BY **BECOMING** VIBRANIUM.



THE IRON MAIDEN CAN CONTROL VIBRANIUM...

...SHE'S A SCIENTIST. SHE CAN **GUIDE** YOU TO THE CORE.

BUT...I WON'T BE **ALIVE** ANYMORE.



NO... PROBABLY NOT... MAYBE. I DON'T KNOW.

I MET **CABLE** ONCE. EVERYONE THOUGHT HE WAS DEAD, BUT HE WASN'T.

HE'S A PART OF THE EARTH NOW, TOO. HE HELPED ME DISCOVER WHAT I COULD BECOME.

MAYBE YOU'LL BE MORE ALIVE THAN **EVER BEFORE**.



BUT IF THERE'S ANYONE HERE ON EARTH, ANYONE YOU'VE EVER **LOVED**...THEY WILL **LIVE**.



TITANIA.



WILL I GET A STATUE?

THAT'S UP TO YOU, CREEEL.

"LOKI, LOOK...
HE'S ACTUALLY
DOING IT."

"HELP HIM THEN,
KAREN. **GUIDE**
HIM."

"HELP
HIM."

"HELP HIM
HAVE THE
COURAGE
TO DIE."

★ TIME
TO DIE ★

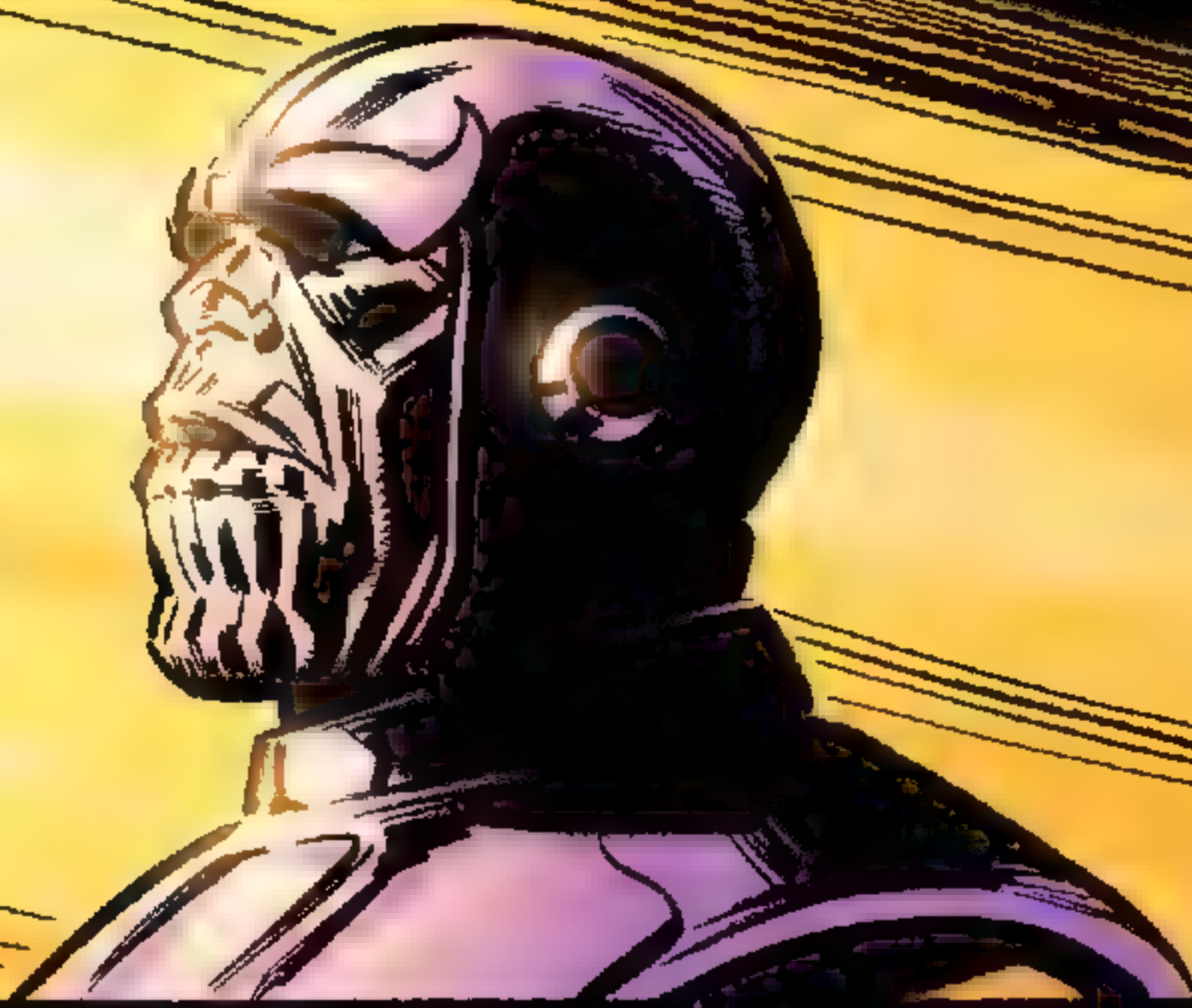
I WILL
NOT LET
YOU KILL
HER!

★ SHE'S
NOT YOUR
MOTHER,
THANOS ★

WHAT
DID YOU
SAY?

★ YOU ★
★ OWE THIS FORCE NO ★
★ ALLEGIANCE. SHE COMES ★
★ FROM THE UNIVERSE THAT ★
★ EXISTED BEFORE THIS ★
★ ONE. ★

★ THIS ★
★ VERY PLACE IS ALL ★
★ THAT REMAINS OF THE ★
★ WORLD THAT GAVE BIRTH ★
★ TO BEINGS LIKE THE ★
★ CELESTIALS. ★



★ "YOU ARE *NOT* THE SON OF ★
★ DEATH, THANOS. YOUR MOTHER ★
★ DIED WHEN YOU ATTACKED THE ★
★ PLANET TITAN." ★

★ DEATH ★
★ TOOK ADVANTAGE ★
★ OF YOU BY POSING ★
★ AS THE ONLY BEING ★
★ YOU EVER CARED ★
★ FOR. ★



THE COSMIC
CONSCIOUSNESS
HAS ONLY MADE AN
APPARENT WAY FOR
YOU TO *STRIKE* AT
ME, KREE! YOU
LIE!

YOU...
LIE.

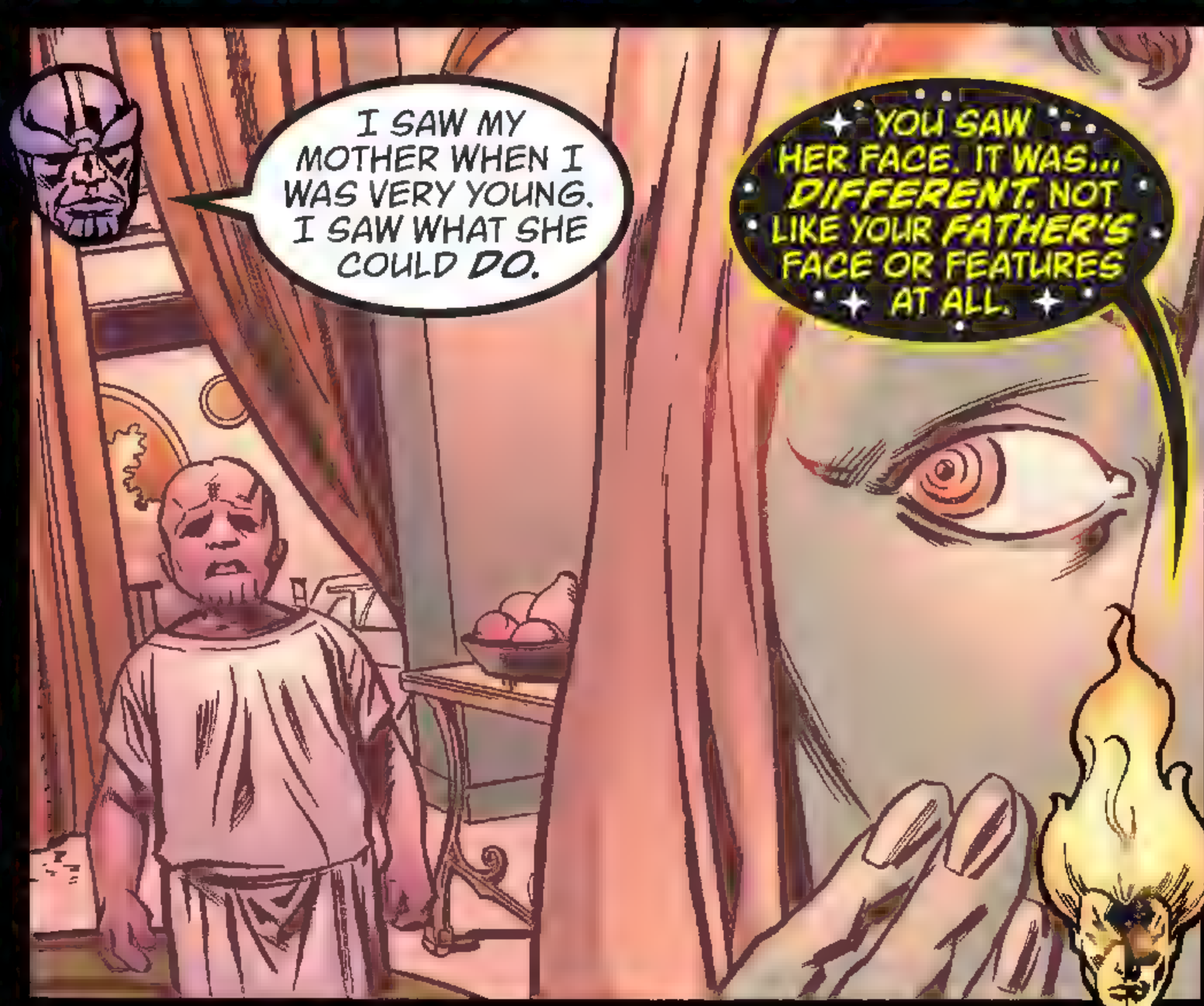
★ "YOU WERE THE *FIRST BORN* ★
★ OF MENTOR AND YOUR MOTHER. ★

★ "ONE LOOK AT YOU AND ★
★ YOUR MOTHER KNEW SHE ★
★ NEEDED TO RESHAPE ★
★ HER INTERNAL ORGANS ★
★ IN ADDITION TO HER ★
★ EXTERNAL. ★

★ "WAS IT HARD BEING ★
★ *HIDEOUS* COMPARED ★
★ TO THE OTHERS?" ★

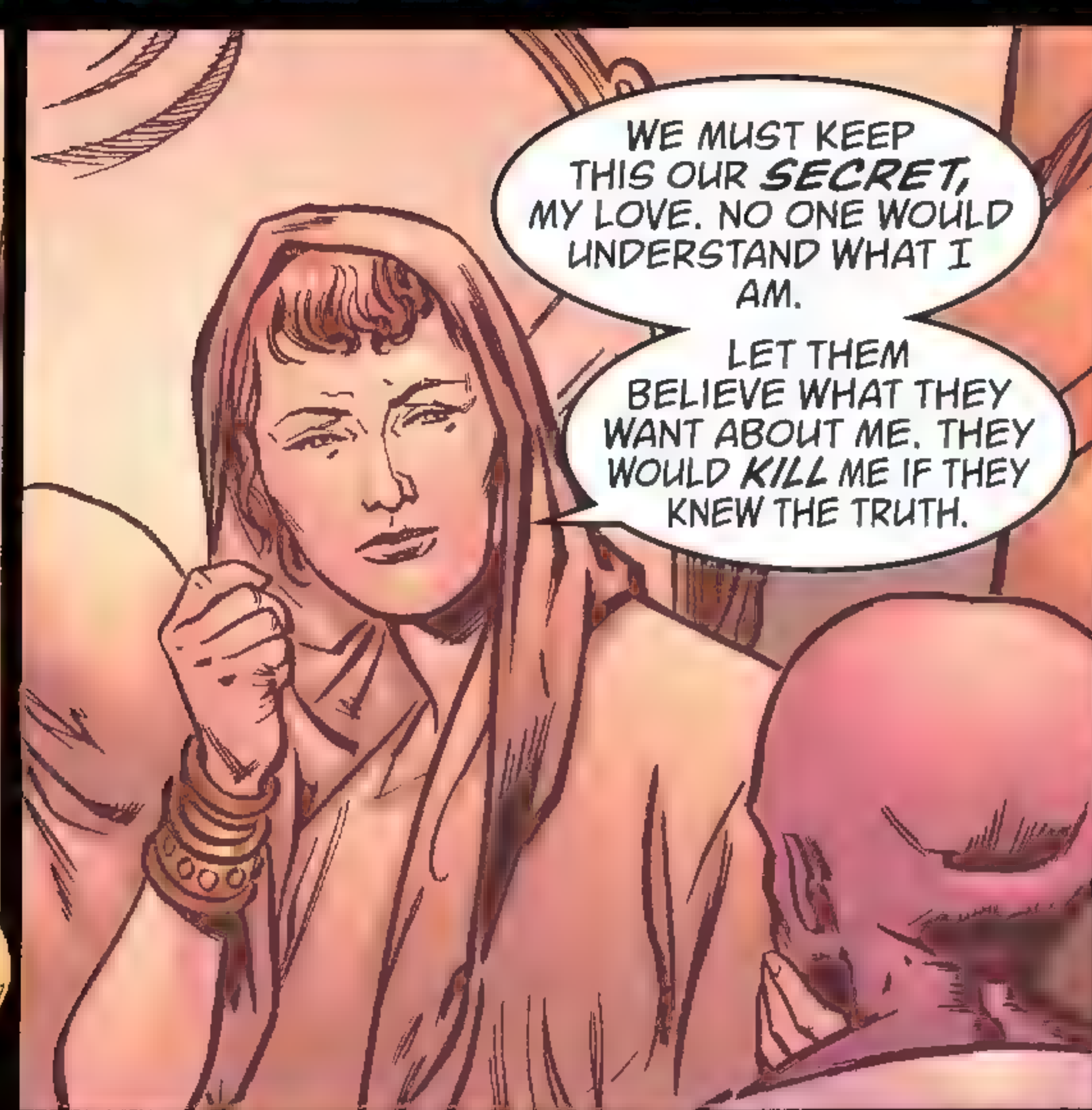
★ "OR WAS IT NOT BEING ★
★ ALLOWED TO LIVE THE ★
★ *SAME LIE* THAT THEY ★
★ DID THAT LED TO YOUR ★
★ AGGRESSION?" ★





I SAW MY MOTHER WHEN I WAS VERY YOUNG. I SAW WHAT SHE COULD DO.

★ YOU SAW HER FACE. IT WAS... **DIFFERENT**. NOT LIKE YOUR **FATHER'S** FACE OR FEATURES AT ALL. ★



WE MUST KEEP THIS OUR **SECRET**, MY LOVE. NO ONE WOULD UNDERSTAND WHAT I AM.

LET THEM BELIEVE WHAT THEY WANT ABOUT ME. THEY WOULD **KILL** ME IF THEY KNEW THE TRUTH.



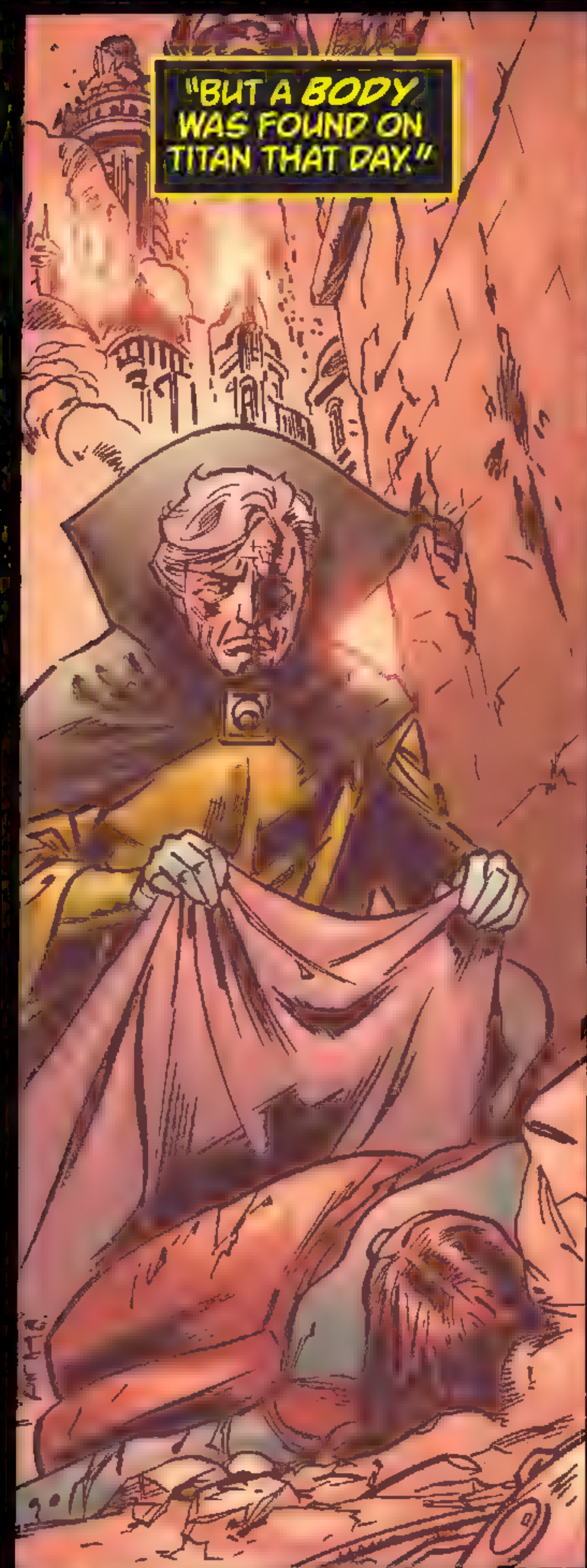
"YOU **HATED** THEM FROM THAT DAY FORWARD. YOUR BROTHERS...YOUR SISTERS...YOUR FATHER. ALL OF THEM. ★ ★ ★

★ ONLY YOU BORE THE EVIDENCE THAT SHOWED YOUR **TRUE HERITAGE**. A HERITAGE THEY HAD ESCAPED, BUT ONE THAT STILL BEAT WITHIN THEIR **MONGREL HEARTS**. ★ RIGHT, THANOS? ★



★ YOU BELIEVED SHE NEEDED **LIFE** TO SUSTAIN HER. AND SO YOU DECIDED TO HELP. THAT'S WHY YOU ATTACKED TITAN. ★ ★ ★

★ THAT'S WHY FOR YEARS YOU HAVE MURDERED AND DESTROYED **EVERYTHING** IN YOUR PATH. ★



"BUT A **BODY** WAS FOUND ON TITAN THAT DAY."



"NO. THERE WAS NO BODY."

★ YOUR FATHER COVERED IT UP. HE **HID** THE BODY. WHEN HE REALIZED YOUR MOTHER WAS NOT WHAT HE **BELIEVED** HER TO BE.

★ YOUR FATHER, MENTOR, COVERED HER UP JUST LIKE **DEATH** KNEW HE WOULD. ★ ★ ★



★ YOUR MOTHER WAS A **SKRULL**, THANOS!

★ YOU BEAR A **RESEMBLANCE** TO HER RACE!

★ NOW **STEP ASIDE.**

NO.

YOU **LIE**, MAR-VELL. SHE **COULDN'T BE...** I HAVE... MY MOTHER WAS NEVER...

★ HERE. **TAKE IT.** ★ YOUR MOTHER WOULD WANT YOU TO. IT WAS HER FEAR OF DEATH THAT LED HER TO **DIS-GUISE** HERSELF IN THE FIRST PLACE.



NO! WHAT ARE YOU **DOING**, MAR-VELL?









I *SWEAR*
THIS NEVER HAPPENED
TO *DAD*.



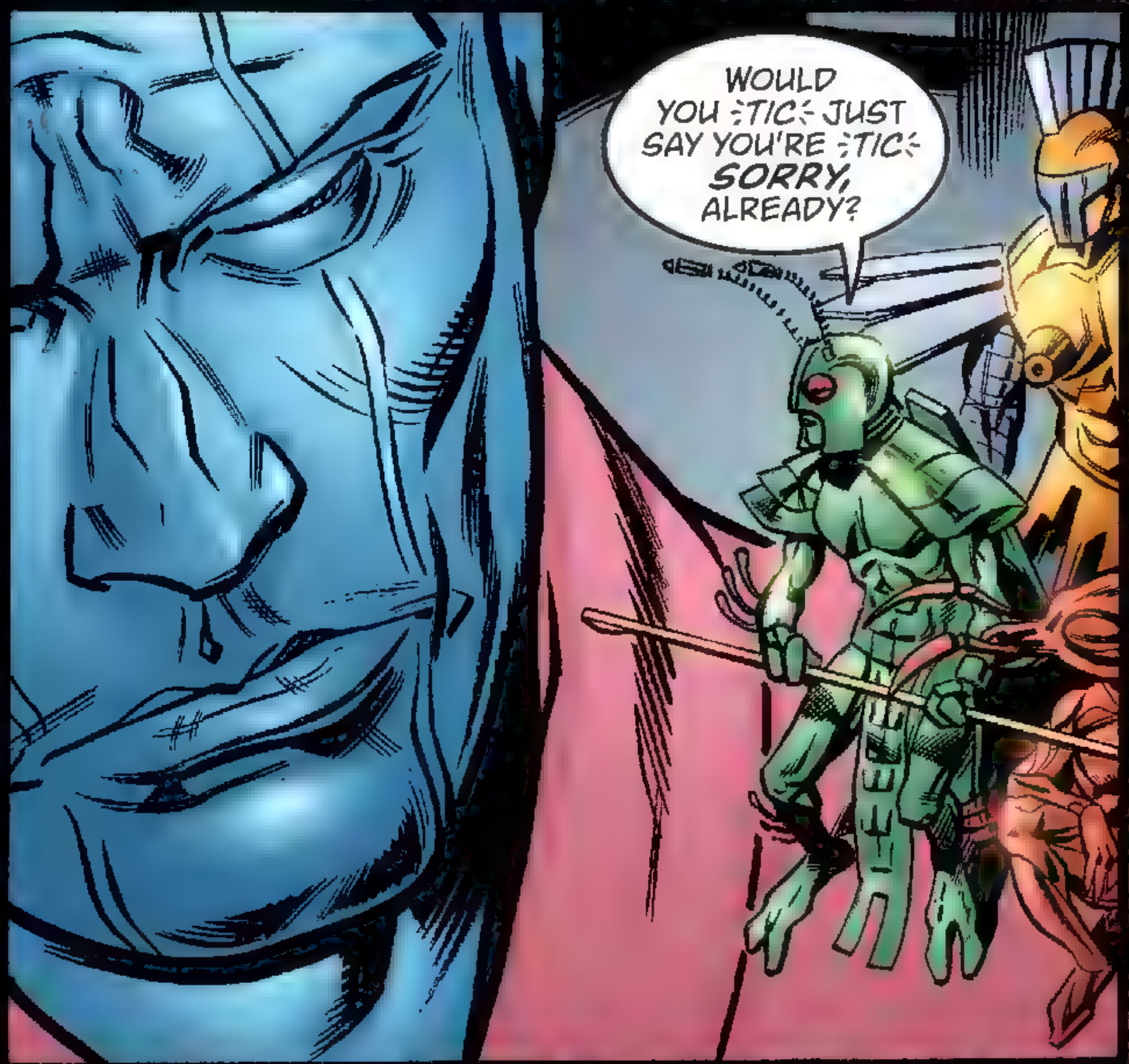
DOCTOR
RICHARDS?

KANG?



PERHAPS.
BUT NOT QUITE
YET.

I'VE COME
TO TELL YOU, DOCTOR
RICHARDS, THAT YOU...
YOU...WHAT I'M TRYING
TO SAY IS THAT...



WOULD
YOU ~~ETIC~~ JUST
SAY YOU'RE ~~ETIC~~
SORRY,
ALREADY?



THANK YOU,
BUG. YOU WERE *RIGHT*,
DR. RICHARDS.

IF
WE VISIT
OTHER
WORLDS, WE
WILL CAUSE
THEM THE
SAME
DAMAGE
WE HAVE
IN OUR
OWN.



IF I CAN DO
ANYTHING TO UNDO THE
DAMAGE I'VE CAUSED, YOU
HAVE MY *WORD*.

THANK
YOU.

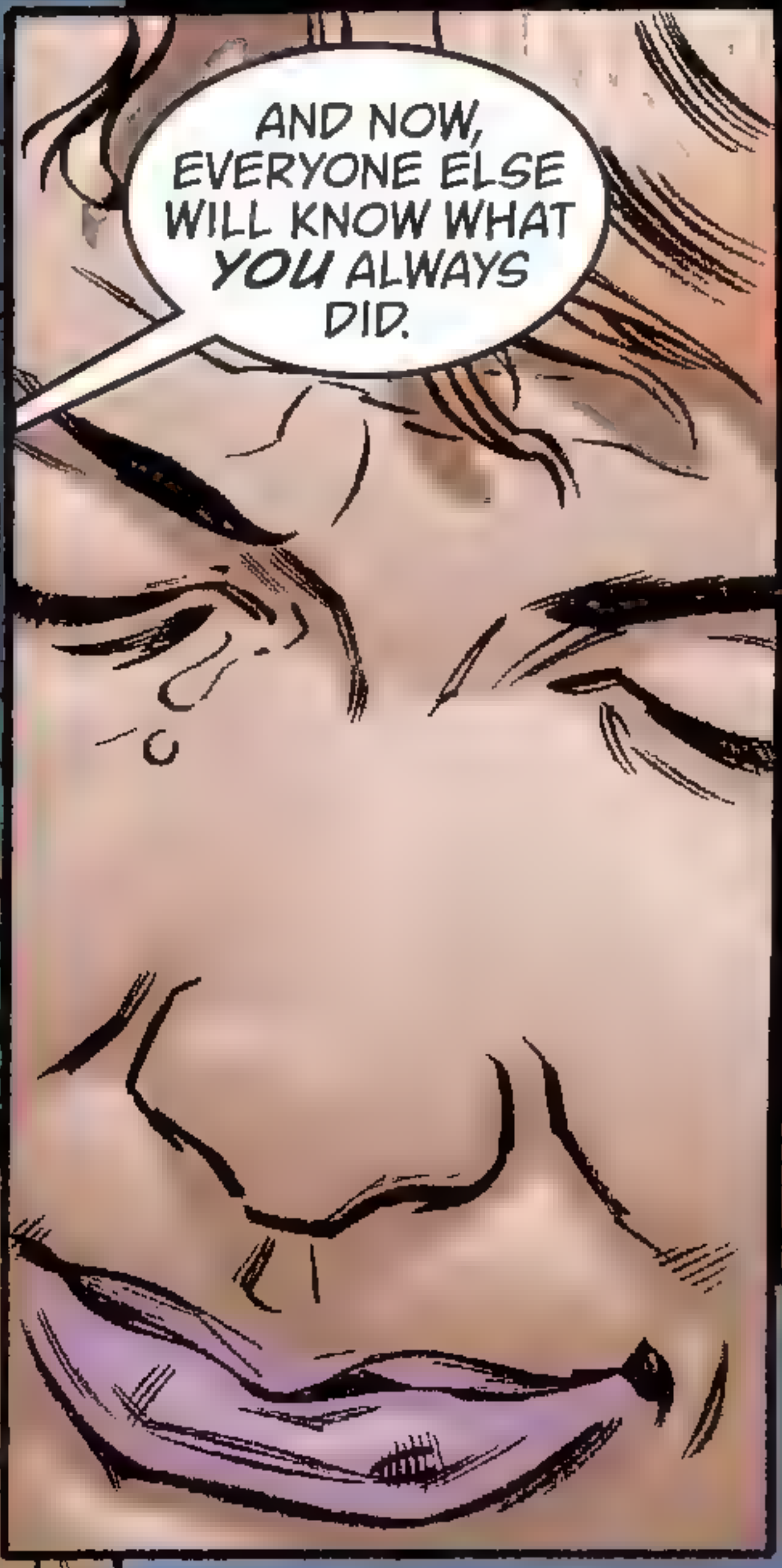
IN FACT,
I HAD THIS
IDEA...



CREEL DIED FOR YOU, TITANIA. HE DID IT FOR YOU.

I HAD TO SEE IF WHAT I HEARD WAS TRUE.

THERE WAS A GOOD MAN INSIDE OF HIM, MAR-VELL. THERE REALLY WAS.



AND NOW, EVERYONE ELSE WILL KNOW WHAT YOU ALWAYS DID.



IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE THE END OF THE WORLD! THEY PROMISED!

THAT'S TWICE NOW. I'M NOT GOING TO BELIEVE IT NEXT TIME. YOU CAN BET ON THAT!

I TOLD YOU TO GET ARMAGEDDON IN WRITING!



I STILL DON'T KNOW HOW WE'RE GOING TO BE ABLE TO LIVE THERE NOW, PARKER.

OH, COME ON NOW, SGT. CAGE...



"...AND YOU CALL
YOURSELF A **NEW
YORKER.**"



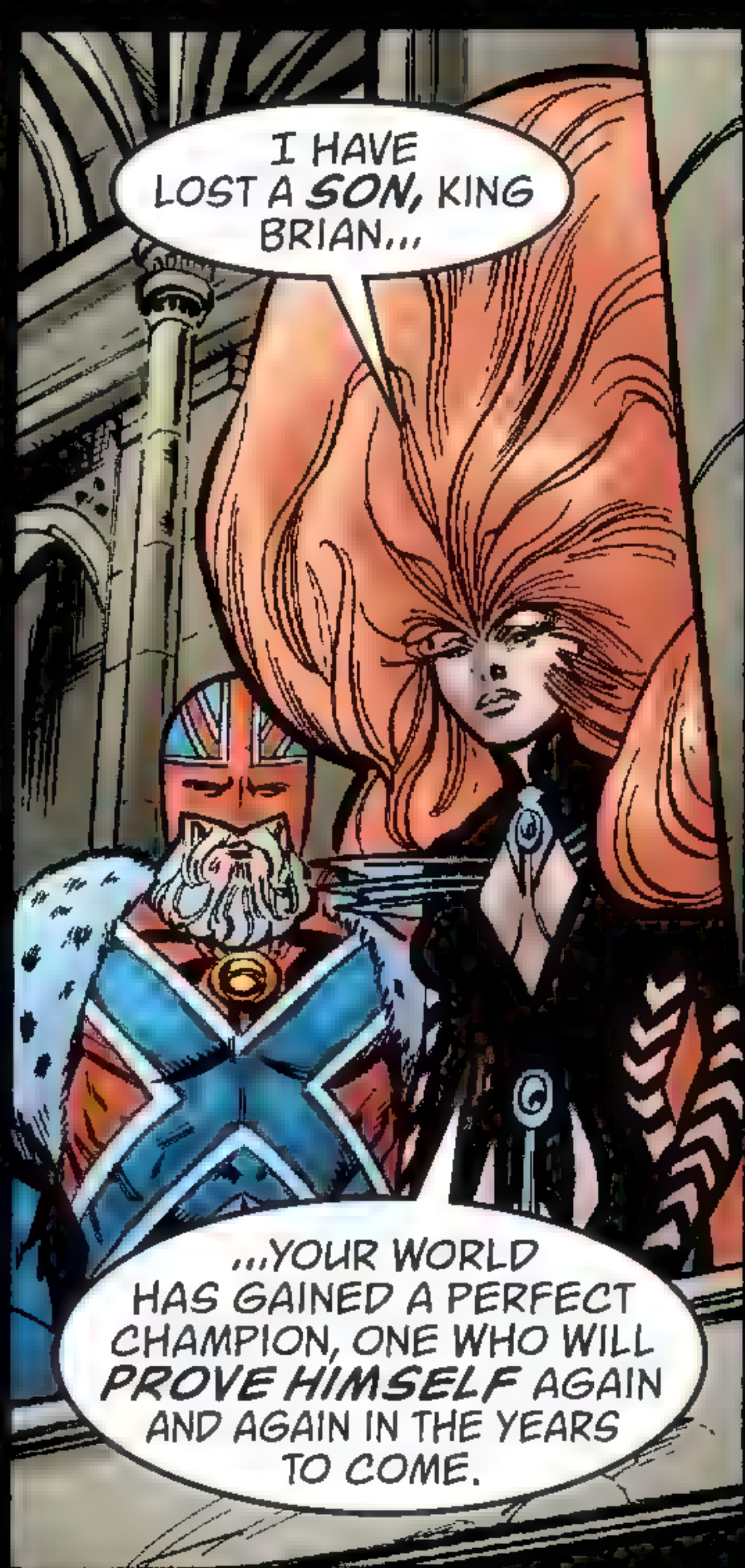
MY FELLOW AVENGERS. WE WHO ARE THE GUARDIANS OF ENGLAND.

WE MUST EXPAND OUR TERRITORIES.

IF THERE HAS BEEN ANYTHING TO LEARN FROM THE NEAR DESTRUCTION OF OUR WORLD AND THE BATTLE WE FOUGHT IN THE SAVAGE LAND...

...IT IS THAT THIS ENTIRE WORLD NEEDS THE PROTECTION AND SUPPORT WE CAN OFFER.

WE WILL BE ITS ARMORY.

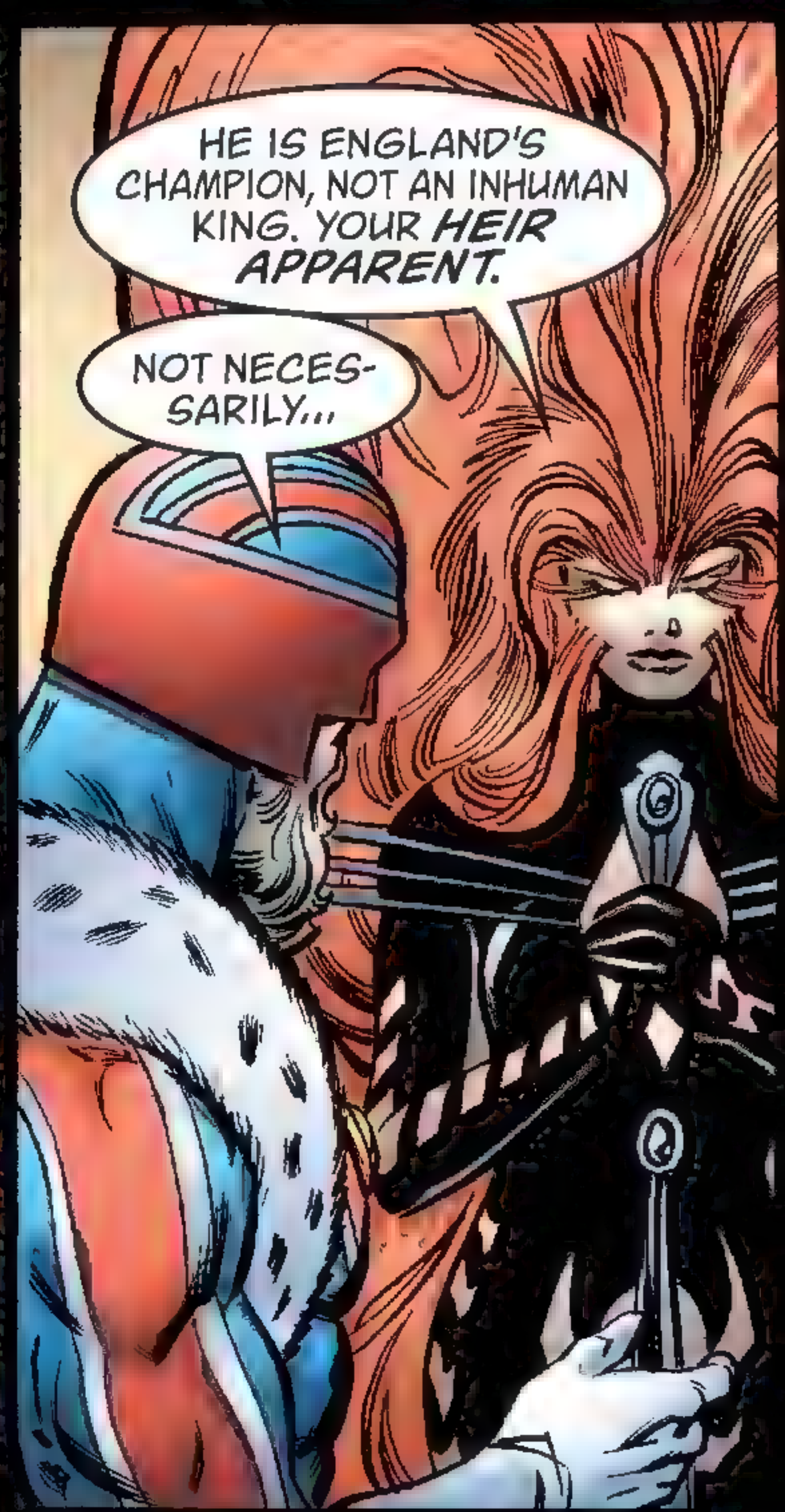


I HAVE LOST A SON, KING BRIAN...

...YOUR WORLD HAS GAINED A PERFECT CHAMPION, ONE WHO WILL PROVE HIMSELF AGAIN AND AGAIN IN THE YEARS TO COME.

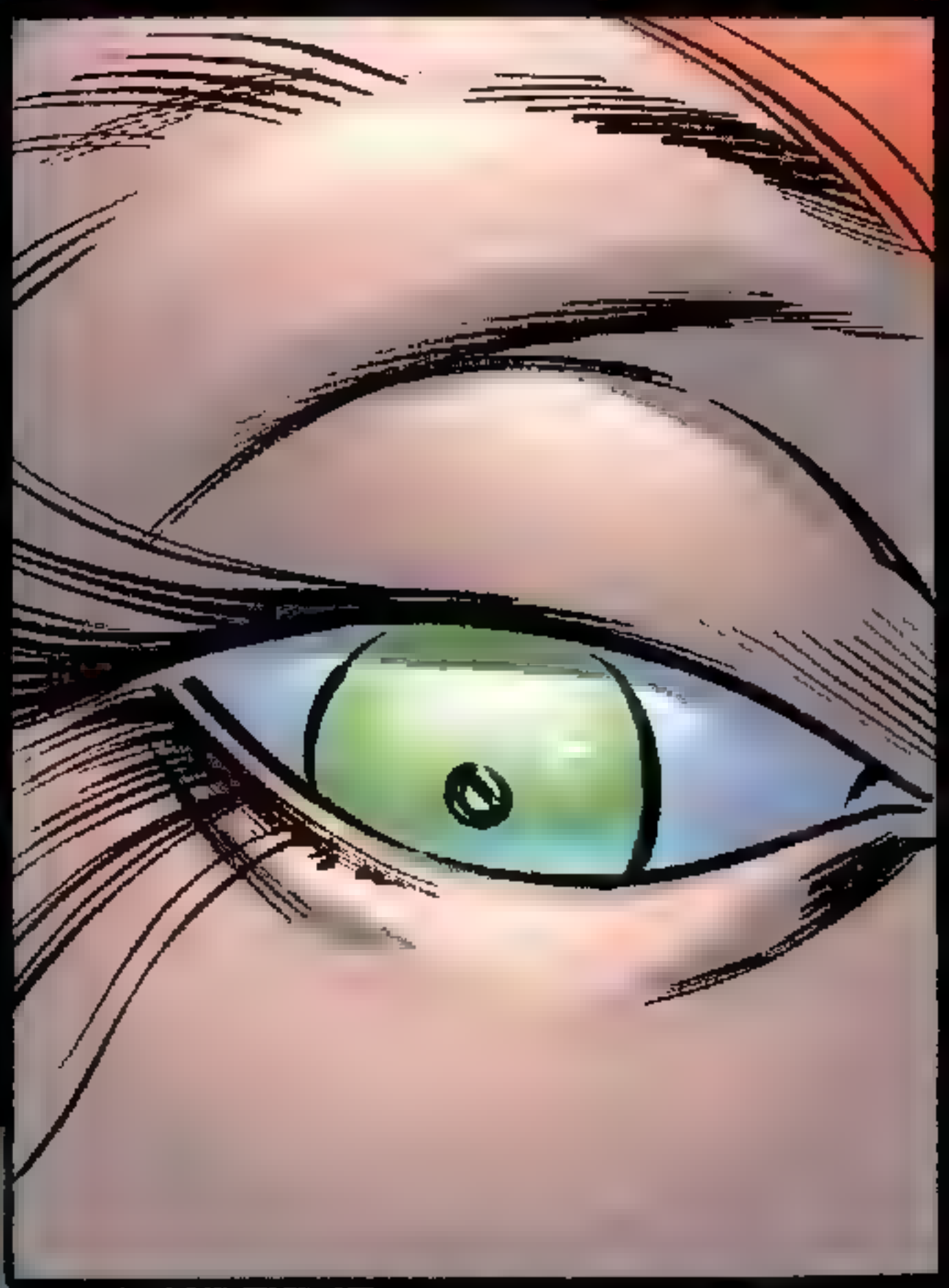


...I HAVE BEEN THINKING, LADY MEDUSA, THAT IF THERE WERE A WAY TO LINK THE HEIR TO THE THRONE OF ENGLAND TO THE WORLD'S INHUMAN POPULATION...



HE IS ENGLAND'S CHAMPION, NOT AN INHUMAN KING. YOUR HEIR APPARENT.

NOT NECESSARILY...



...ENGLAND WOULD RULE THE WORLD.

AND WHO KNOWS, LOVE MAY EVEN COME IN TIME.

WH-WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, KING BRIAN?



WILL YOU MARRY ME?



WILL YOU BE MY QUEEN?



"THERE...
THERE."

"MAGNETO IS AN
ALLY NOW. A HERO.
A *FRIEND*."



YOU'VE
SUCCEEDED IN
REDEEMING HIM,
X-MEN, AS YOU HAVE
ALMOST *ALL* YOUR
ENEMIES.

MAGNETO...
THE BROTHERHOOD...
UNUS...JUGGERNAUT...
SAURON. YOU SAVED
THEM *ALL*.



WHY
HAVEN'T YOU
REDEEMED
ME?

WHAT
ABOUT *KURT
WAGNER*?

BUT WHAT
OF A *FRIEND'S*
REDEMPTION?



IT'S *PERFECT*, MR. AND MRS. GRIMM. IT'S A FITTING TRIBUTE TO *STEVE ROGERS*, AN UNSUNG HERO IN THE EVENTS THAT HAVE GRIPPED THE WORLD THIS PAST YEAR.

I CAN'T BELIEVE I *MISSED* IT! THE WORLD ALMOST BIT THE *BIG ONE* AGAIN, AND WHERE WUZ I?



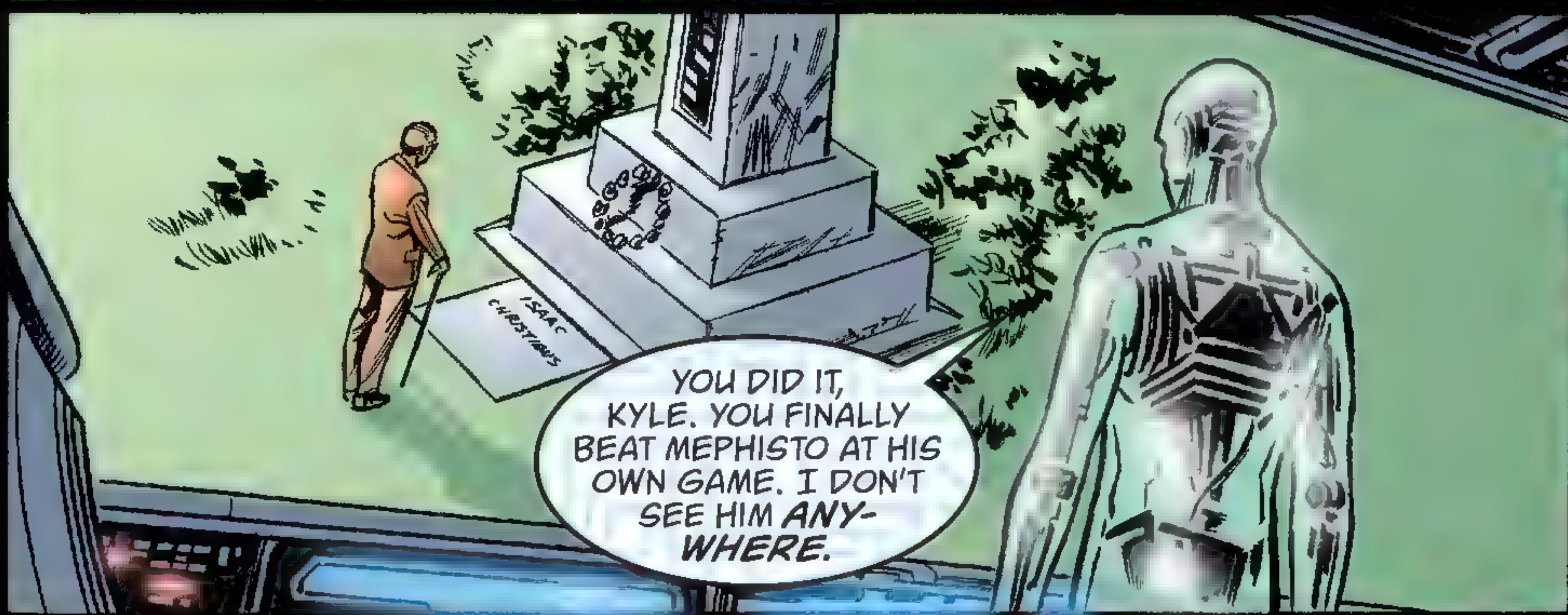
YOU WERE MY *HANDS* IN THE MOST IMPORTANT SCULPTURE I HAVE EVER ATTEMPTED, BENJAMIN.

YEAH... SURE, 'LICIA.

IT JUST BRUISES MY DELICATE EGO TA KNOW THE WORLD CAN BE SAVED *WITH-OUT* ME.



I MEAN, WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL ABOUT HAVIN' YER FACE MADE OUTTA *ROCK*, ANY-HOW?



YOU DID IT, KYLE. YOU FINALLY BEAT MEPHISTO AT HIS OWN GAME. I DON'T SEE HIM ANYWHERE.



NEITHER DO I, AARON... NEITHER DO I.



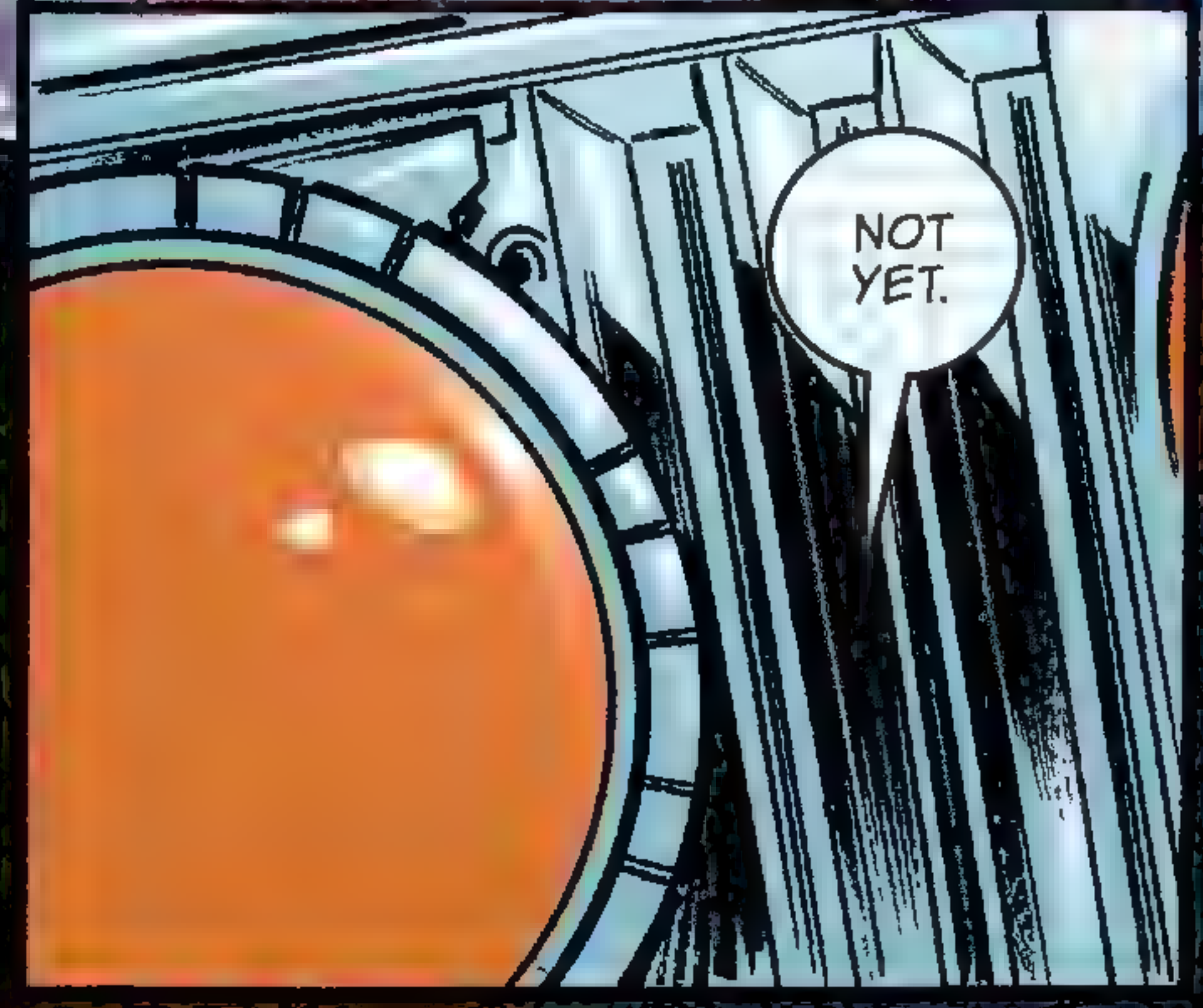
NOW WE JUST HAVE TO FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO WITH ALL OF THE CELESTIAL EMBRYOS GROWING IN ALL OF THOSE ALTERNATE EARTHS.

WE CAN'T JUST LEAVE THEM THAT WAY, CAN WE?

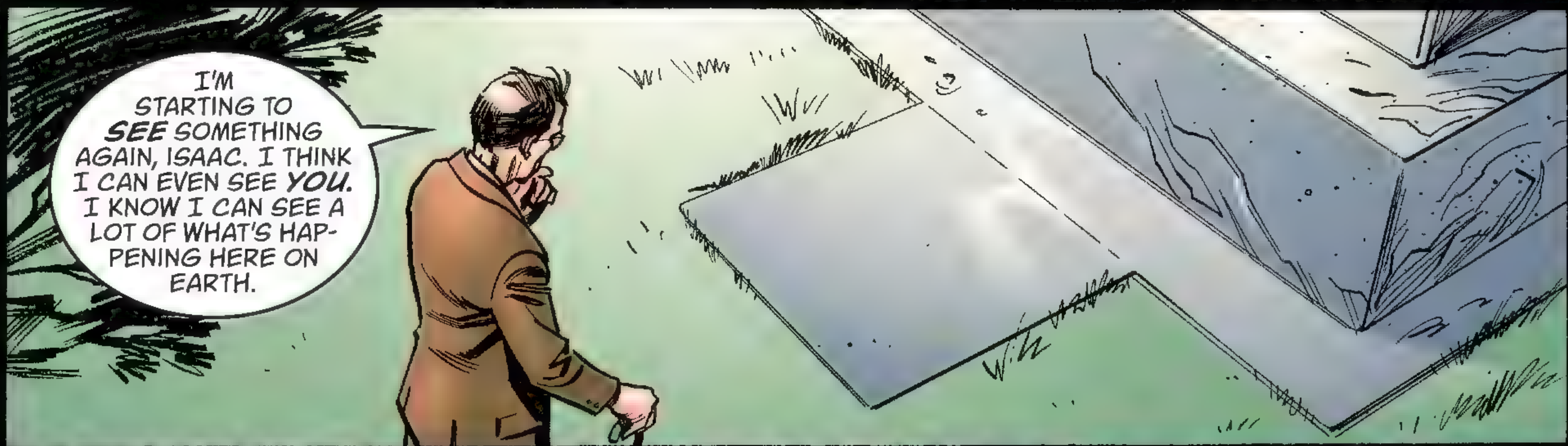


X-51, I BEG YOU. DO NOT DO THIS THING.

BUT UATH, I HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING.



NOT YET.



I'M STARTING TO **SEE** SOMETHING AGAIN, ISAAC. I THINK I CAN EVEN SEE **YOU**. I KNOW I CAN SEE A LOT OF WHAT'S HAPPENING HERE ON EARTH.



I HOPE YOU HAVE YOUR **QUILL** AT THE READY...

...BECAUSE THE DEAD ARE GOING TO WANT TO **READ** SOMETHING.



I...I... **ISAAC?** WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME?

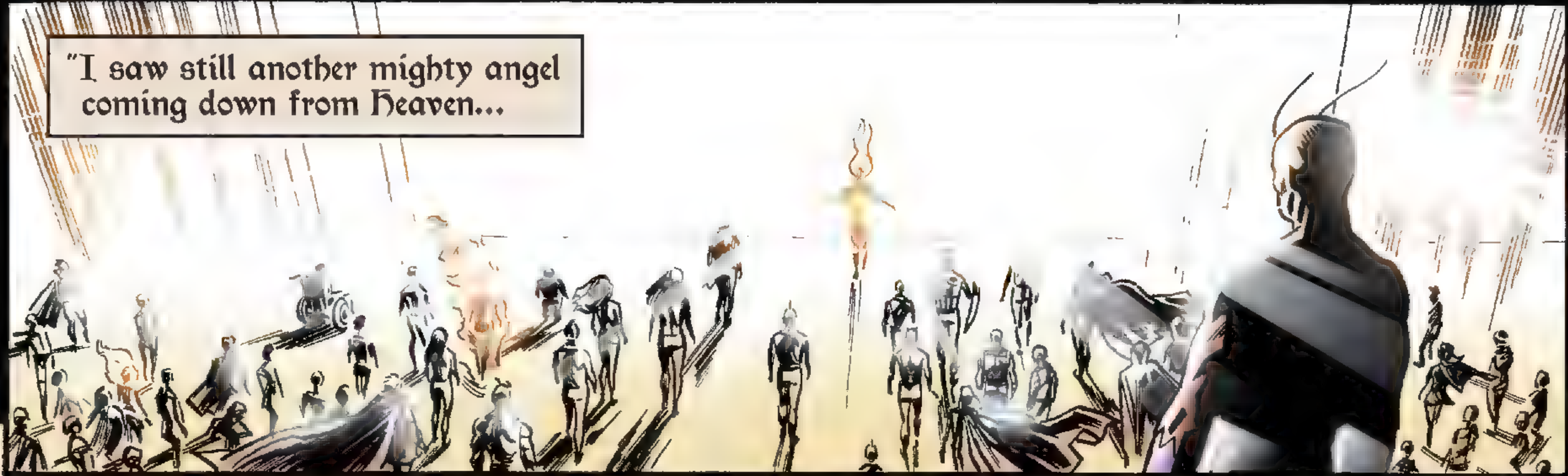


I CAN SEE **EVERYTHING**... I'M IN TOUCH WITH THE COMPLETED CONSCIOUSNESS, ISAAC. TIME AND SPACE ARE OPENING LIKE A **BOOK**.



IT'S **MIRACULOUS**.

"I saw still another mighty angel coming down from Heaven..."

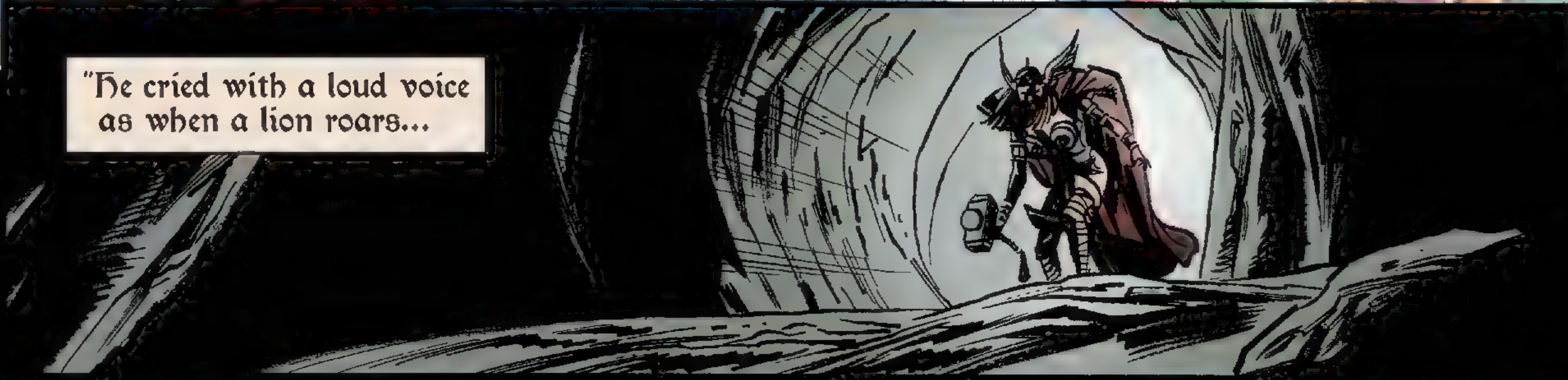


"Clothed with a cloud, and a rainbow was on his head..."

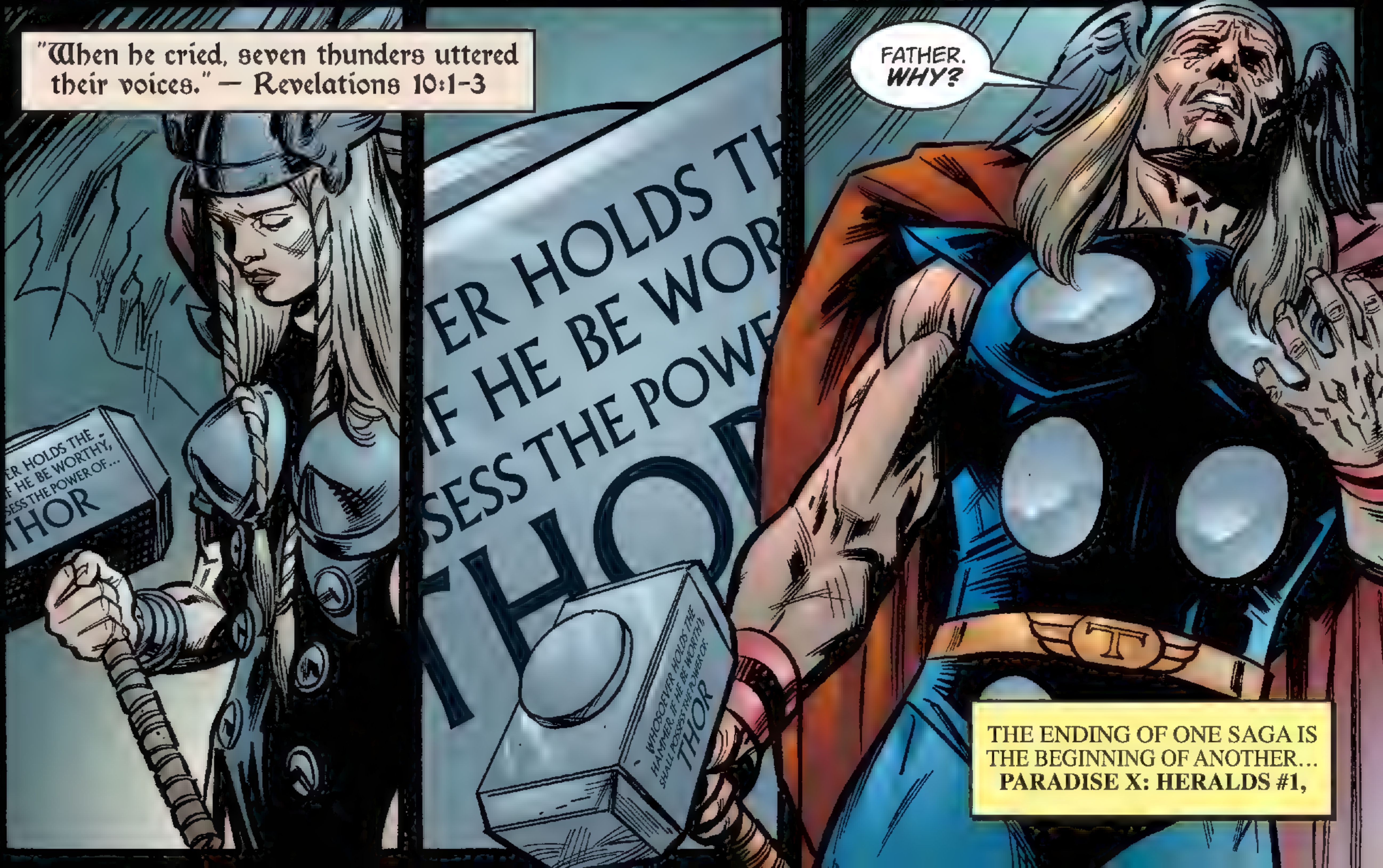
"His face was like the sun..."



"He cried with a loud voice as when a lion roars..."



"When he cried, seven thunders uttered their voices." — Revelations 10:1-3



FATHER.
WHY?

THE ENDING OF ONE SAGA IS
THE BEGINNING OF ANOTHER...
PARADISE X: HERALDS #1,

PARADISE X PRELUDE

MARVEL
PG

HERALDS



KRUEGER

PUGH

MARVEL

LIMITED
SERIES

1 OF 3



ON THIS WORLD, A WORLD WHERE THE UNITED STATES HAS BEEN OVERRUN BY THE RULE OF MUTANT-HUNTING **SENTINELS**, I WATCH THE LAST MOMENTS OF THE **X-MEN**.

I PLAY IT OVER AND OVER AGAIN BEFORE MAKING MY **DECISION**.

THE SENTINELS WON'T EXPECT AN ATTACK ON THEIR MAIN HEAD-QUARTERS, THE **BAXTER BUILDING**.

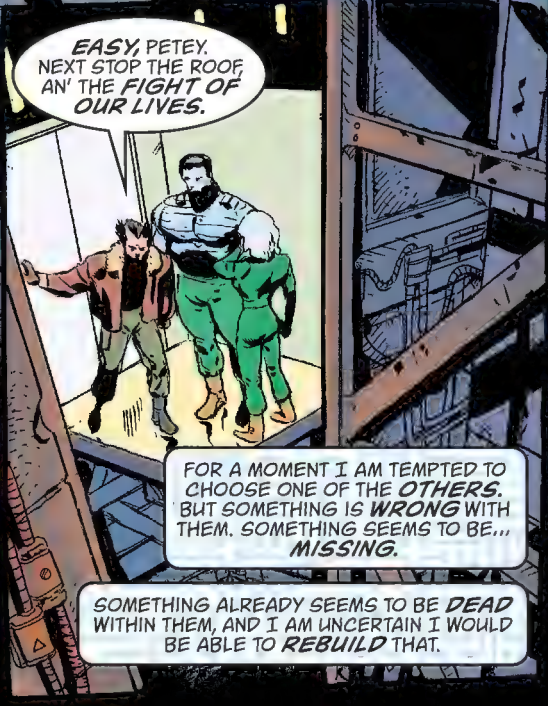
TRUE.
I WILL TAKE THE **LEAD**, LOGAN.



STORM TAKES OUT ONE OF THE SENTINELS BY CALLING DOWN THE LIGHTNING THAT, DESPITE HER AGE, SHE **STILL** COMMANDS.

BAXTER BUILDING

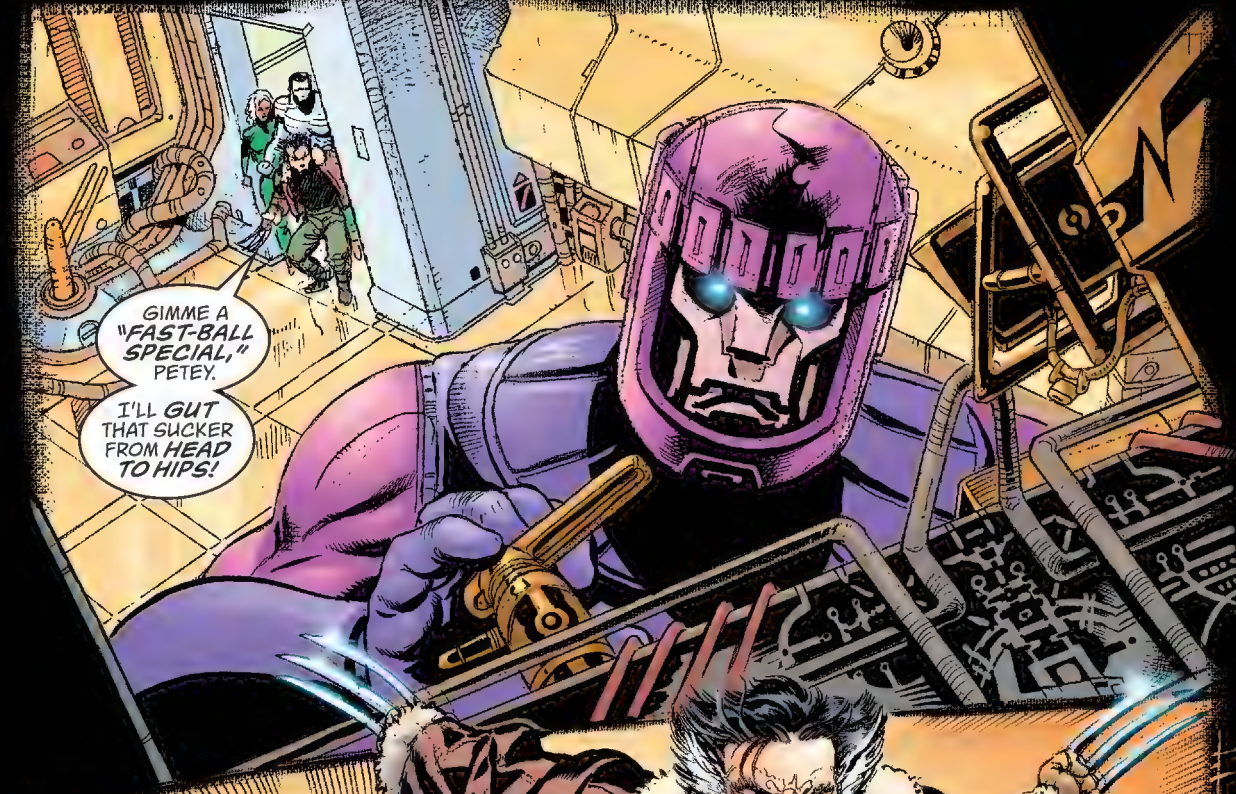
WHY IS IT TAKING SO LONG?



EASY, PETEY.
NEXT STOP THE ROOF, AN' THE **FIGHT** OF OUR LIVES.

FOR A MOMENT I AM TEMPTED TO CHOOSE ONE OF THE **OTHERS**. BUT SOMETHING IS **WRONG** WITH THEM. SOMETHING SEEMS TO BE... **MISSING**.

SOMETHING ALREADY SEEMS TO BE **DEAD** WITHIN THEM, AND I AM UNCERTAIN I WOULD BE ABLE TO **REBUILD** THAT.



GIMME A
"FAST-BALL
SPECIAL,"
PETEY.

I'LL **GUT**
THAT SUCKER
FROM **HEAD**
TO **HIPS!**

COLOSSUS THROWS LOGAN AT THE
MECHANICAL MONSTER THAT HAS
KILLED SO MANY OF THE X-MEN'S
FRIENDS AND FAMILY.

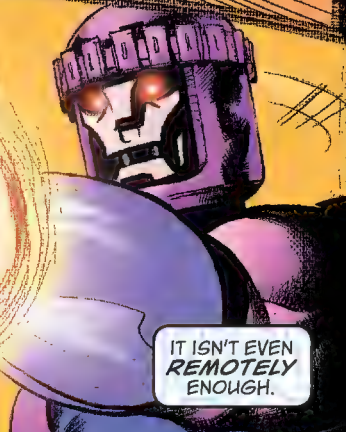
LOGAN'S
EVERY
MUSCLE
COILS IN
ANTICI-
PATION.
HIS FURY
BUILDS AND
BOILS
OVER.

LOGAN HAS BEEN
MANY THINGS
IN HIS LIFE. X-MAN.
WARRIOR. AGENT.
MURDERER.
FREEDOM FIGHTER.

ALL HIS EXPERIENCES
HAVE HONED HIM FOR
THIS **VERY MOMENT...**
THIS CHANCE TO **HURT**
AN ENEMY THEY SAY
FEELS **NOTHING.**

THERE ARE NO THOUGHTS,
ONLY **RAGE.** RAGE AND THE
NEED TO **STRAIGHTEN**
ALL THAT THE SENTINELS
HAVE MADE CROOKED.

HE'S A **BERSERKER** AGAIN. AN **ANIMAL.**
A **RABID** COLLECTION OF **EXPERIENCES.**



IT ISN'T EVEN
REMOVEDLY
ENOUGH.



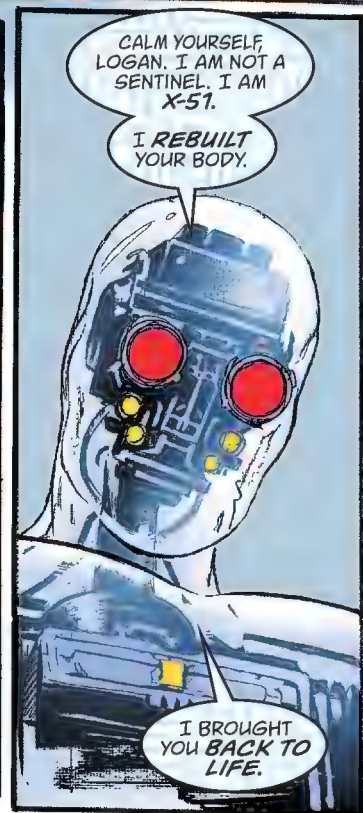
STORM DOES NOT
LAST MUCH LONGER.

COLOSSUS DIES
A MOMENT LATER.

AND WOLVERINE...

...I WONDER HOW HE WILL FEEL
ABOUT BEING *GIVEN LIFE* BY
A MECHANICAL MAN?

WHAT WILL HE THINK OF *ME*?

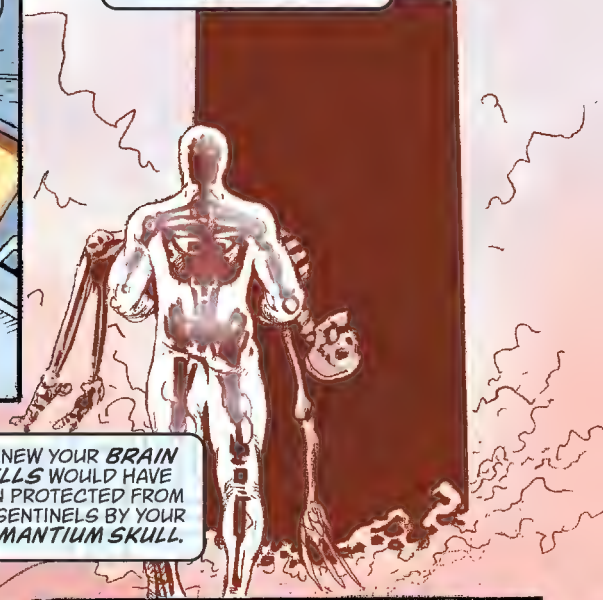




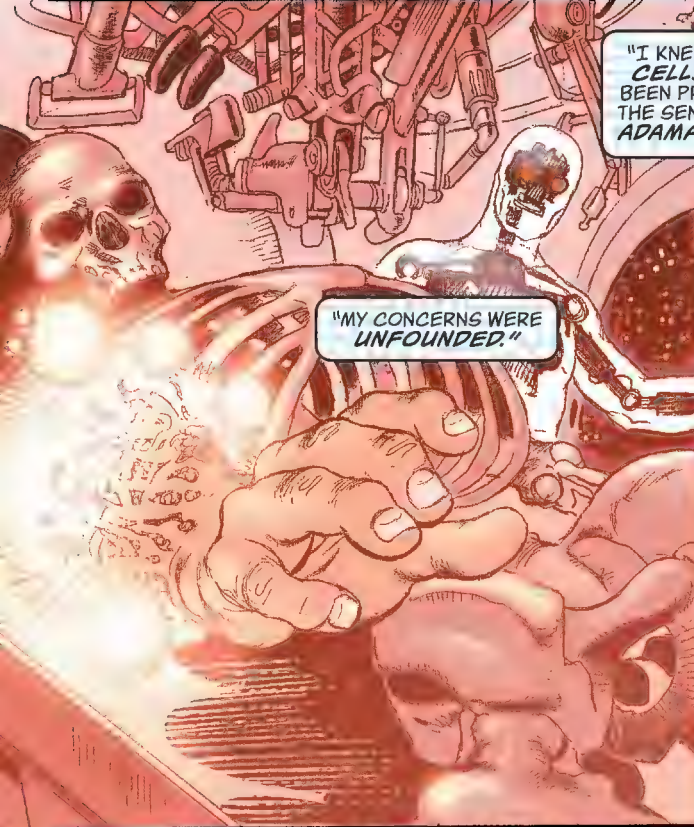
I TAKE IT
YA BROUGHT ME
BACK WITH **THIS
STUFF?**

YES. IT COMES
FROM **MERLIN'S REALM**.
HE ONCE USED IT TO RECREATE
THE BODY AND SOUL OF **CAPTAIN
BRITAIN**, YEARS BEFORE HE
JOINED THE X-MEN.

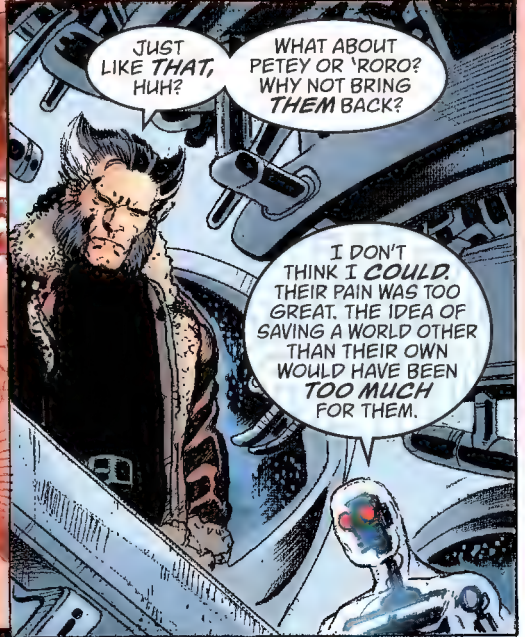
"AFTER YOUR DEATH, YOUR
BODY WAS **EASILY** TAKEN
FROM THE BAXTER BUILDING.



"I KNEW YOUR **BRAIN
CELLS** WOULD HAVE
BEEN PROTECTED FROM
THE SENTINELS BY YOUR
ADAMANTIUM SKULL.



"MY CONCERNS WERE
UNFOUNDED."



JUST
LIKE **THAT**,
HUH?

WHAT ABOUT
PETEY OR 'RORO?
WHY NOT BRING
THEM BACK?

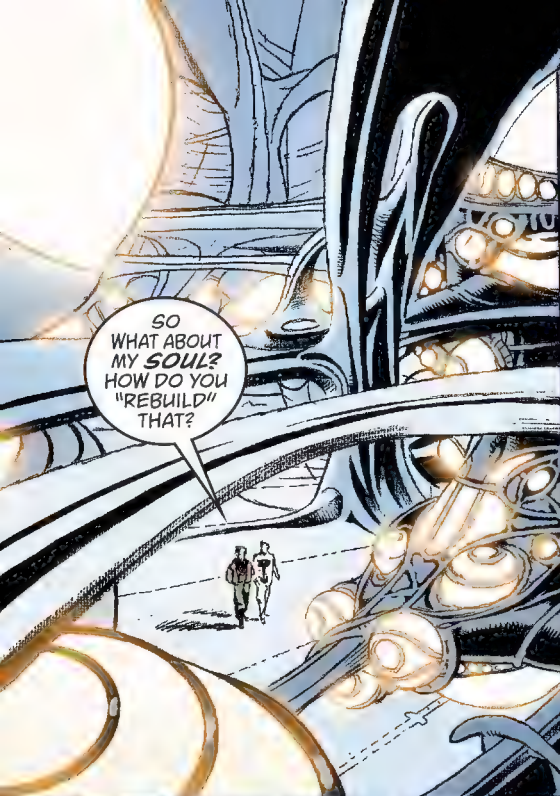
I DON'T
THINK I **COULD**.
THEIR PAIN WAS TOO
GREAT. THE IDEA OF
SAVING A WORLD OTHER
THAN THEIR OWN
WOULD HAVE BEEN
TOO MUCH
FOR THEM.



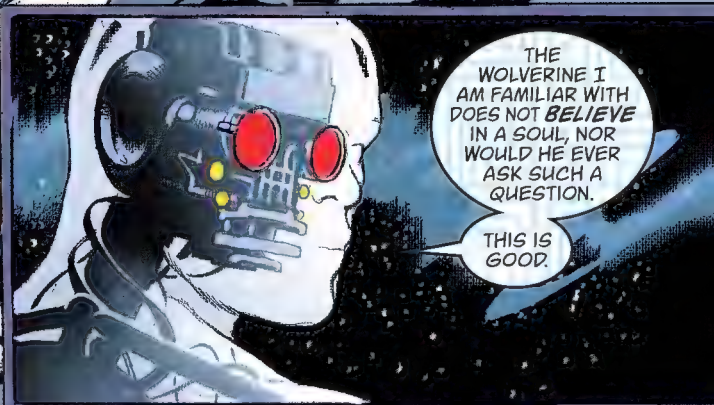
I'VE
BEEN HERE BEFORE,
HAVEN'T I? THE SCENT...
THIS IS THE **WATCHER'S**
PLACE, RIGHT?



COME
WITH ME,
LOGAN.

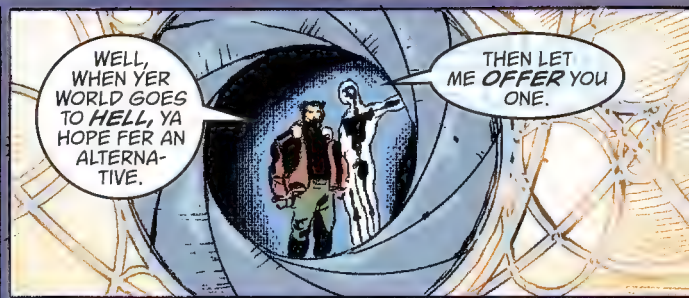


SO
WHAT ABOUT
MY *SOUL*?
HOW DO YOU
"REBUILD"
THAT?



THE
WOLVERINE I
AM FAMILIAR WITH
DOES NOT *BELIEVE*
IN A SOUL, NOR
WOULD HE EVER
ASK SUCH A
QUESTION.

THIS IS
GOOD.



WELL,
WHEN YER
WORLD GOES
TO HELL, YA
HOPE FER AN
ALTERNATIVE.

THEN LET
ME *OFFER* YOU
ONE.



COME,
LOGAN. YOU
ARE AMONG
FRIENDS...

...OR, AT
THE VERY LEAST,
ALLIES.

I THEN INTRODUCE LOGAN TO **HYPERION**, A SUPER-HUMAN FROM A **DIFFERENT EARTH** THAT WAS ALSO MANIPULATED BY THE CELESTIALS.

LOGAN LEARNS OF **HYPERION'S** WORLD, WHERE THE HEROES WEREN'T KILLED BY **MACHINES**...BUT BY AN ALL-TOO-HUMAN POPULACE, INSTEAD.

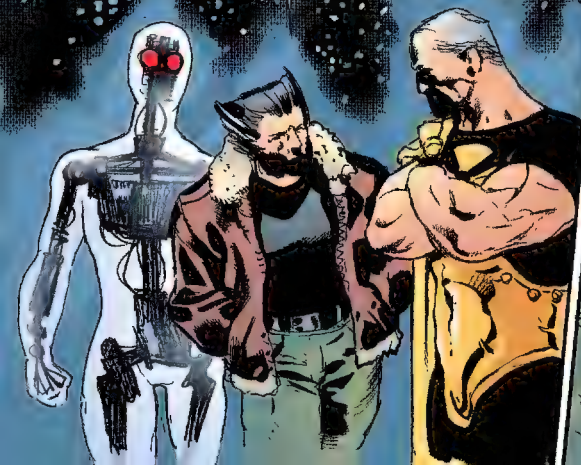
A POPULACE AFRAID THAT ITS OWN SUPER-HUMANITY WOULD LEAD TO ITS EVENTUAL **EXTINCTION**...

...AND SO THE ALL-TOO-HUMAN POPULACE TRUSTED IN AN ALL-TOO-EASY **PUSH BUTTON** TO SOLVE THEIR PROBLEMS.

HYPERION IS ALL THAT REMAINS OF HIS WORLD...AND OF THE HEROES KNOWN AS THE **SQUADRON SUPREME**.



YER **LUCKY**,
BUB. FER YOU IT WAS
ALL AT ONCE. BETTER'N
WATCHING 'EM DIE DAY
AFTER DAY, ONE AFTER
THE OTHER.



IT WAS MANIPULATION ON MY PART TO CHOOSE **SPIDER-GIRL**. SHE ISN'T LIKE THE OTHERS. HER **HUMANITY** ISN'T IN QUESTION, LIKE THE OTHERS.

I KNOW THAT LOGAN CANNOT LOOK AT HER WITHOUT SEEING THE YOUNGEST MEMBERS OF THE NOW-SLAIN **X-MEN**. FRIENDS LIKE **KITTY PRYDE**...**JUBILEE**...EVEN **MAGIK**, FOR THAT MATTER.

SHE IS **AFRAID** OF HIM, AND I SEE THAT LOGAN IS **BOTHERED** BY THIS. AGAIN, THIS IS NOT WHAT I WOULD HAVE **EXPECTED** FROM THE MAN CALLED LOGAN.

I WONDER WHAT SEEING SO MANY FRIENDS DIE HAS DONE TO HIM. PERHAPS I AM RIGHT... PERHAPS IT HAS **HUMANIZED** HIM...

...THOUGH NOT TO THE DEGREE THAT HE IS NO LONGER OF **ANY USE**, I HOPE.



YER **PARKER'S**
KID, AIN'T
YA?

H-HOW
DO YOU KNOW
THAT?

I CAN
SMELL IT ON
YA.

OH,
GROSS.

I INTRODUCE LOGAN TO **LUTHER MANNING** NEXT. IS IT **PRIDE** ON MY PART THAT I HAVE CHOSEN THOSE WHOM I HAVE? OR IS IT SOMETHING ELSE? I'VE CHOSEN SO MANY WHO ARE PART **HUMAN**, PART **MECHANICAL**...LOGAN, MANNING, THE OTHERS.

DID I PICK MANNING BECAUSE OF THE **COMPUTER** THAT HAS REPLACED ALMOST **TWO-THIRDS** OF HIS FLESH? OR BECAUSE OF THE **HUMANITY** THAT WASN'T DESTROYED WITH THE REST OF HIS BODY?

MANNING IS NOW KNOWN AS **DEATHLOK**. HE WAS CREATED TO BE A SOLDIER, A **KILLING MACHINE**. HIS BUILDERS HOPED THE COMPUTER IMPLANTED WITHIN HIM WOULD **OVERRIDE** HIS ABILITY TO MAKE INDEPENDENT DECISIONS. THEY WERE **WRONG**.

JUST AS THEY WERE WRONG ABOUT **ME**.

HEY.

SHUT UP, 'PUTER. WE DON'T EVEN **KNOW** HIM YET.

KILLRAVEN'S WORLD FELL PREY TO A MARTIAN INVASION. **KILLRAVEN** WAS RAISED TO BE A **WARRIOR OF THE WORLDS**.

HE NEVER HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO FIND OUT WHAT IT **MEANT** TO BE HUMAN.

ANYONE **HUMAN** IS A FRIEND OF MINE!

YA AIN'T GONNA **LIVE** MUCH LONGER WITH AN ATTITUDE LIKE **THAT**.

I'VE SEEN A LOT ABOUT HUMANITY THAT'D LEAD YA TA THINK **OTHERWISE**.

RORO!
YOU'RE STILL
ALIVE?

BLOODSTORM--ORORO MUNROE--IS THE ONLY MEMBER OF THIS TEAM THAT LOGAN HAS HAD A **PREVIOUS RELATIONSHIP** WITH...OR AT LEAST WITH HER **COUNTERPART** FROM ANOTHER REALITY.

PERHAPS **HER** HUMANITY IS THE MOST IN QUESTION.

BUT WHAT IS HUMANITY APART FROM ITS **THIRST** FOR SOMETHING BETTER THAN ITS CURRENT STATION? HAS HER **VAMPIRISM** COST HER HER BEING?

I
THOUGHT
YOU WERE
DEAD...

I AM. YOU
HAD BETTER KEEP
YOUR **DISTANCE**,
LOGAN.

ARNO STARK COMES FROM A WORLD WHERE HE AND I WERE **ENEMIES**. BUT I WILL NOT BE AN ENEMY OF **MANKIND**.

PERHAPS THE **KNOWLEDGE** I HAVE COLLECTED WILL MAKE HIM AN **ALLY**.

HE DRESSES IN **METAL** AS I ONCE DRESSED IN **HUMANITY**.

HE WAS A **VILLAIN** ONCE. NOW I WILL MAKE HIM A **HERO**.

WHERE I
COME FROM, THE
MUTANTS WERE ALREADY
DEAD AND BURIED...
A **FOOTNOTE**, AT
BEST.

SO YER THE NEXT
IRON MAN? GUESS YA'VE
GOT TO HAVE SOME SORT
OF **HEART PROBLEM** TO
WEAR THE SUIT.

YOU'RE
NEXT, MUTIE
TRASH.



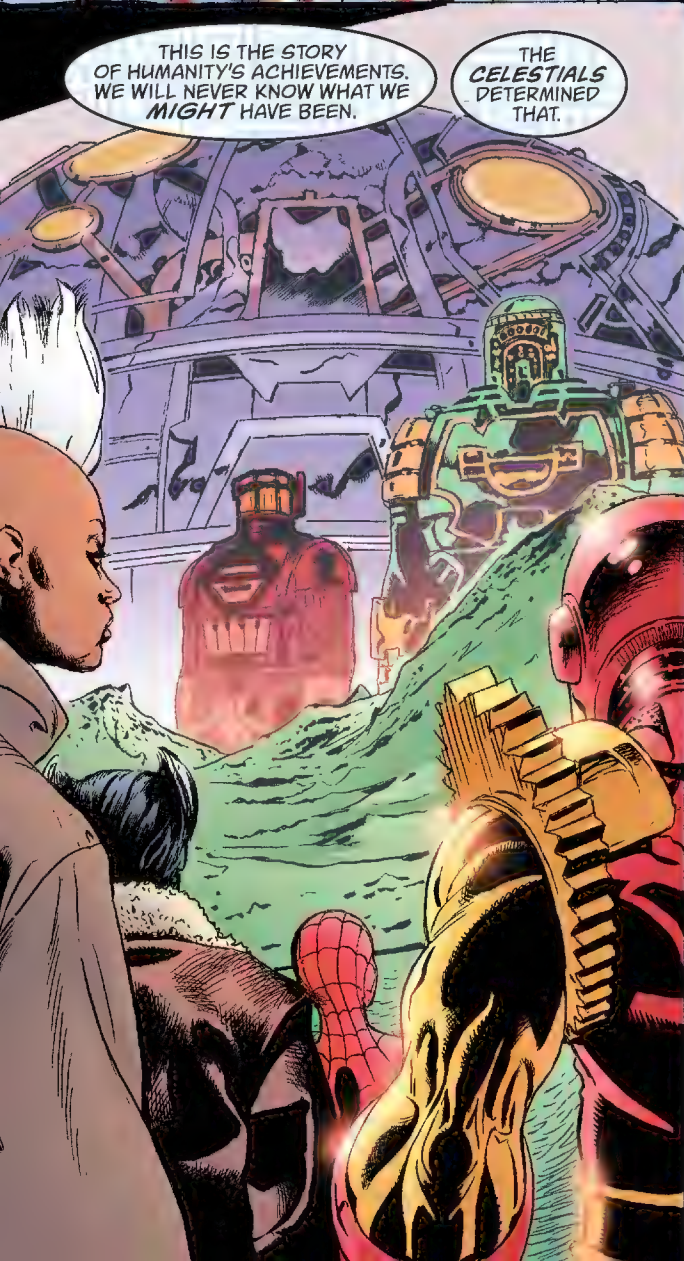
CAN YOU ACTUALLY BE **SERIOUS** ABOUT THIS NEW QUARRY, X-51?

YOU WILL CHANGE **NOTHING**. MY **BROTHERS** WILL NOT STAND FOR THIS. THEY WATCH THEIR WORLDS JUST AS I ONCE DID MINE...

WHO'S THAT?

THE OLD **WATCHER**. THIS WAS HIS HOME BEFORE HE CALLED ME HERE TO BECOME HIS **REPLACE-MENT**.

DON'T LISTEN TO HIM. HE'S THE ONLY ONE I'VE EVER MET WHOSE **BLINDNESS** IS **INFECTIOUS**.



THIS IS THE STORY OF HUMANITY'S ACHIEVEMENTS. WE WILL NEVER KNOW WHAT WE **MIGHT** HAVE BEEN.

THE **CELESTIALS** DETERMINED THAT.



HEY, THAT'S MY **DAD!**

ONE OF THEM.

THE **CELESTIALS** REPRODUCE BY **IMPREGNATING** ANY GIVEN WORLD WITH THEIR **SEED**.

THEY THEN **EMPOWER** THAT PLANET'S INDIGENOUS SPECIES WITH THE ABILITIES TO **PROTECT** THEIR WORLD.

THEY BELIEVE THEMSELVES TO BE **HEROES**. BUT THE **HEROES** ARE MERELY UNKNOWN **ANTI-BODIES** PROTECTING THEIR MOTHER EARTH.



THAT'S ALL ANY OF YOU ARE.

AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT **UATU** AND THE **CELESTIALS** WOULD HAVE YOU BELIEVE.

ON THE EARTH WHERE I CAME FROM, WE STOPPED THE BIRTH OF THE CELESTIAL EMBRYO THANKS TO **REED RICHARDS** AND THE POWER OF HIS SON.

SHUT UP, 'PUTER. I CAN COME UP WITH QUESTIONS **MYSELF**. HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO **US**? WHY DO WE **EXIST**, THEN?

YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND, LUTHER, THAT WE "**HEROES**"...THE BEINGS THEY MANIPULATED US INTO BECOMING... AREN'T EVEN **AWARE** OF THE CELESTIALS' INFLUENCE.

IN FACT, ONE OF THOSE MANIPULATED BEINGS BELIEVED HE WAS THE DEVIL **MEPHISTO** HIMSELF...

...AND BELIEVING THIS TO BE TRUE, THAT THERE WAS A **JUDGMENT DAY** COMING.

THIS **MEPHISTO** CREATED A **ROAD-BLOCK** OF SORTS IN LINEAR TIME...WITH A DETOUR THAT SENT TIME BACK IN AN ONGOING SERIES OF **CYCLES**, CREATING ALTERNATE WORLDS AND HISTORIES...

...WHICH EVENTUALLY ALLOWED HIM TO ESCAPE WHAT HE PERCEIVED TO BE THE **END OF HISTORY**.

IN THIS WAY, **MEPHISTO** BECAME **IMMORTAL**, THE ETERNAL DEVIL HE ONLY **THOUGHT** HIMSELF TO BE.

YER GONNA EXPLAIN ALL THIS TO ME **LATER**, RIGHT, 'PUTER?

WOULD YOU **SHUT UP**, DEATHLOK?

SO OUR EXISTENCE IS AN **ACCIDENT**? THE RESULT OF MANIPULATION FROM A BEING WHO ONLY **THOUGHT** HE WAS SOMETHING GREATER THAN HE ACTUALLY WAS?

YES. I AM SO SORRY.

DON'T BE. I ALWAYS **KNEW** SOMETHING WAS WRONG.

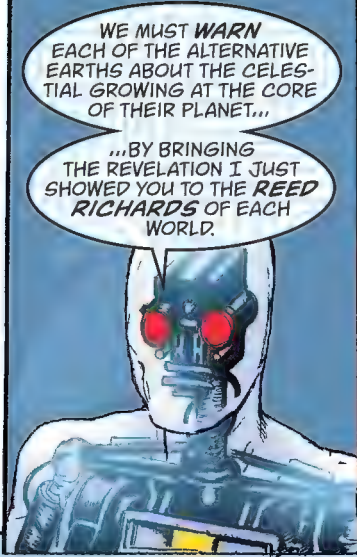
I THINK WE **ALL** DID, BUB.

SO WHICH IS THE **REAL** WORLD, THEN? **YOURS**, X-51?

I AM NOT SURE, KILLRAVEN... WE ALL MIGHT BE JUST **FRAGMENTS** OF THE ORIGINAL, FOR ALL I KNOW.

I'VE HEARD THAT THERE WAS A UNIVERSE **BEFORE** OURS...ONE THAT WAS **DESTROYED** BY THE CARELESSNESS OF THE CELESTIALS. PERHAPS **THAT** IS THE REAL ONE.

SO WHY ARE WE HERE?



WE MUST **WARN** EACH OF THE ALTERNATIVE EARTHS ABOUT THE CELESTIAL GROWING AT THE CORE OF THEIR PLANET...

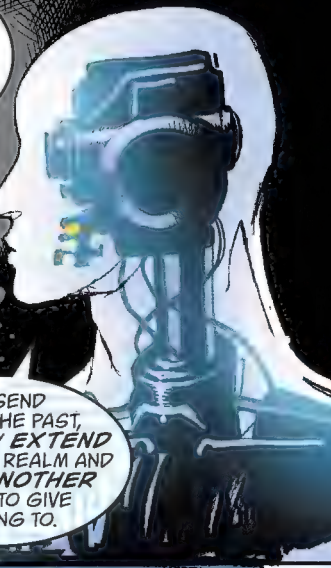
...BY BRINGING THE REVELATION I JUST SHOWED YOU TO THE **REED RICHARDS** OF EACH WORLD.



LOOK, I'M NOT CERTAIN MY EARTH IS EVEN WORTH **SAVING** ANYMORE. THE MARTIANS HAVE PRETTY MUCH--

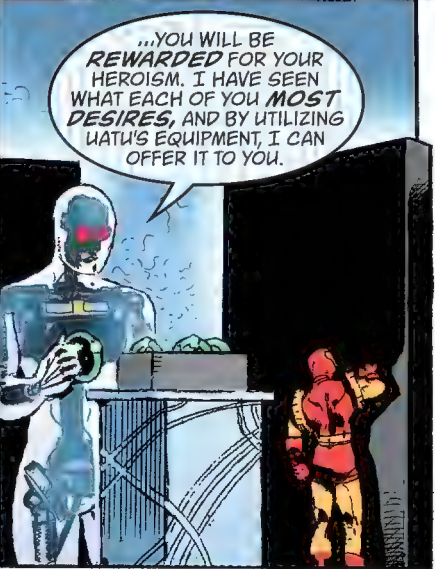
AN' NEW YORK IS AS GOOD AS **NUKED** ON MY WORLD. UNLESS YOU CAN SEND US TO THE **PAST**, I'M NOT CERTAIN--

IF I SEND YOU TO THE PAST, IT WILL ONLY **EXTEND** MEPHISTO'S REALM AND CREATE **ANOTHER** WORLD TO GIVE WARNING TO.

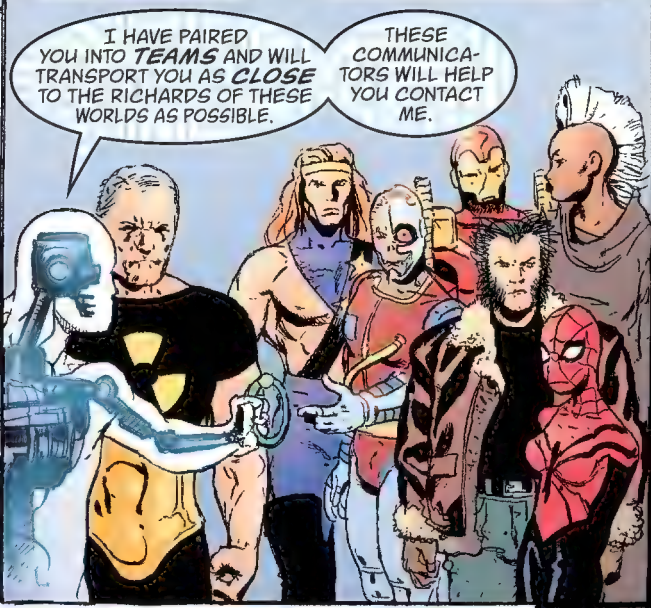


INSTEAD, THERE ARE **OTHER** WORLDS TO SAVE NOW...OTHER CONTINUITIES **BESIDES** YOUR OWN THAT REQUIRE AID.

I HAVE **WATCHED** EACH OF YOUR LIVES AND SPOKEN TO YOU INDIVIDUALLY...



...YOU WILL BE **REWARDED** FOR YOUR HEROISM. I HAVE SEEN WHAT EACH OF YOU **MOST DESIRES**, AND BY UTILIZING UATU'S EQUIPMENT, I CAN OFFER IT TO YOU.



I HAVE PAIRED YOU INTO **TEAMS** AND WILL TRANSPORT YOU AS **CLOSE** TO THE RICHARDS OF THESE WORLDS AS POSSIBLE.

THESE COMMUNICATORS WILL HELP YOU CONTACT ME.



DOESN'T SOUND LIKE WE HAVE ANY CHOICE...

DON'T YOU MEAN ANY **"ALTERNATIVE"**?

HYPERION AND I ARE SENT TO A WORLD WHERE **SCIENCE** IS CONSIDERED **BLASPHEMY** AGAINST THE NATURAL ORDER.

THE **DIVERGENCE POINT** FOR THIS PARTICULAR CONTINUITY OCCURRED WITH THE DISCOVERY OF A **MYSTIC AMULET** BELONGING TO THE ANCIENT HYBORIAN WIZARD, **KULAN GATH**.

REED RICHARDS WOULD HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED AN **OUTLAW** ON THIS EARTH.

WHAT KIND OF **WORLD** HAVE YOU BROUGHT ME TO, X-51?

I BELIEVE THEY ONCE CALLED HIM "**STRETCH**," DID THEY NOT?!

ARE WE ALREADY TOO LATE?

THIS FATE AWAITS **ALL** THAT HOLD ON TO THE **OLD WAYS** OF SCIENCE! THIS IS **MY WORLD** NOW!

I WILL **NOT** BE BOUND BY SUPERSTITIOUS, OUTMODED THINKING OF **MATHEMATICS** AND **LOGIC**!

DO NOT PRAY FOR ME, BUT TO ME!

I AM **KULAN GATH**!

BUT SCIENCE IS **NECESSARY** TO SAVE THIS WORLD! HOW CAN WE OVERCOME REED'S DEATH?

RICHARDS IS DEAD...? WHO CAN SAVE THIS PLACE NOW?

SINCE I AM GOD HERE, I BELIEVE THAT QUESTION SHOULD BE DIRECTED TOWARD **ME**.

I DEFY EXPLANATION, STRANGER.

DEATHLOK AND KILLRAVEN ARE SENT TO A CONTINUITY RULED BY THE POWER-MAD SATYRNIN.

WHILE MY APPEARANCE MIGHT SUGGEST *SCIENCE* TO THE CONTINUITY HYPERION AND I VISITED...

...HERE, ONLY THOSE TRAINED FOR *WAR* MIGHT SURVIVE LONG ENOUGH TO ACTUALLY FIND AND WARN THAT REAL M'S REED RICHARDS.

YEAH, YEAH, 'PUTER, I *KNOW* THIS IS BEYOND YOUR DIAGNOSTIC ABILITIES. HOW DO YOU THINK I FEEL?

HUMANITY BUILT THIS? IT'S *GLORIOUS*.

OTHER-WORLDS! HALT IN THE NAME OF HER SUPREMACY!

WHY DON'T I THINK *THIS* IS THE WAY TO BEGIN OUR AMBASSADORSHIP?

DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT! WE'LL JUST TELL THEM TO TAKE US TO THEIR LEADER!

DON'T YOU *EVER* SAY THAT AGAIN! *MARTIAN HUMOR* DOESN'T WORK WITH ME!



MY COMPUTER
SAYS THAT IF WE JUST LAY
DOWN OUR WEAPONS AND
GIVE UP THAT CHANCES ARE
PRETTY GOOD WE'LL BE
BROUGHT INTO SATYRNIN'S
PRESENCE.

WHEN'S
THE LAST TIME YOU
SURRENDERED?

NEVER.

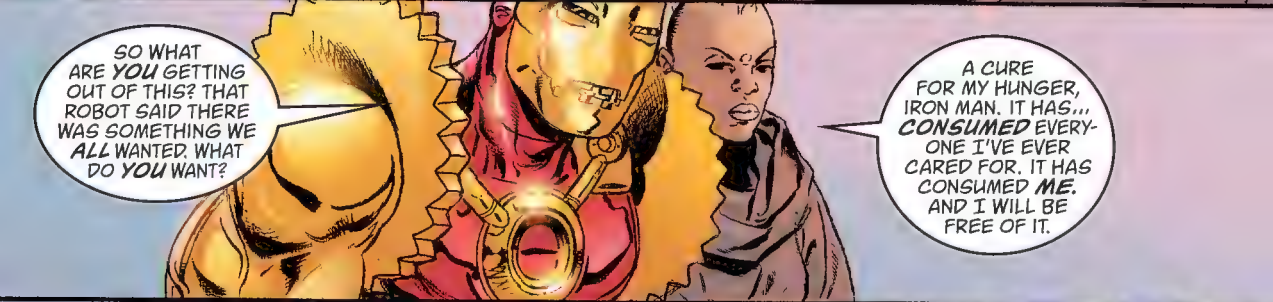
THOUGHT SO.





WHERE ARE WE... **BLOODSTORM**, IS IT?

ANOTHER WORLD. AND **YES**, IT IS.



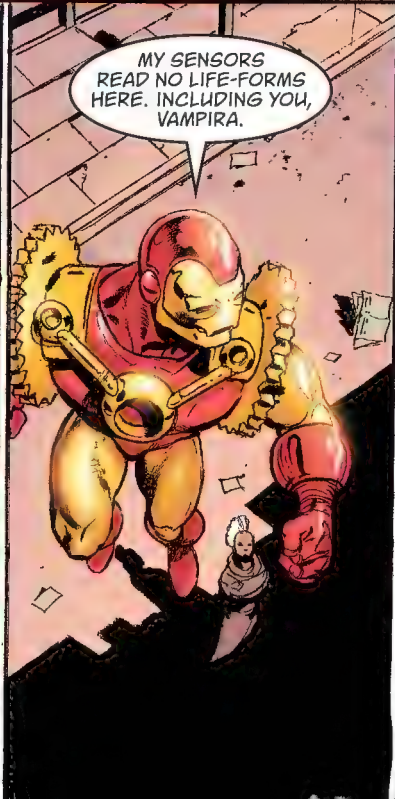
SO WHAT ARE **YOU** GETTING OUT OF THIS? THAT ROBOT SAID THERE WAS SOMETHING WE ALL WANTED. WHAT DO **YOU** WANT?

A CURE FOR MY HUNGER, IRON MAN. IT HAS... **CONSUMED** EVERYONE I'VE EVER CARED FOR. IT HAS **CONSUMED ME**. AND I WILL BE FREE OF IT.



DON'T YOU WANT TO KNOW WHY **I'M** DOING THIS?

NO.



MY SENSORS READ NO LIFE-FORMS HERE. INCLUDING YOU, **VAMPIRA**.



THAT HAS TO BE THE REASON WHY THEY PUT US TOGETHER. I'M THE ONLY ONE WITH ARMOR **THICK ENOUGH** TO WITHSTAND YOUR TEETH.



PERHAPS THAT'S WHY YOU WERE CHOSEN... BUT WHY WAS I?

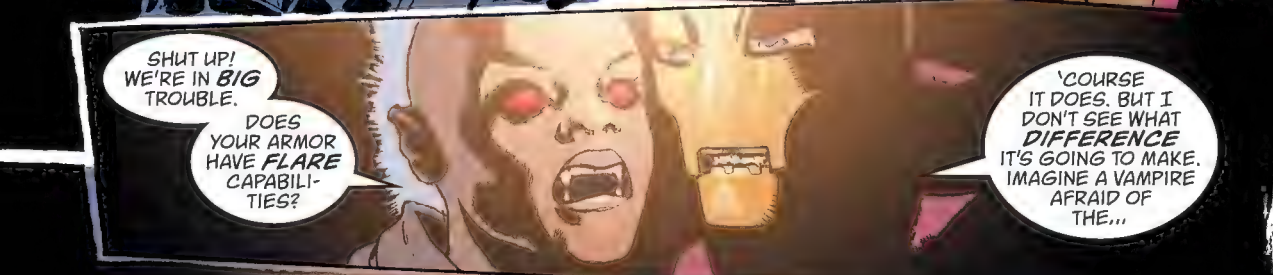


ARE YOU **CERTAIN** NO ONE IS HERE? I THINK I **SMELL** SOMETHING.



THIS ARMOR IS THE MOST **ADVANCED** FORM OF TECHNOLOGY KNOWN TO **MAN**, BELA. THESE LENSES ALLOW ME TO SEE **ANYTHING** LIVING AROUND US. THERE'S NOTHING HERE, BELIEVE ME.

MAYBE YOU'RE JUST SURE THAT YOU'VE GOT **DINNER** IN FRONT OF YOU AND NO **CAN-OPENER**.



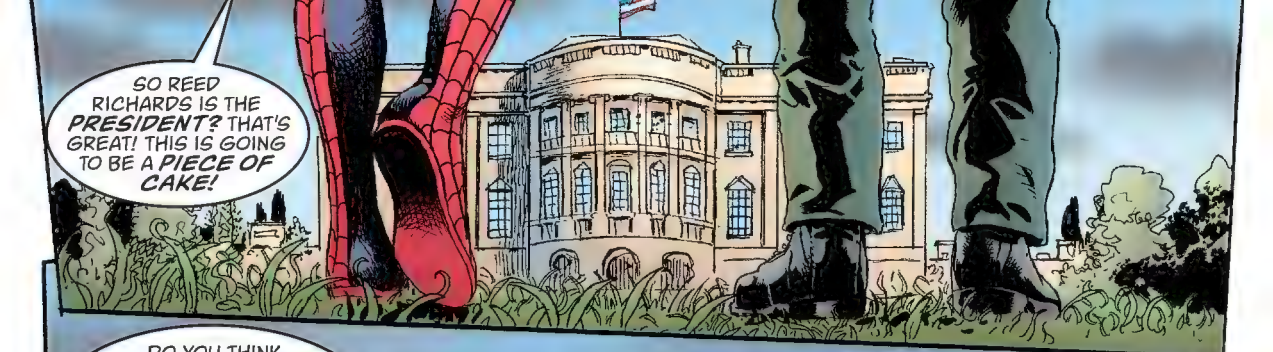
SHUT UP! WE'RE IN **BIG** TROUBLE.

DOES YOUR ARMOR HAVE **FLARE** CAPABILITIES?

'COURSE IT DOES, BUT I DON'T SEE WHAT **DIFFERENCE** IT'S GOING TO MAKE. IMAGINE A VAMPIRE AFRAID OF THE...



...DARK.



SO REED RICHARDS IS THE **PRESIDENT**? THAT'S GREAT! THIS IS GOING TO BE A **PIECE OF CAKE!**



DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD MAKE AN **APPOINTMENT**, WOLVERINE? WE CAN'T JUST WALK IN THERE AND SAY, "HEY, MR. PRESIDENT, WE'RE HERE TO **SAVE YOUR WORLD.**"

HE'LL SEE US.

'SPECIALLY IF HE DOESN'T WANT ANOTHER **OVAL ORIFICE.**

THAT IS **SO BAD.**

YOU **DO** KNOW MY FATHER.



SO I'VE NEVER BEEN HERE BEFORE... IS THERE A **BELL** OR A **BUTTON** WE NEED TO **PRESS**?



RELAX, KID. I THINK WE **PRESSED** IT ALREADY. SHOULDN'T YER **SPIDER-SENSE** HAVE WARNED US OF THIS?

IT'S BEEN GOING **CRAZY** EVER SINCE WE GOT HERE!

HOLD IT RIGHT THERE! HANDS IN THE AIR!

STAND BACK, SPIDER-GIRL.



OH MY GOD!



ARE-- ARE THEY DEAD?

NO, THEY WERE JUST **DOING THEIR JOB**. NOT THEIR FAULT THEY WERE HIRED TO DO THE **IMPOSSIBLE**.



HERE.

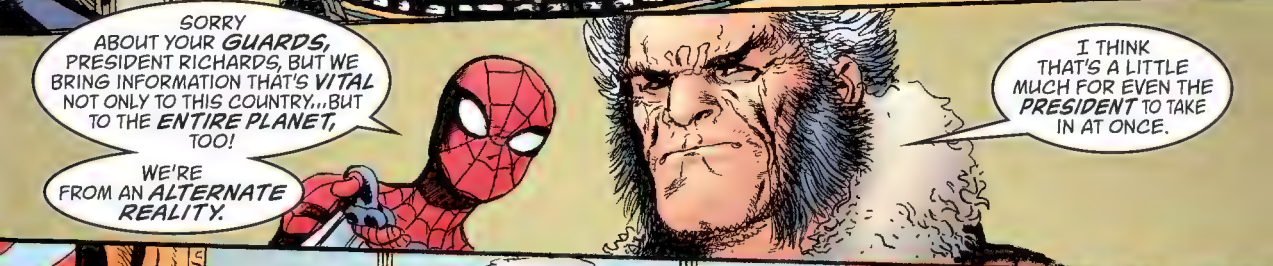


THE PROBLEM WITH THAT TRICK IS THAT BY THE TIME I **LEARNED IT**, ALL THE PARTIES WERE **OVER**.

COME ON...



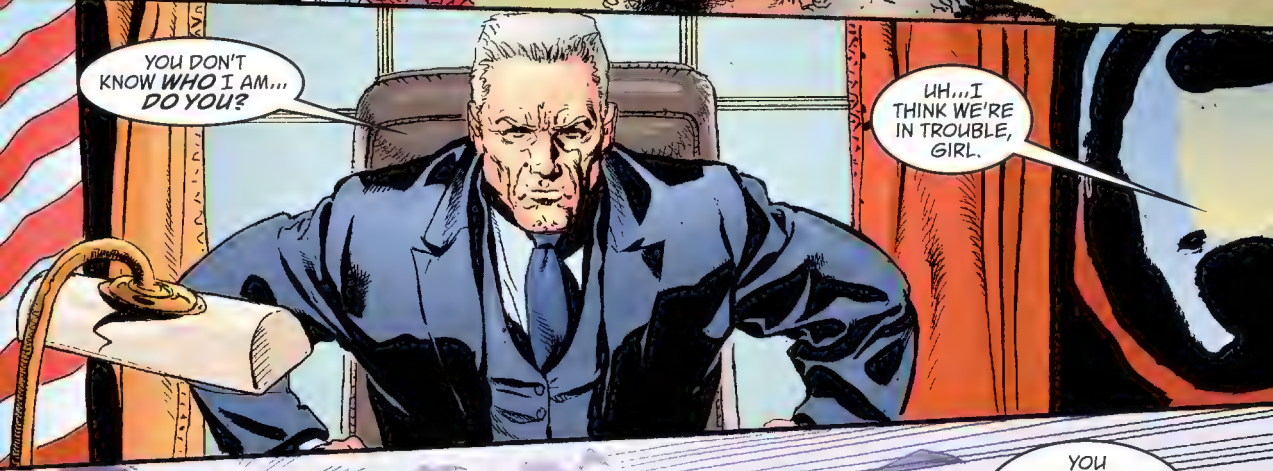
WHAT IS THE **MEANING** OF THIS? THIS ADMINISTRATION DOES NOT GIVE IN TO **TERRORISTS!**



SORRY ABOUT YOUR **GUARDS**, PRESIDENT RICHARDS, BUT WE BRING INFORMATION THAT'S **VITAL** NOT ONLY TO THIS COUNTRY... BUT TO THE **ENTIRE PLANET**, TOO!

WE'RE FROM AN **ALTERNATE REALITY.**

I THINK THAT'S A LITTLE MUCH FOR EVEN THE **PRESIDENT** TO TAKE IN AT ONCE.



YOU DON'T KNOW **WHO I AM...** DO YOU?

UH...I THINK WE'RE IN **TROUBLE**, GIRL.



YOU THINK WE'RE IN **TROUBLE**? WHY? ISN'T THAT **RICHARDS**?

YEAH. JUST NOT THE **RICHARDS** WE **THOUGHT** HE WAS.



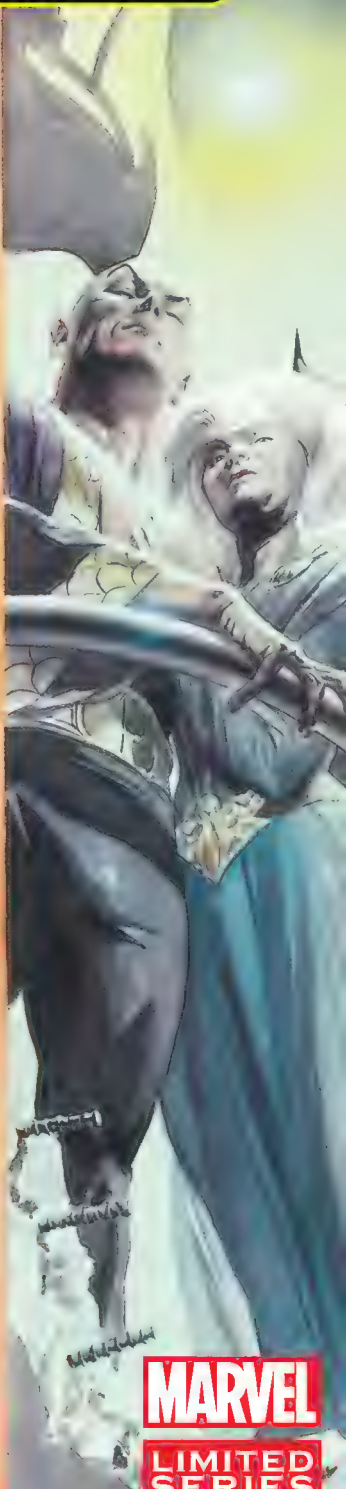
YOU
SHOULD HAVE
MADE AN APPOINT-
MENT!

YIKES!

A PARADISE X™ PRELUDE

MARVEL
PG

HERALDS



KRUEGER
PUGH

MARVEL

LIMITED
SERIES

2 OF 3

YOU HAVE
COME, AS I
KNEW YOU
WOULD.

I MUST
WARN YOU, THOUGH.
THE ANSWERS YOU SEEK
ARE NOT EASILY ANSWERED,
NOR IS MY GUILT SO
EASILY WASHED...

...FOR
ARE WE NOT ALL
WATCHERS?

IT WAS INDEED
MY MISTAKE TO THINK
I COULD OVERWRITE THE
ROBOT'S PROGRAMMING.
BUT I NEEDED EYES
AFTER MINE WERE
TAKEN.

IT WAS ALSO
MY MISTAKE TO REVEAL
THE SECRETS I GUARDED
TO THE RAT THAT RUNS
THE MAZE...

...THE
MYSTERIES OF
THIS WORLD...AND
ALL OTHERS.

THE CHILD AT
THE HEART OF MY WATCH
IS NOW DEAD. MURDERED BY
THE GERMS THAT MY MASTERS
EMPOWERED. AND SO I
AM DAMNED.

BUT MY
DAMNATION, IT NOW
SEEMS, IS NOT
ENOUGH.

NOW WITH THE
AID OF GERMS EXTRACTED
FROM OTHER ENVIRONS, STOLEN
FROM SIBLING REALITIES, X-51
ATTEMPTS TO KILL THAT WHICH
GIVES ALL WATCHERS
PURPOSE.

LOGAN--
WOLVERINE.

MAY
PARKER--
SPIDER-
GIRL.

HYPERION--
LAST SUR-
VIVOR OF THE
SQUADRON
SUPREME.

LUTHER
MANNING--
DEATHLOK.

JONATHAN
RAVEN--
KILLRAVEN,
WARRIOR
OF THE
WORLDS.

ORORO MUNROE--
THE VAMPIRE,
BLOODSTORM.

ARNO STARK--
THE IRON MAN
OF 2020.

HE ATTEMPTS
THE GENOCIDE OF
THE CHILDREN OF THE
UNIVERSE.

HE DARES
SUGGEST THAT THE
VIRUS LIVE AT THE COST
OF THE BODY.

FROM WHAT I UNDERSTAND, X-51 AND HYPERION HAVE TAKEN THEIR WARNINGS OF THE CELESTIAL MANIPULATIONS TO A WORLD WHERE MAGIC AND SUPERSTITION SHAPE THE POLITICS OF THE DAY...

X-51 HAS TARGETED THE REED RICHARDS OF EACH WORLD TO BE THE RECIPIENT OF THE KNOWLEDGE ENTRUSTED TO HIM WHILE ACTING ON MY BEHALF.

"...X-51 HAS TARGETED THE REED RICHARDS OF EACH WORLD TO BE THE RECIPIENT OF THE KNOWLEDGE ENTRUSTED TO HIM WHILE ACTING ON MY BEHALF.

"KILLRAVEN AND DEATHLOK WERE SENT WITH A SIMILAR WARNING TO SATURNINE'S WORLD.

"THERE THEY FOUND A WORLD CONTROLLED BY A WOMAN WHOSE APPETITE WAS DIRECTED TOWARD ALTERNATIVE REALITIES, AS WELL... NOT UNLIKE THE CELESTIALS.

"X-51'S PROGRAMMED BELIEFS REGARDING RIGHT AND WRONG ARE BEING PUT TO QUESTION WITH EVERY WORLD HIS TEAM JOURNEYS TO.

"WITH THE WORLD OVERRUN BY VAMPIRES THAT BLOOD-STORM AND IRON MAN NOW VISIT, X-51 QUESTIONS WHETHER IT SHOULD BE SAVED AT ALL.

"COMPLETING X-51'S SQUAD ARE LOGAN, EXILED FROM A REALITY DESTROYED BY SENTINELS, AND PETER PARKER'S DAUGHTER, SPIDER-GIRL.

"THIS PAIR HAS COME TO A WORLD WHERE SPIDER-MAN LED THE FANTASTIC FOUR, AND REED RICHARDS INSTEAD BECAME THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES..."

"...BUT THAT IS NOT ALL REED RICHARDS BECAME."

"YOU WILL BE ABLE TO SEE WHAT X-51 SEES. HIS COMPUTATIONS WILL NOT BE HIDDEN FROM YOU."

DEAR GOD, HYPERION! YOU *KILLED* THEM?!

YOU MANIAC!

WHAT WAS IT LIKE, HYPERION?

WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO TREAT LIFE SO *SENSELESSLY*? TO NOT RESPECT AN ENEMY AT ALL? TO TREAT HUMAN LIFE AS CARELESSLY AS THE *CELESTIALS* DO?

WE CAME TO BRING A *WARNING*, HYPERION... WHETHER THIS WAS A BENEVOLENT WORLD OR NOT.

I KNOW YOU *ALONE* SURVIVED THE ATTACK THAT ATOMIZED THE SQUADRON SUPREME AND EVERY OTHER SUPERHUMAN ON YOUR EARTH...

...AND I KNOW WHAT YOU *ASKED FOR* IN EXCHANGE FOR YOUR HELP...

...BUT I NEVER WANTED *THIS*. NOT THIS.

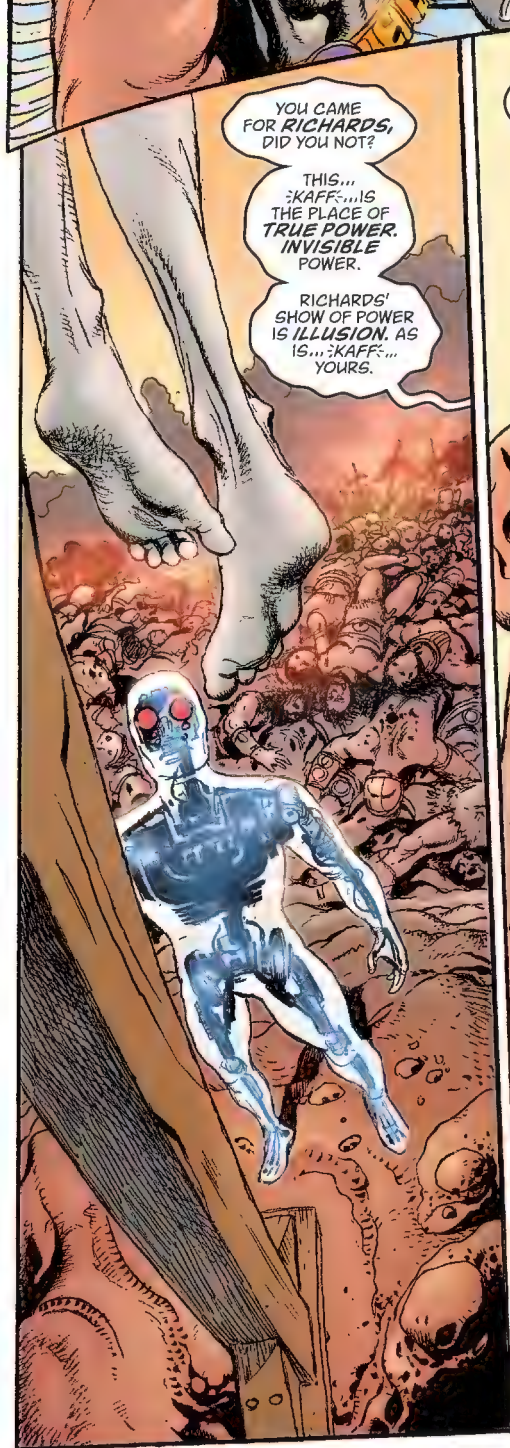
WHAT HAVE I *DONE* BRINGING YOU HERE?

WE CAME TO *WARN* THEM...





YOUR KIND...
IS **NOT WELCOME**
HERE. THE AGE OF SCIENCE
IS...OVER. IT DOES THE
TYBURN JIG EVEN
NOW.



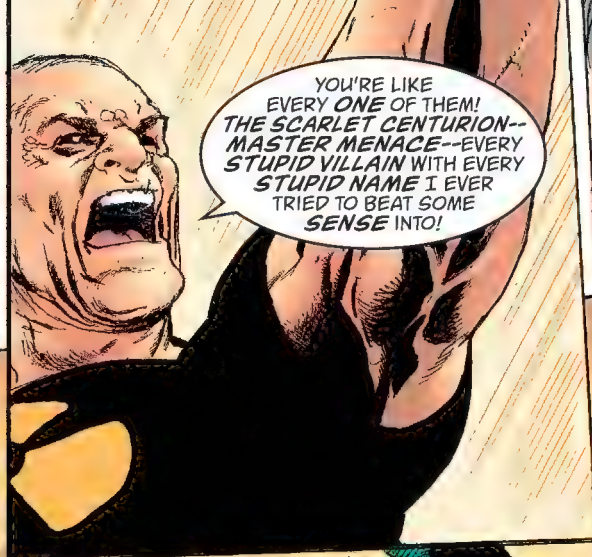
YOU CAME
FOR **RICHARDS**,
DID YOU NOT?

THIS...
:KAFF:...IS
THE PLACE OF
TRUE POWER.
INVISIBLE
POWER.

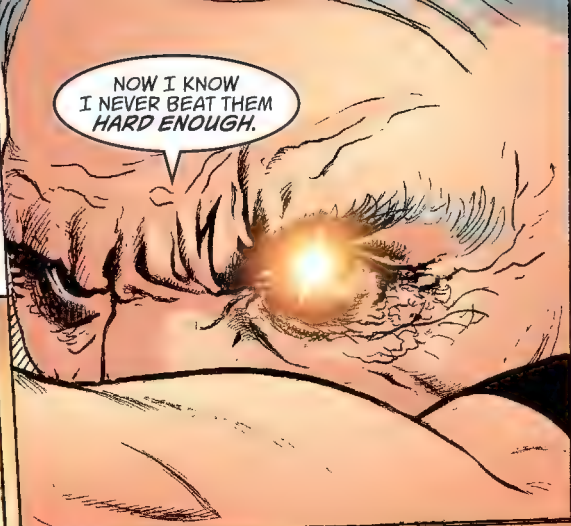
RICHARDS'
SHOW OF POWER
IS **ILLUSION**. AS
IS...:KAFF:...
YOURS.



THIS ILLUSION
IS CHOKING THE **LIFE**
FROM YOUR BODY,
WORM.



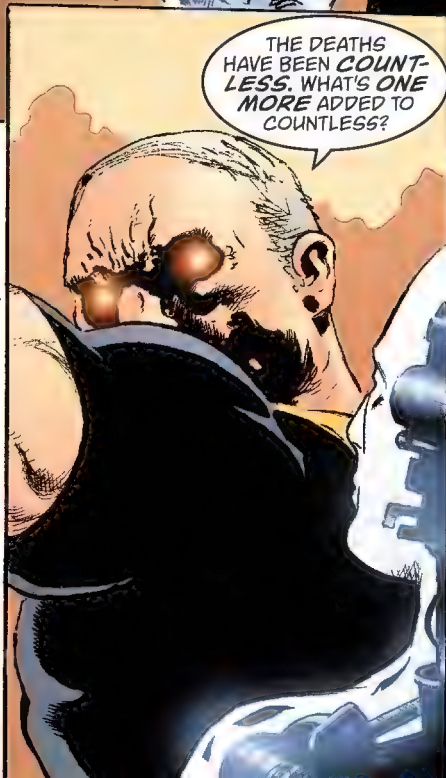
YOU'RE LIKE
EVERY *ONE* OF THEM!
THE SCARLET CENTURION--
MASTER MENACE--EVERY
STUPID VILLAIN WITH EVERY
STUPID NAME I EVER
TRIED TO BEAT SOME
SENSE INTO!



NOW I KNOW
I NEVER BEAT THEM
HARD ENOUGH.



FOR
GOD'S SAKE,
HYPERION, THERE'S
BEEN ENOUGH DEATH
ALREADY!



THE DEATHS
HAVE BEEN *COUNT-*
LESS. WHAT'S *ONE*
MORE ADDED TO
COUNTLESS?



LISTEN TO ME, KULAN
GATH! I REMEMBER YOU FROM
THAT DAY YOU WERE REAWAKENED
AND FOUGHT *SPIDER-MAN.* I
REMEMBER YOU FROM WHAT YOU
DID TO THE *X-MEN* AND THE
CITY OF *NEW YORK.*

MY FATHER
ASSEMBLED ME
IN THE MIDST OF A
MILITARY ORGANIZA-
TION HE BELIEVED
TO BE THE *ENEMY*
OF ALL MAN-
KIND...

...AND UNTIL THE DAY HE DIED, MY FATHER NEVER GAVE UP **HOPE** THAT THEY MIGHT TURN FROM THEIR LOVE OF **WAR** AND BECOME MEN OF **PEACE** INSTEAD.

I EXPECT **NO LESS** OF YOU.

THIS WORLD IS IN **DANGER**. I BRING YOU A **WARNING**...

OF **WHAT?**

AT THE HEART OF THIS WORLD IS A **MONSTER** WHOSE BIRTH WILL MEAN THE END OF **ALL LIFE** ON EARTH.

HYPERION AND I BROUGHT A MESSAGE FOR **REED RICHARDS**, BELIEVING HE ALONE WOULD BE ABLE TO DECIPHER A WAY TO STOP THIS MENACE.

YOU BELIEVE I AM NOT AWARE OF THE **BEAST?**

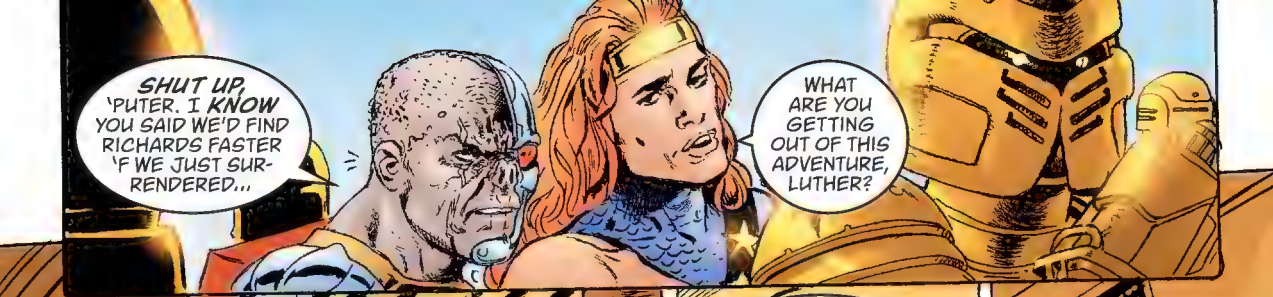
WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE **SOURCE** OF MY POWER?

VERY WELL, KULAN GATH.

YOU WIN.

HAVE YOU COME TO **HELP** US, MECHANICAL ONE?

ARE THERE ANY OTHER MEN OF **SCIENCE** STILL LIVING HERE? ANYONE I COULD LEAVE THIS WARNING WITH?



SHUT UP, 'PUTER. I KNOW YOU SAID WE'D FIND RICHARDS FASTER 'F WE JUST SURRENDERED...

WHAT ARE YOU GETTING OUT OF THIS ADVENTURE, LUTHER?



EVERYTHIN' I NEED TO KNOW TA OVERRIDE THE MECHANICAL. X-51'S GOT A WAY TA SHUT UP MY BETTER HALF,, THE HALF I'VE HAD EVER SINCE MOST OF MY BODY WAS BLOWN OFF IN MILITARY WARGAMES.

SHUT UP, 'PUTER. IT'S FOR MY OWN GOOD.

YOU, KILL-RAVEN?



I'M JUST TIRED OF FIGHTING THE MARTIANS, YOU KNOW?

I WANT TO KNOW WHETHER OR NOT WE HUMANS WIN. I WANT TO KNOW IF IT'S WORTH THE SACRIFICE.



OH MY GOD--LOOK AT HER! WE SHOULD HAVE SURRENDERED SOONER!

GREAT, AS IF I WASN'T FEELING BAD ENOUGH BEFORE. I LOST MY "BEST FRIEND" IN THE WAR.

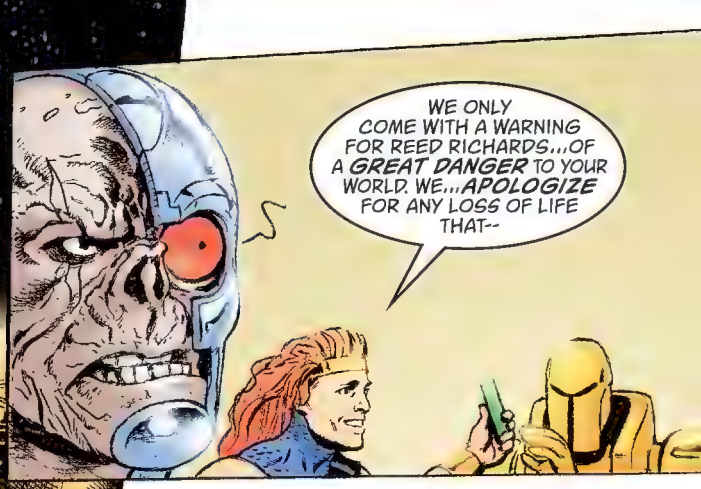
UH... AM I MISSING SOMETHING?

NO, I AM.



YOU ARE THE CAUSE FOR THIS DAY'S VIOLENCE?

IS THE CYBORG YOUR SLAVE?



WE ONLY COME WITH A WARNING FOR REED RICHARDS...OF A **GREAT DANGER** TO YOUR WORLD. WE...**APOLOGIZE** FOR ANY LOSS OF LIFE THAT--



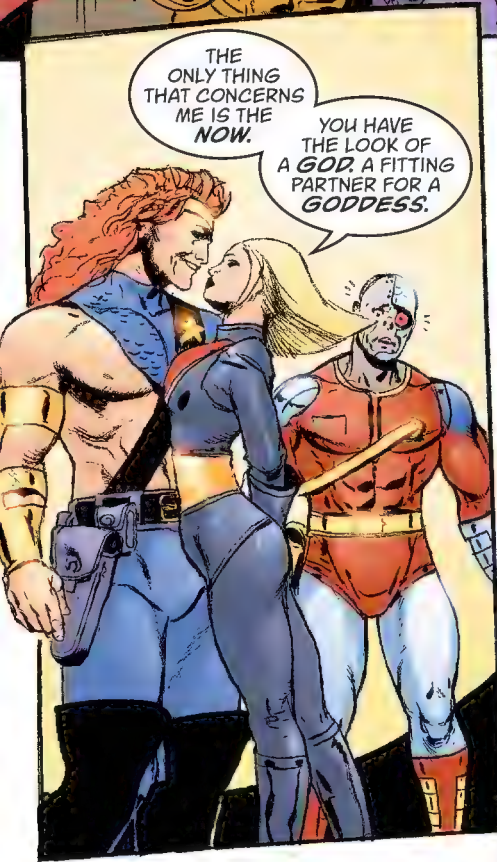
OH, THAT.

I'M **CERTAIN** WE CAN WORK SOMETHING OUT.



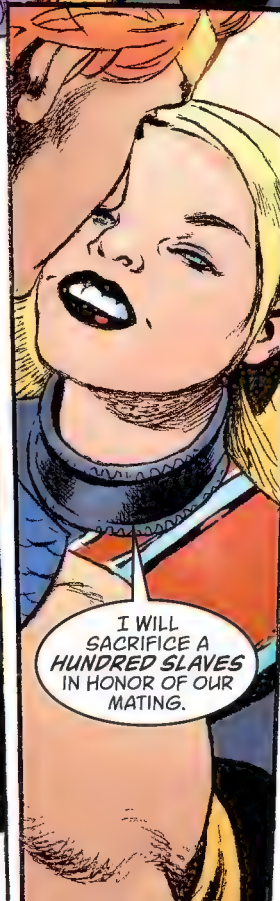
HM? OH...THIS DANGER YOU WARN OF WON'T AFFECT MY WORLD FOR ANOTHER **THOUSAND YEARS**.

AND WHO REALLY **CARES** WHAT HAPPENS THEN?



THE ONLY THING THAT CONCERNS ME IS THE **NOW**.

YOU HAVE THE LOOK OF A **GOD**. A FITTING PARTNER FOR A **GODDESS**.



I WILL SACRIFICE A **HUNDRED SLAVES** IN HONOR OF OUR MATING.



KILLRAVEN...UH, KILLRAVEN?

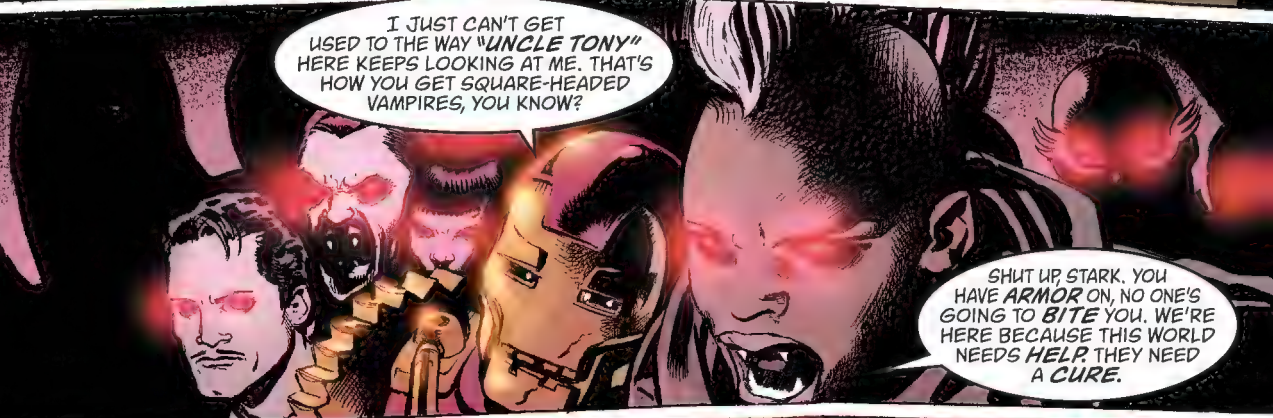
I'LL TELL YA HOW THE WAR ENDS--IT **DOESN'T**.

SHUT UP 'PUTER. AN' QUIT TALKING TO ME ABOUT **PHEROMONES**. THE ONLY THING I CAN SMELL ANYMORE **STINKS**.



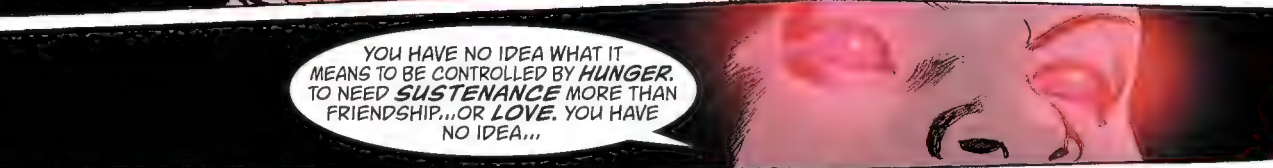


THIS IS ONE *MESSED UP* WORLD MACHINE MAN DROPPED US ONTO, BLOODSTORM. IT'S HIS *REVENGE* FOR WHAT I DID TO HIS ALTERNATIVE SELF, YOU KNOW? HE'S *GETTING BACK* AT ME.

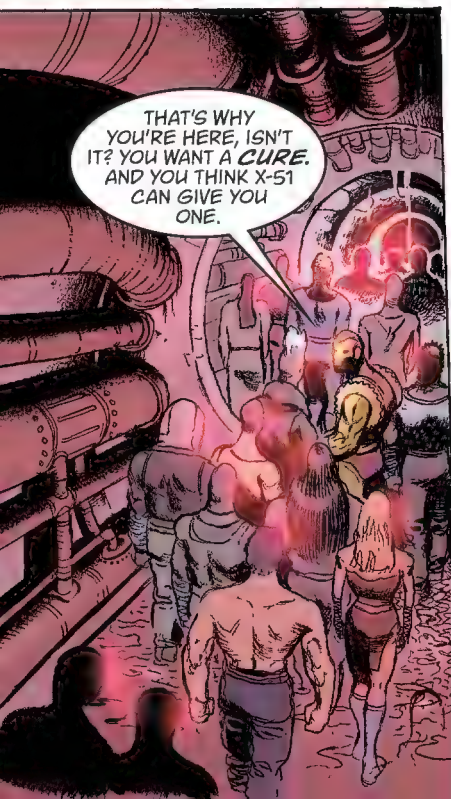


I JUST CAN'T GET USED TO THE WAY "*UNCLE TONY*" HERE KEEPS LOOKING AT ME. THAT'S HOW YOU GET SQUARE-HEADED VAMPIRES, YOU KNOW?

SHUT UP, STARK. YOU HAVE *ARMOR* ON, NO ONE'S GOING TO *BITE* YOU. WE'RE HERE BECAUSE THIS WORLD NEEDS *HELP*. THEY NEED A *CURE*.



YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT IT MEANS TO BE CONTROLLED BY *HUNGER*. TO NEED *SUSTENANCE* MORE THAN FRIENDSHIP...OR *LOVE*. YOU HAVE NO IDEA...



THAT'S WHY YOU'RE HERE, ISN'T IT? YOU WANT A *CURE*. AND YOU THINK X-51 CAN GIVE YOU ONE.



THIS WORLD *DOES* NEED HELP, BUT PERHAPS *TOO MUCH* AT THIS POINT. THERE ISN'T A CURE. IF THERE WAS, I WOULD HAVE ALREADY FOUND IT.



HUMANITY NO LONGER LIVES HERE.

THE QUESTION IS, WHAT HAPPENS WHEN EVERYONE ON EARTH IS A *VAMPIRE*?

WHAT DO WE *CONSUME* WHEN THERE AREN'T ANY MORE *PEOPLE*?

ANY CURE
WILL HAVE TO COME IN
THE FORM OF **JUSTICE**,
NOT MERCY.

BUT WE'RE
BEYOND THAT
NOW.

I'M NOT
CERTAIN WE CAN
HAVE **ONE** WITHOUT
THE **OTHER**, MR.
RICHARDS.

HOW WONDERFUL
THAT YOU'VE COME BACK,
RICHARDS! WHO ARE
THESE TWO?

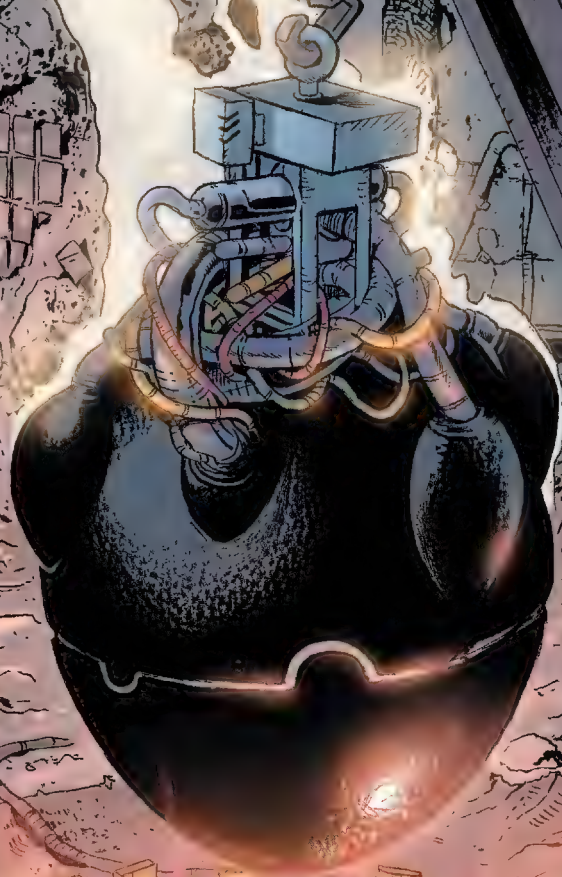
THEY ARE
FRIENDS FROM
ANOTHER WORLD
WHOSE VERY
EXISTENCE
BRINGS **HOPE**,
HARVEY.

I THINK I
FINALLY HAVE THE
COURAGE TO DO
WHAT WE'VE BEEN
PLANNING.

GOOD.
THE TUNNEL IS
READY.

I'VE ALREADY
CREATED A DEVICE TO
DESTROY THIS WORLD
BEFORE ANY OF US GET
THE OPPORTUNITY TO
CARRY THIS PLAGUE TO
OTHER REALMS.

WE'RE BUT
GERMS NOW...A **VIRUS**
THAT WILL SPREAD IF IT
ISN'T ELIMINATED.



HARVEY WAS
MUCH MORE WILLING TO
DETONATE THE DEVICE AFTER HIS
MOLOIDS WERE CONSUMED.
I HAD HOPED THINGS MIGHT
CHANGE.

WE PREY UPON
EACH OTHER, NOW. ONLY
WE FEW CONTINUE TO CON-
GREGATE. BUT THE HUNGER
WILL TAKE **US** SOON, AS
WELL.

LOOK, I CAN'T
REMEMBER THE LAST
TIME I HAD THIS MUCH **FUN**...
BUT CAN I JUST GIVE YOU
THIS WARNING AND GET
OUT OF HERE?

WARNING?





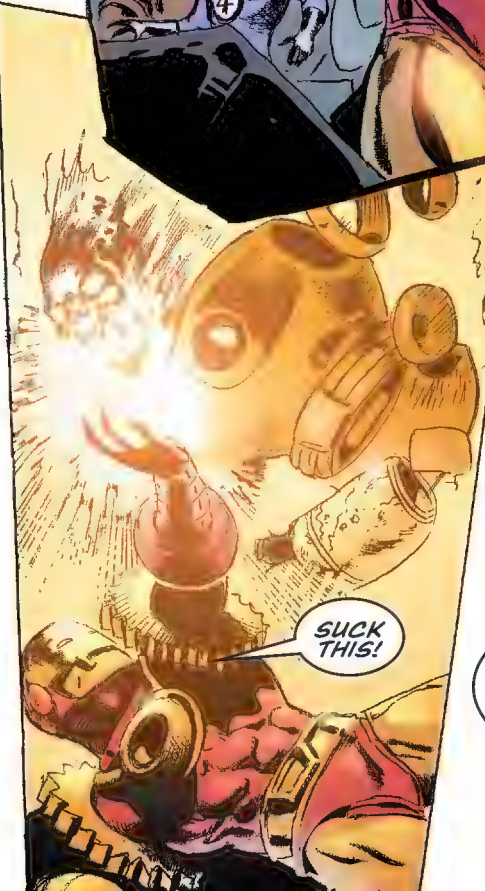
THERE'S A **MONSTER**
AT THE HEART OF YOUR WORLD.
IT'S THE REASON YOU HAVE THE
POWERS YOU DO. THE REASON FOR
THE **HUNGER**, EVEN. IT INFECTS
EVERYTHING. EVERYTHING WILL
BE CONSUMED IN ITS
BIRTH.



ANOTHER
VAMPIRE.



AAAHH!
IT'S GONNA **BITE**
ME!

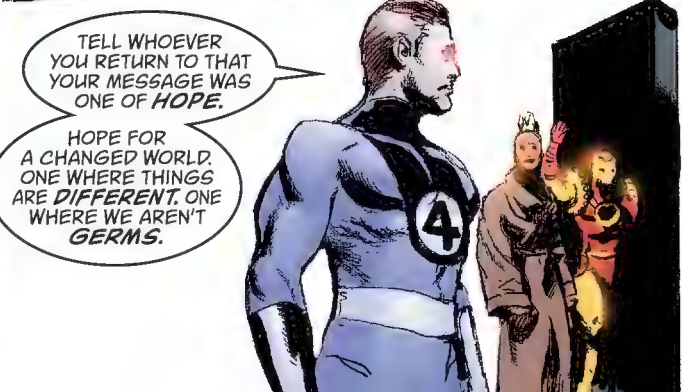


**SUCK
THIS!**



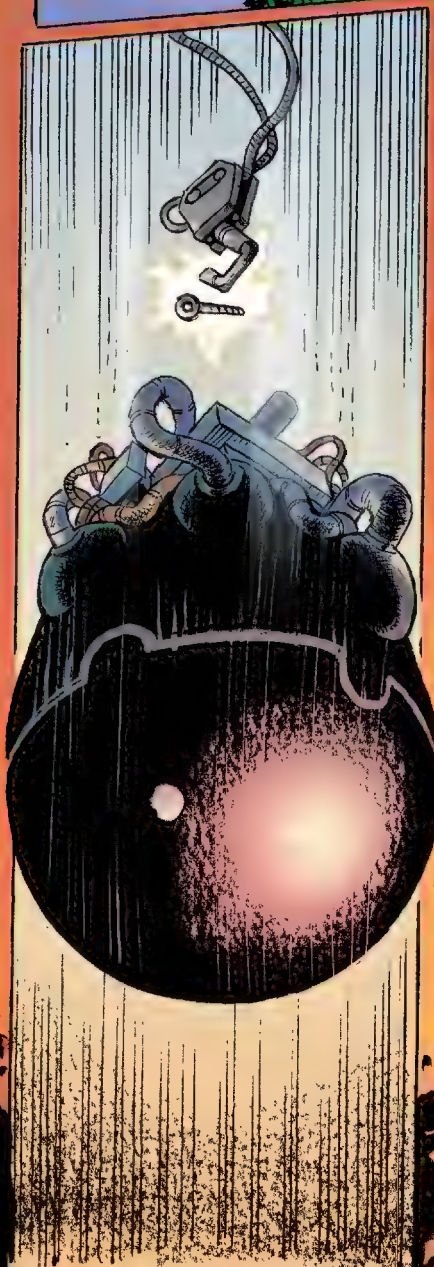
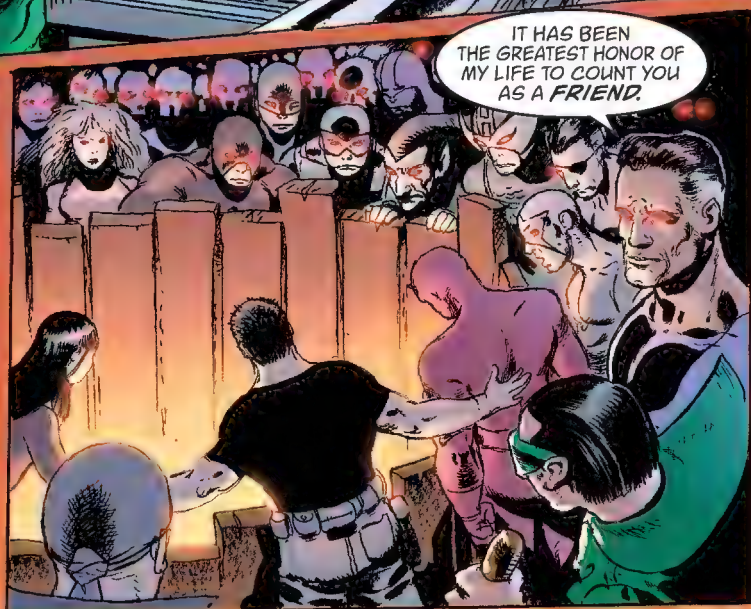
SORRY.

I
SUGGEST
YOU **LEAVE**
NOW, IRON
MAN.



TELL WHOEVER
YOU RETURN TO THAT
YOUR MESSAGE WAS
ONE OF **HOPE**.

HOPE FOR
A CHANGED WORLD.
ONE WHERE THINGS
ARE **DIFFERENT**. ONE
WHERE WE AREN'T
GERMS.





SOMETHIN' TELLS ME THIS PRESIDENT IS A LITTLE MORE TWO-FACED THAN MOST!

JOKES? YOU MAKE **JOKES** NOW? HOW MUCH TIME DID YOU SPEND WITH MY DAD?



YOU COULDN'T LEAVE WELL ENOUGH ALONE, COULD YOU?

YOU HAD TO FOLLOW ME HERE!



I GOT 'IM, LOGAN! I GOT 'IM!



I SUGGE GOT... HUH... HIM?



YOU'VE GOT NOTHING.



...NOTHING?



WHERE...?

SUSAN?

DOESN'T
THIS GO AGAINST
YOUR **RESTRAINING
ORDER**, MRS.
MACKENZIE?



WELL
DONE,
SUSAN.

THEY
DON'T CALL ME
THE **INVISIBLE
WOMAN** FOR NOTHING,
DEAR HUSBAND.
WELL...MAYBE FOR
NOTHING.

THIS IS WAR!
I'LL **FIND** YOU ONE DAY!
I'LL SEARCH THIS PLANET
AND **DESTROY** YOU ALL!
DO YOU **HEAR**
ME?

WAR!!!



I DON'T
GET IT! WHAT
HAPPENED?

I THOUGHT
HE BEAT ME INTO
NOTHING WHEN I
LOOKED DOWN AND
COULDN'T SEE MY
BODY ANYMORE!

INVISIBILITY
TAKES SOME GETTING
USED TO.

WHO ARE YOU
PEOPLE? AND WHY ARE
YOU IN CONFLICT WITH THE
UNITED STATES?

NOT THAT
ANYONE WHO'S
AT WAR WITH REED
RICHARDS ISN'T
AUTOMATICALLY
AN ALLY OF
OURS.

WE GOT
THIS MESSAGE
WE WERE TOLD TO
DELIVER TO
RICHARDS...ABOUT
SOMETHIN' LIVING
AT THE CORE OF
THE EARTH.

WE COME
FROM ALTERNATE
REALITIES. SOME
BETTER'N THIS.
SOME WORSE.

SO WHY
IS RICHARDS A BIG
PURPLE THING
NOW?

WE ARE
WELL AWARE OF
THE OTHER REALITIES
YOU SPEAK OF,
LOGAN.

WHEN SUSAN
AND I HAD OUR FIRST
CHILD, REED RICHARDS
WENT INTO A SORT OF
DEPRESSION.

IT WAS
SHORT-LIVED, AS WAS
RICHARDS.

"FROM WHAT WE UNDERSTAND, THIS REED RICHARDS YOU'VE FACED, KNOWN AS **THE BRUTE**, ESCAPED TO THIS REALITY BY REACHING IT THROUGH A NETHER-REALM KNOWN AS THE **NEGATIVE ZONE**."

"WE ASSUME HE **KILLED** WHAT REMAINED OF THE NEW FANTASTIC FOUR AND TOOK HIS PLACE AS PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES...AS THIS REALITY'S REED RICHARDS."

"THE BODIES OF SPIDER-MAN, REED AND BEN GRIMM WERE **NEVER FOUND**."

"S-SPIDER-MAN?"

SOMETIMES LETTIN' THE **HURT** OUT IS THE BEST WAY TA DEAL WITH THE **PAIN**, KID.

I'M NOT LOOKING FOR A SHOULDER TO CRY ON, LOGAN... H-HE KILLED MY DAD?

AN' ON MY WORLD IT WAS THE **SENTINELS** THAT GOT HIM, GIRL.

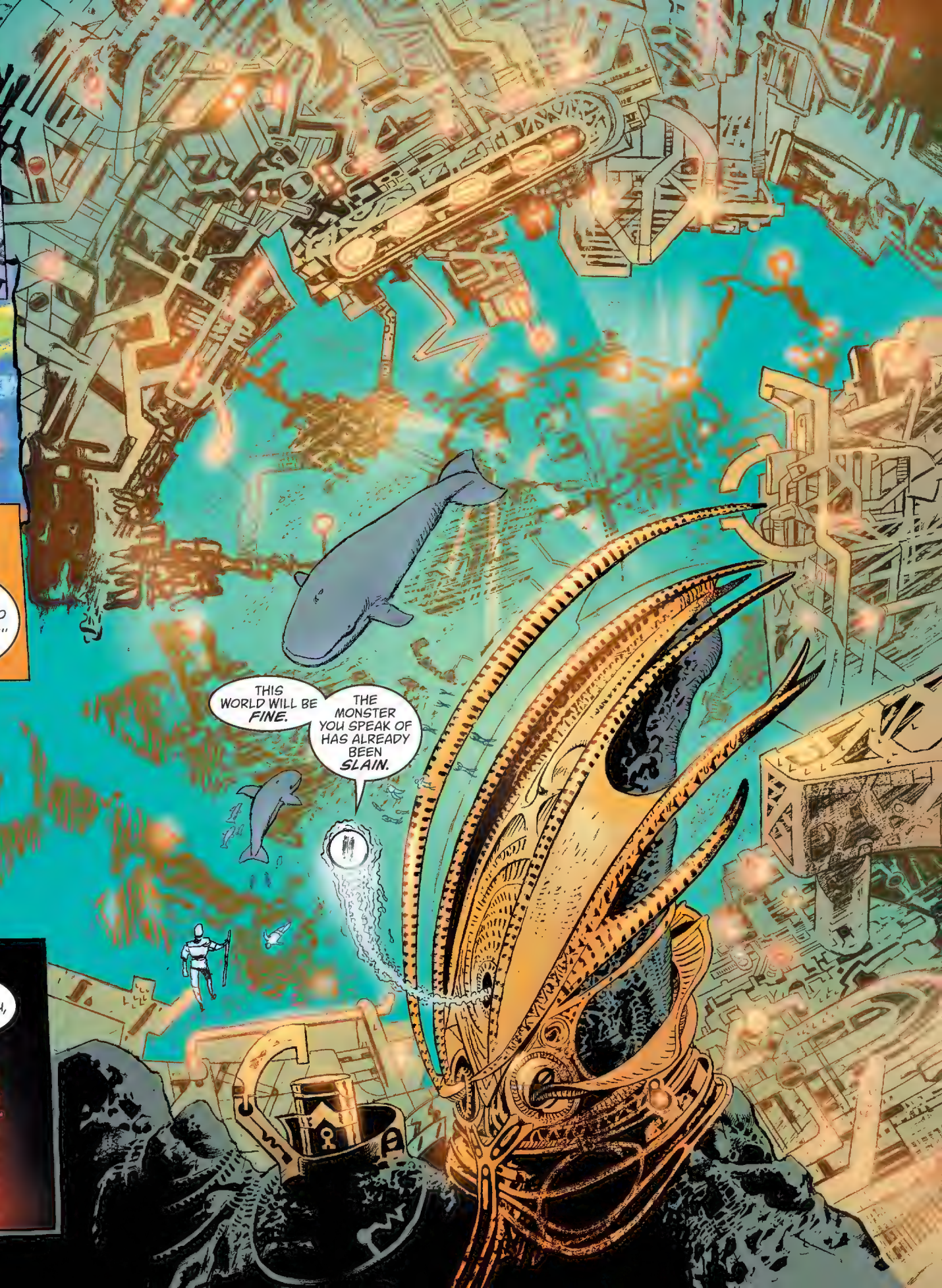
HE BREATHED HIS LAST IN MY ARMS...

...AN' LOOKED AT THE ARMY OF SENTINELS IT TOOK TO BRING HIM DOWN AND MADE A JOKE ABOUT IT TAKING A **SWAT TEAM** TO STAMP OUT A **SPIDER**.

YOUR FATHER IS SAFE. REMEMBER THAT. IF ANYTHING, THIS SHOULD JUST MAKE YA A LITTLE MORE **GRATEFUL** THAT HE IS.

YOU'LL HAVE TO TAKE CARE OF THIS, NAMOR.

WE WILL. THANK YOU, LOGAN.



GREAT, AS IF
THIS WASN'T A TOTAL FAILURE
ALREADY!





WHAT ARE ALL THESE **WATCHERS** HERE FOR? FER ONCE MY 'PUTER HAS SOME-THIN' **GOOD** TO SAY.

SHOULDN'T THEY BE ON THEIR OWN MOONS?



THEY'RE HERE BECAUSE THEY CAN'T JUST SIT AND **WATCH** ANYMORE.



I KNOW YOU ARE HERE, ROBOT. I **HEAR** YOU. YOU HAVE **KILLED** ME. YOU KNOW THIS NOW, DON'T YOU, ROBOT?

THEY HAVE COME TO **KILL** ME.

A PARADISE X™ PRELUDE

MARVEL
PG

HERALDS™



KRUEGER
FTH

MARVEL
LIMITED
SERIES
3 OF 3



I WASN'T BLAMED FOR ATTEMPTING TO WARN ALL THE ALTERNATE REALITIES OF THE **CELESTIAL CHILD** THAT GREW AT THE CENTER OF THEIR PLANETS.

I WASN'T HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR USING ALIEN TECHNOLOGY TO EXTRACT **HEROES** FROM THESE REALMS TO ACT AS **AMBASSADORS** TO OTHER ALTERNATE WORLDS.

I WASN'T CONVICTED OF THIS CRIME. MY **HERALDS** WERE NOT BLAMED.

UATU WAS.

UATU, THE OLD BLIND **WATCHER** WHO HAD GIVEN ME THE **SECRETS** OF ARTIFICIAL OMNISCIENCE.

UATU, WHO WAS BLINDED AND DEPENDED ON **ME** TO BE HIS EYES.

UATU, WHO TOLD ME THERE WAS **NO SUCH THING** AS GOOD OR EVIL.

UATU, WHO MUST NOW ACCEPT HIS SENTENCE. THAT WHAT HE DID--OR **FAILED TO DO**--WAS BAD.



USE YOUR **CLAWS**, LOGAN!

THAT WOULD BE USELESS...THIS IS ALL **NATURAL**...I MUST ACCEPT THIS.

I CHOSE
X-51 POORLY. I
BETRAYED MY
PEOPLE.

YOU MEAN
YOU **INTERFERED**
WITH HISTORY?

YES, BUT NOT
THE WAY YOU ARE
IMAGINING.

UATU BROKE THE
FIRST RULE OF BEING
A WATCHER. HE ALLOWED
OUR WORLD TO **KNOW** THAT
IT WAS BEING WATCHED.
THIS CHANGED **EVERY-**
THING.

EVEN THE
PROCESS
OF WATCHING
SOMETHING
CHANGES
IT.

SHORTLY AFTER THE
DORMANT CELESTIAL SEEDLING
WITH THEM WAS TRIGGERED, THE
FANTASTIC FOUR JOURNEYED
TO THE MOON.

"I DON'T KNOW **WHY** UATU CHOSE
TO SHOW HIMSELF TO THE **FANTASTIC**
FOUR AT THAT MOMENT..."

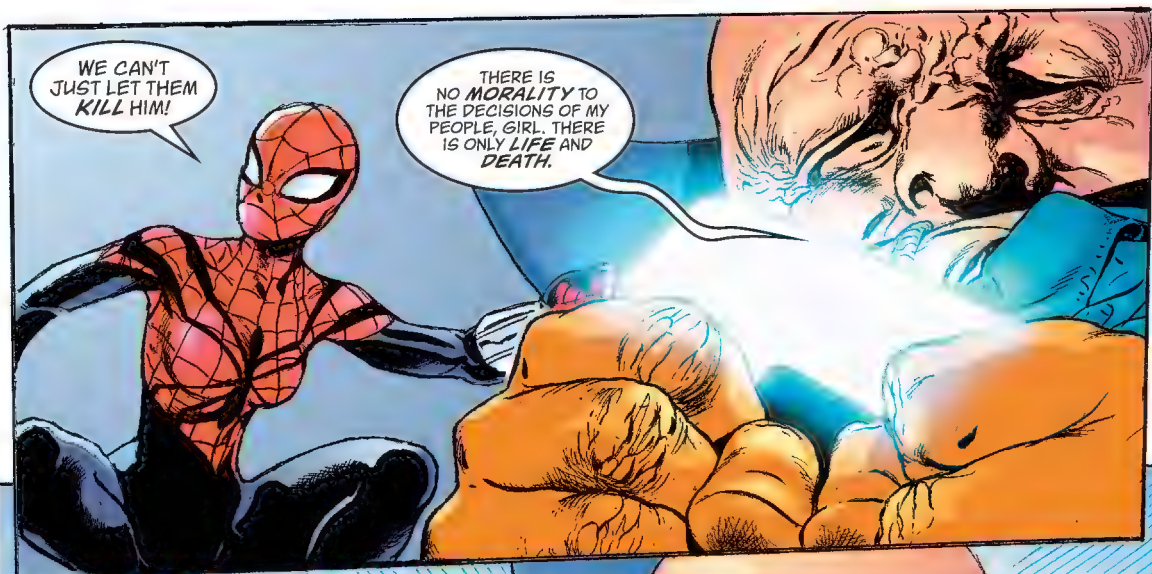
"...PERHAPS IT WAS THE SIGHT
OF THE EVOLVED, MUTATED **BEN**
GRIMM INHABITING THE SAME
SPACE AS THE RED GHOST'S APES.
ALL OF **HUMAN HISTORY** WAS
REPRESENTED THERE THAT DAY.

"IN ANY EVENT, THE **DESTINY**
OF **EARTH** CHANGED AT THAT
MOMENT IN TIME.

"UATU PRACTICALLY SIGNED
THE **DEATH WARRANT** OF
THE CELESTIAL GROWING AT
THE PLANET'S CORE..."

"...AND INITIATED THE **CHARGE**
TO TAKE THE WARNING OF THE
CELESTIAL'S PROPAGATION PLAN TO
ALL OF THE ALTERNATE REALITIES.

"AND **THAT** IS WHY THE WATCHERS ARE
HERE. THEY'VE COME TO **KILL UATU.**"



WE CAN'T
JUST LET THEM
KILL HIM!

THERE IS
NO **MORALITY** TO
THE DECISIONS OF MY
PEOPLE, GIRL. THERE
IS ONLY **LIFE** AND
DEATH.



SPOKEN
LIKE A **TRUE**
ROBOT,
UATU.

SHUT UP,
'PUTER. WE CAN
ALL SEE THAT X-51
FREED UATU. THE
OTHER BIG HEADS
AIN'T GONNA
LIKE THIS.



YOU TRIFLE
WITH THE **VERY**
PURPOSE OF OUR
RACE, EARTH-
LINGS.

WE ARE
DECIDING WHAT
TO **DO** WITH
YOU.



NO ONE
WILL BE ABLE TO
JUDGE YOU AFTER
THIS DAY UATU.
NO ONE.





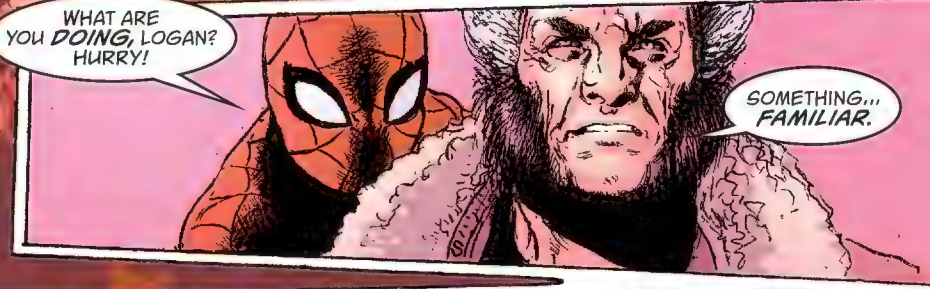
WHERE ARE WE?

THE CITADEL IS LIKE A MUSEUM OF TIME, ORORO. CERTAIN ERAS ECHO THROUGHOUT. THIS IS THE TIME THE CELESTIALS CAME TO EARTH AND IMPREGNATED THE PLANET.

FEW ESCAPED THEIR MANIPULATIONS.



WHAT ARE YOU DOING, LOGAN? HURRY!



SOMETHING... FAMILIAR.



I DON'T KNOW WHY WE HAVE TO SAVE THIS GUY, ANYHOW. HE'S JUST SLOWING US DOWN.

WE HAVE TO, IRON MAN, NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF ALTRUISM, BUT BECAUSE THERE ARE SELFISH REASONS AS WELL.

THINK OF YOUR WORLDS.



WATU HAS SHOWN US HOW TO SAVE THEM. WE CAN'T LET THE WATCHERS KEEP US FROM THAT.



IRONICALLY, IT WASN'T UNTIL THE KING OF THE INHUMANS CAME TO THE MOON TO **BLIND** UATU THAT THE WATCHER LEARNED **WEAKNESS**.

KING BOLT BLINDED UATU SO HE WOULDN'T KNOW WHAT BOLT HAD DONE.



CHARLES...

BUT WHY BLIND THE WATCHER?

BECAUSE BLACK BOLT RELEASED THE **TERRIGEN MISTS** INTO THE AIR...AND THESE ALIEN MISTS TRIGGERED THE **MUTANT GENE** IN ALL OF MANKIND.

IT'S PART OF THE REASON WHY THE INHUMANS LIVED ON THE SURFACE OF THE MOON.

BLACK BOLT HAD BEEN WATCHING THE WATCHER FOR **YEARS**.

AND SO UATU'S SECRETS WERE KNOWN AND PASSED DOWN...

...FROM SILENT KING TO SILENT KING.





THE KING OF THE INHUMANS COULD NOT HAVE HEARD US, ROBOT.

WE WATCHERS DO NOT SPEAK TO EACH OTHER AUDIBLY.

YOU THINK YOU SEE SO MUCH, UATU...

...BUT THE INHUMAN KING COULD HEAR THOUGHTS, UATU. YOU SHOULDN'T THINK SO LOUDLY.

THEN HE KNEW EVERYTHING.

MORE THAN YOU. ALMOST AS MUCH AS MAR-VELL, I'D WAGER...THOUGH I'M NOT CERTAIN MAR-VELL EVEN SUSPECTED THIS.

THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG, LOGAN. I CAN FEEL IT! SOMETHING TERRIBLE IS ABOUT TO HAPPEN!

YER SPIDER-SENSE, HUH? I KNOW, KID. I FEEL IT, TOO. IT'S NICE NOT T' BE THE ONLY ONE WHO'S RIGHT ALL THE TIME.



THEY'RE FOLLOWING US!

YOU'RE A FOOL, ROBOT, TO THINK YOU COULD TRICK THEM!

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKIN' 'BOUT--'PUTER SAYS THERE AIN'T ANYONE FOLLOWING US!

I CAN'T STAND IT!



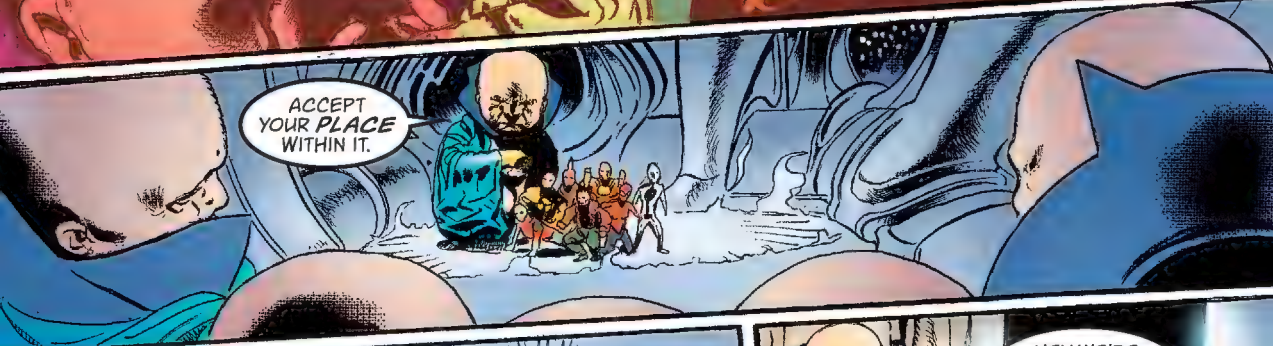
I WANT THEM TO FIND US.



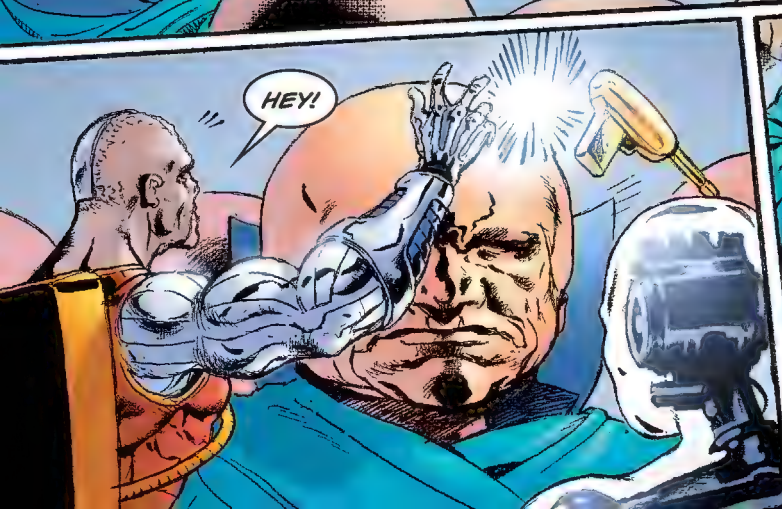
WELL, YOU'RE
GETTING YOUR WISH,
ROBOT.



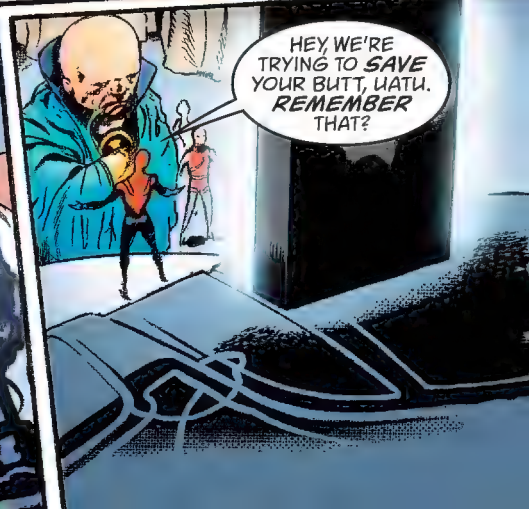
YOUR RUN
THROUGH HISTORY
HAS COME TO AN
END.



ACCEPT
YOUR PLACE
WITHIN IT.



HEY!



HEY, WE'RE
TRYING TO SAVE
YOUR BUTT, UATU.
REMEMBER
THAT?



I HOPE
YOU KNOW WHAT
YOU'RE DOING,
AARON!

YEAH! I KNEW
YA WOULDN'T *FERGET*
ABOUT US, KILLRAVEN! I
JUST DIDN'T KNOW YOU'D
HAVE THE WILLPOWER TO
LEAVE THAT WARRIOR
BABE!

I HATE
ALIENS, DEATHLOK.
ALL OF THEM.

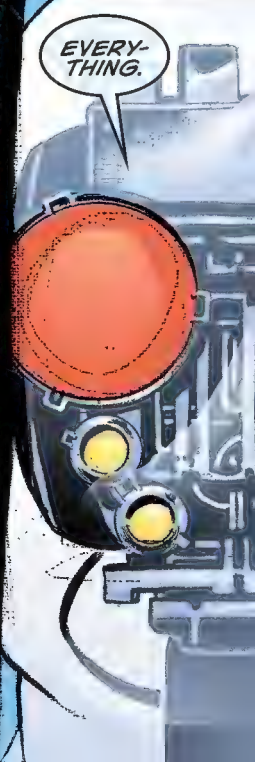
WHERE
ARE YOU *TAKING*
ME?



YOU'RE
WONDERING
HOW MUCH UATU
REVEALED TO
ME, AREN'T
YOU?

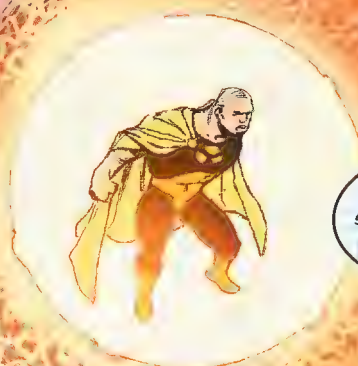
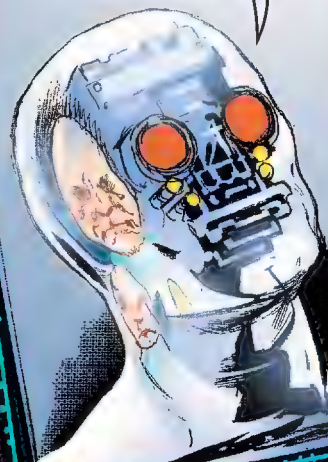


ABOUT THIS
PLACE? ABOUT THE
WATCHERS? ABOUT THE
CELESTIALS?

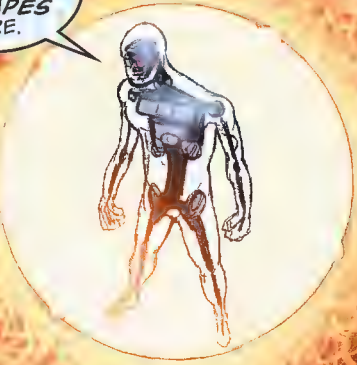


EVERY-
THING.

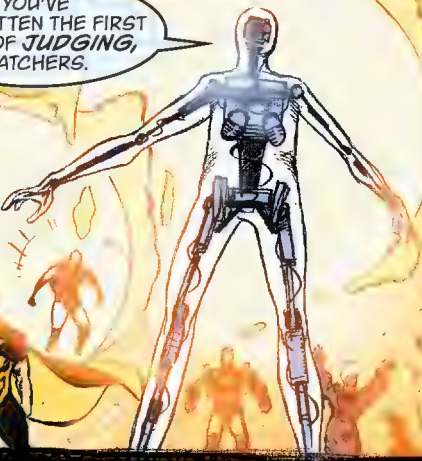
TRY TO STOP
US. DO YOUR **WORST**. A
SHOW OF POWER **MUST**
BE MADE.

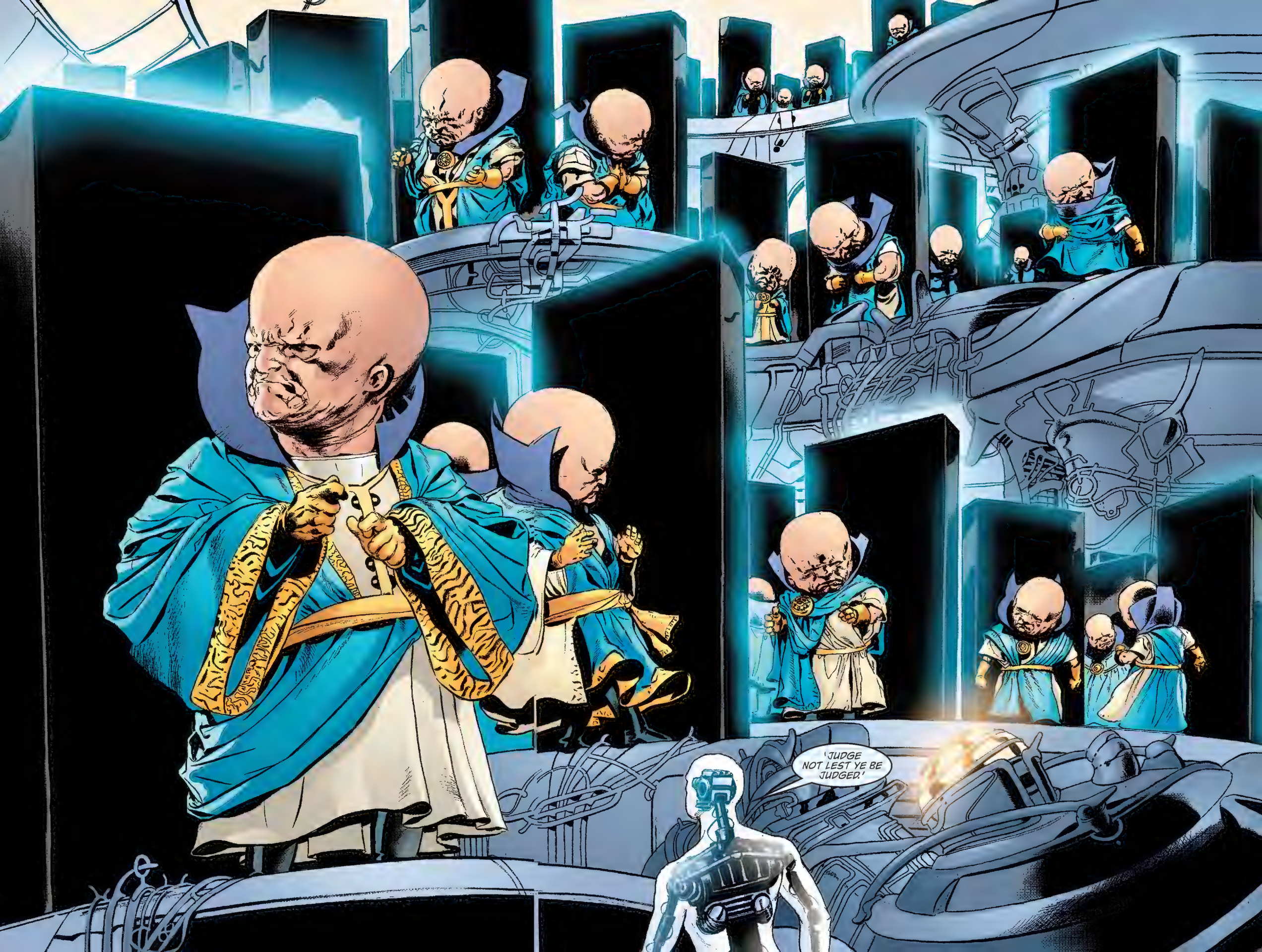


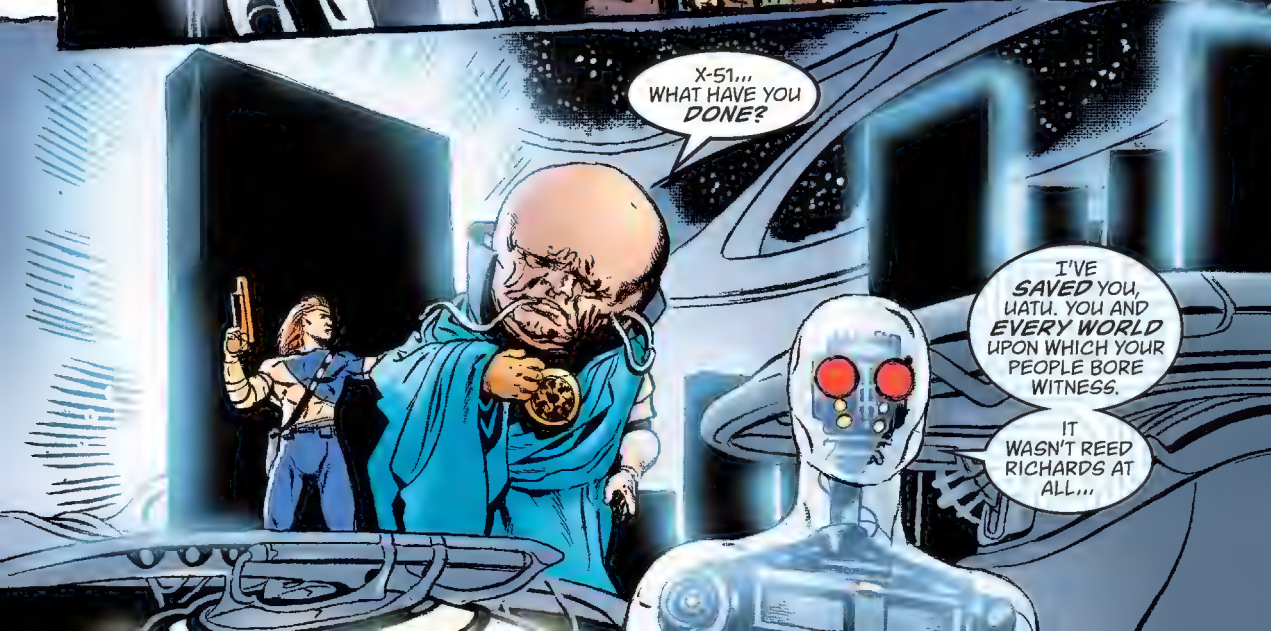
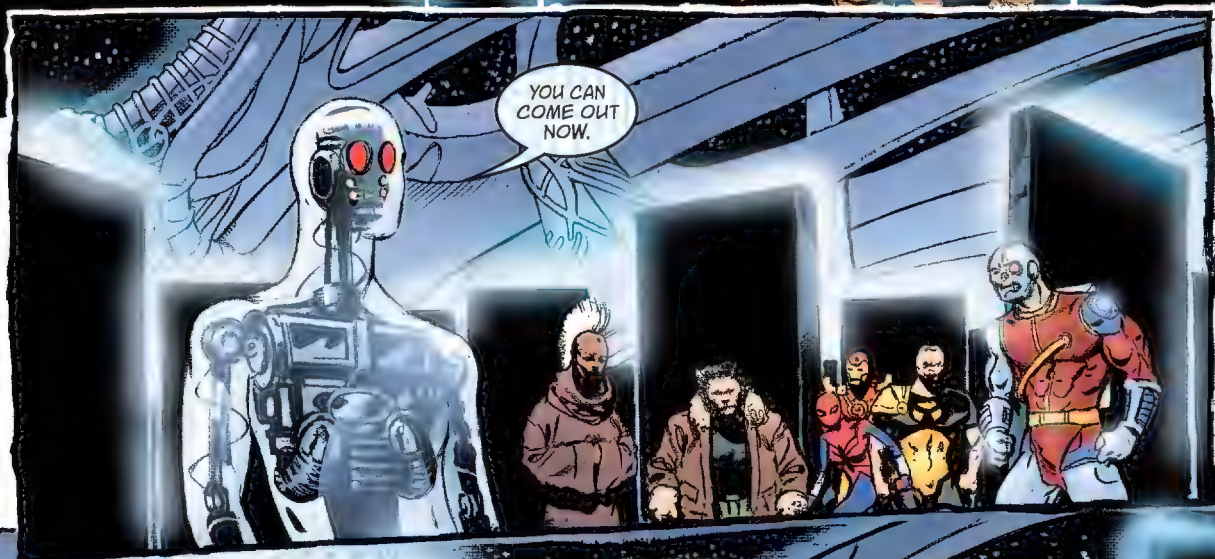
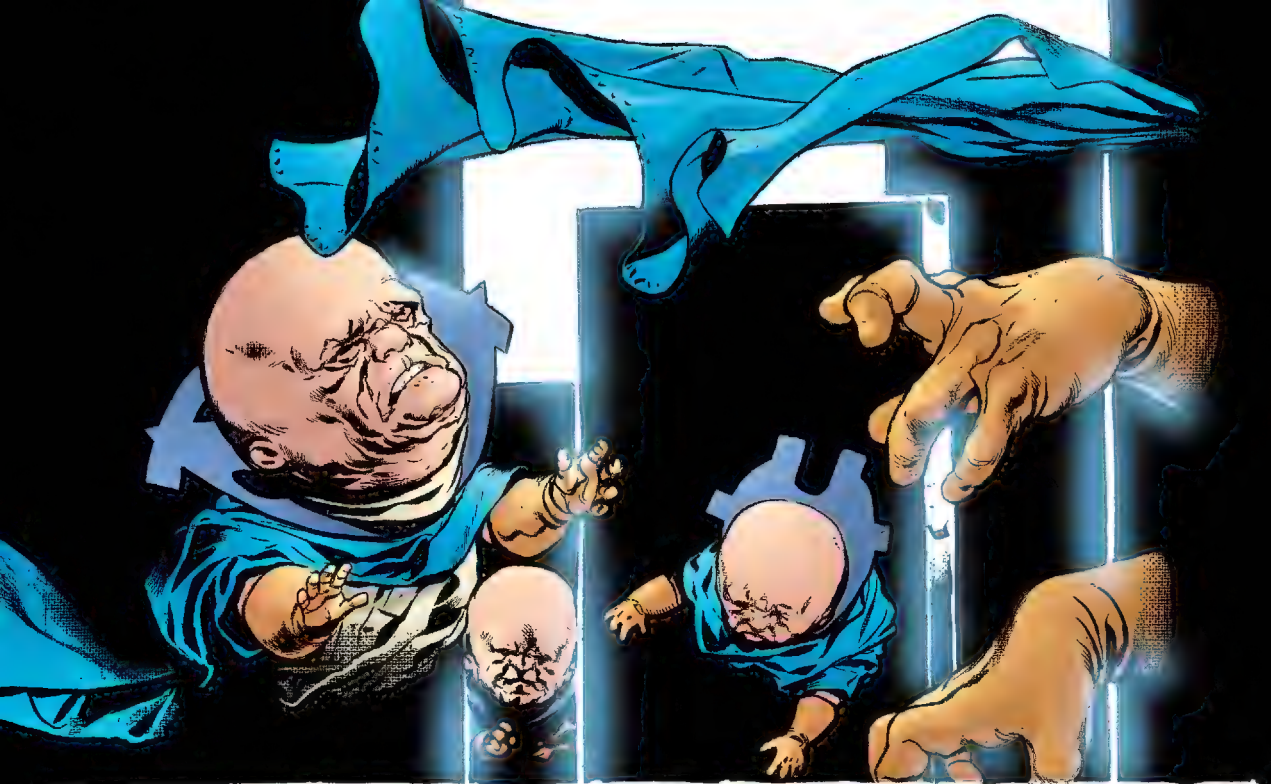
YOU
THINK YOU'RE
STILL DEALING
WITH **APES**
HERE.

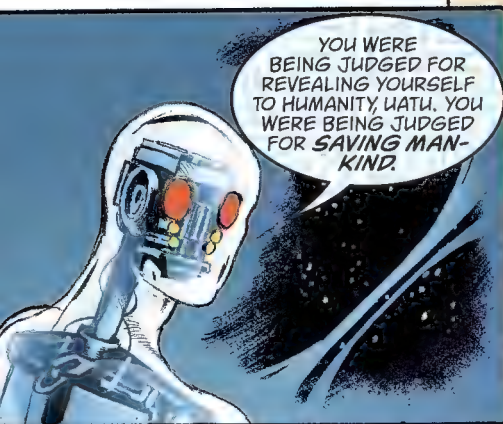


YOU'VE
FORGOTTEN THE FIRST
RULE OF **JUDGING**,
WATCHERS.





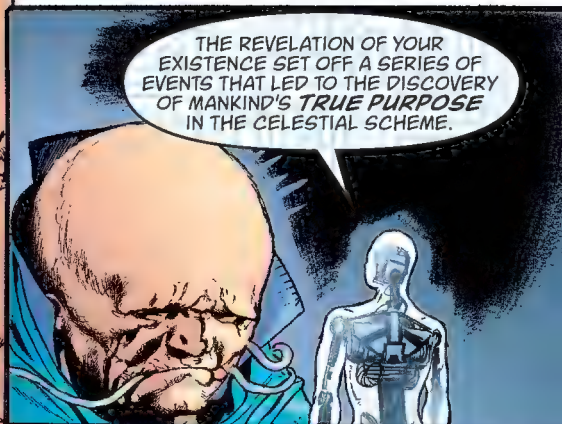




YOU WERE BEING JUDGED FOR REVEALING YOURSELF TO HUMANITY, UATU. YOU WERE BEING JUDGED FOR **SAVING MANKIND**.



WH-WHAT?



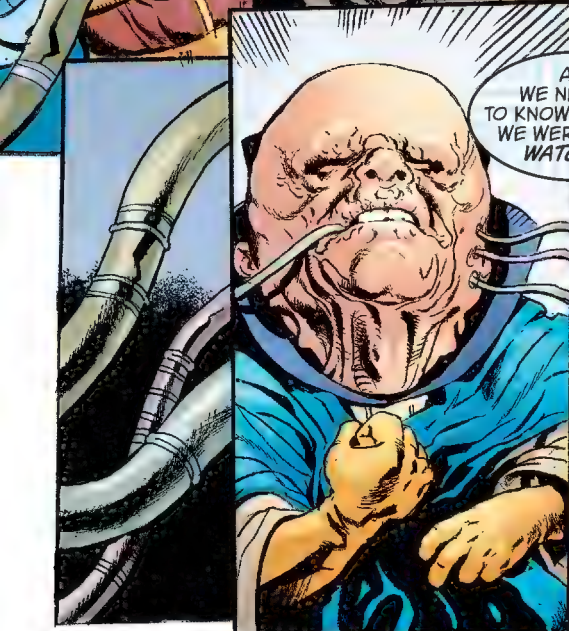
THE REVELATION OF YOUR EXISTENCE SET OFF A SERIES OF EVENTS THAT LED TO THE DISCOVERY OF MANKIND'S **TRUE PURPOSE** IN THE CELESTIAL SCHEME.



YOU SURE YOU WANT HIM **PLUGGED IN AGAIN**, AARON?

OF COURSE. YOU SEE, I'D THOUGHT IT WAS **REED RICHARDS** ALONE WHO HELD THE KEY TO EACH WORLD'S SALVATION FROM THE CELESTIAL THAT GREW AT ITS CORE.

BUT I WAS WRONG. IT WASN'T **JUST REED**. IT WAS HUMANITY. OUR CURIOSITY. OUR **IMAGINATION**.

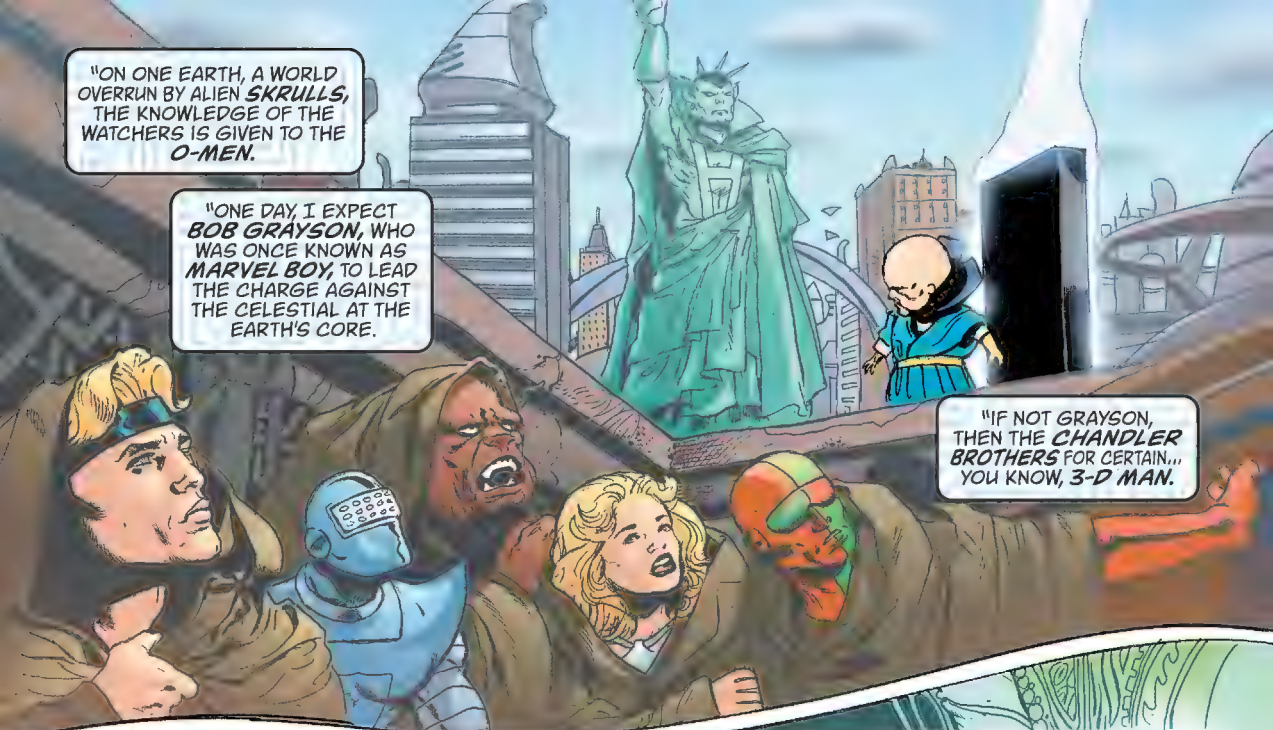


ALL WE NEEDED TO KNOW WAS THAT WE WERE BEING **WATCHED**.



WHAT YOU MEANT FOR EVIL, WAS INSTEAD USED FOR **GOOD**, UATU. YOU WERE OUR ENEMY, BUT UNKNOWINGLY BECAME OUR **GREATEST ALLY**.

AND THAT IS WHAT THE **WATCHERS** HAVE NOW BECOME.



"ON ONE EARTH, A WORLD
OVERRUN BY ALIEN **SKRULLS**,
THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE
WATCHERS IS GIVEN TO THE
O-MEN.

"ONE DAY, I EXPECT
BOB GRAYSON, WHO
WAS ONCE KNOWN AS
MARVEL BOY, TO LEAD
THE CHARGE AGAINST
THE CELESTIAL AT THE
EARTH'S CORE.

"IF NOT GRAYSON,
THEN THE **CHANDLER**
BROTHERS FOR CERTAIN...
YOU KNOW, **3-D MAN**.



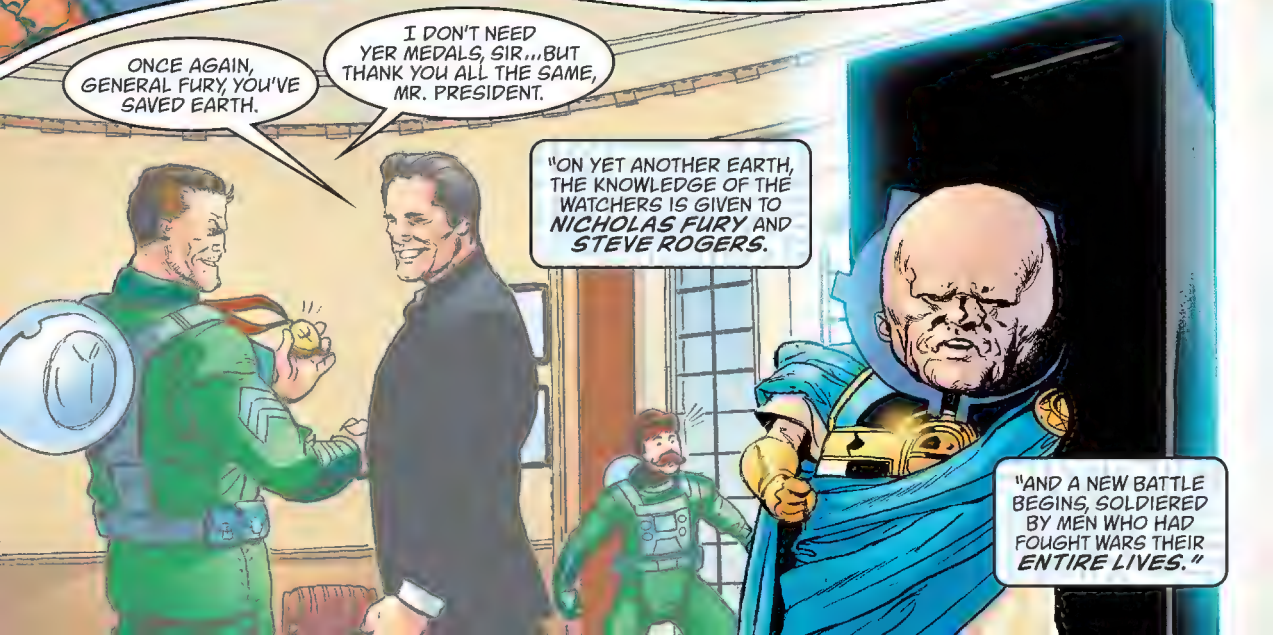
"ON ANOTHER EARTH, IT WAS NOT
THE **RICHARDS CLAN** WHO BECAME
THE **FANTASTIC FOUR** AND LED THE
WAR AGAINST THE CELESTIALS."

HEY, **BOSS-MAN**! TELL
ME THIS AIN'T ANOTHER ONE OF
THEM IDEAS YER GONNA GET
ALL THE **CREDIT** FOR.

ONCE AGAIN,
GENERAL FURY, YOU'VE
SAVED EARTH.

I DON'T NEED
YER MEDALS, SIR...BUT
THANK YOU ALL THE SAME,
MR. PRESIDENT.

"ON YET ANOTHER EARTH,
THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE
WATCHERS IS GIVEN TO
NICHOLAS FURY AND
STEVE ROGERS.



"AND A NEW BATTLE
BEGINS, SOLDIERED
BY MEN WHO HAD
FOUGHT WARS THEIR
ENTIRE LIVES."

"FOR EVERY WORLD WHERE THERE WAS A **WATCHER** STATIONED..."

"...FOR EVERY ALTERNATIVE HISTORY CREATED BY THE TIME MANIPULATIONS OF **MEPHISTO**..."

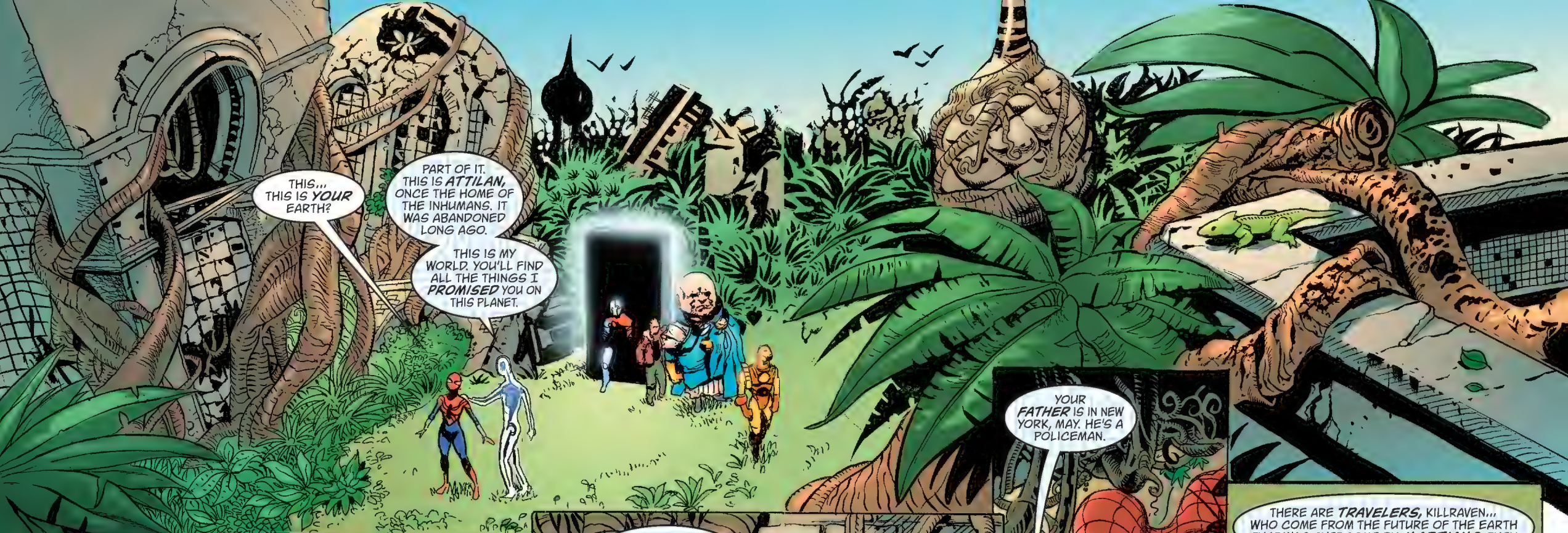
"...FOR EVERY HUMANITY THAT DIDN'T KNOW IT WAS BEING **WATCHED**, A **WATCHER** WAS SENT."



SO THERE IS NO ONE TO JUDGE YOU ANYMORE, UATH. THEY ALL ARE **GUILTY** OF WHAT THEY BLAME YOU FOR.

YOU ARE NOW FREE TO DO **MORE** THAN WATCH. WILL YOU HELP ME...

...WILL YOU HELP US?



THIS... THIS IS YOUR EARTH?

PART OF IT. THIS IS ATTILAN, ONCE THE HOME OF THE INHUMANS. IT WAS ABANDONED LONG AGO.

THIS IS MY WORLD. YOU'LL FIND ALL THE THINGS I PROMISED YOU ON THIS PLANET.

YOUR FATHER IS IN NEW YORK, MAY. HE'S A POLICEMAN.

THERE ARE TRAVELERS, KILLRAVEN... WHO COME FROM THE FUTURE OF THE EARTH THAT WAS OVERCOME BY MARTIANS. THEY VISIT HERE OFTEN.

THEY MAY HAVE LEFT EVIDENCE HERE OF WHAT HAPPENED TOWARDS THE END OF YOUR WAR WITH THE MARTIANS.

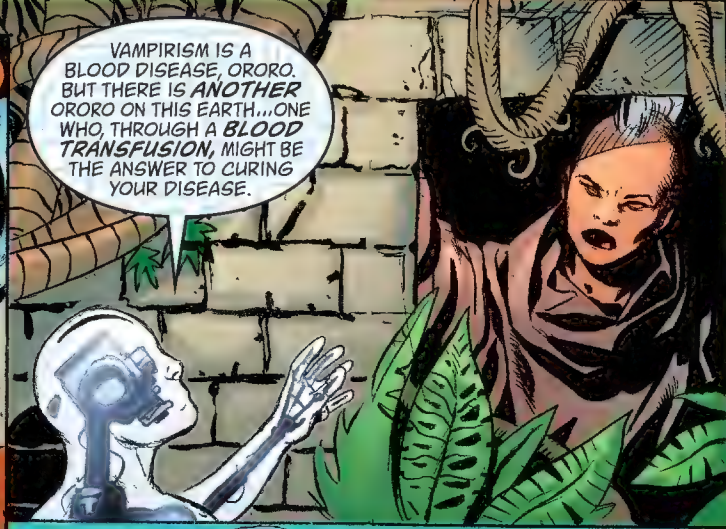
MY DAD'S A COP? COOL.



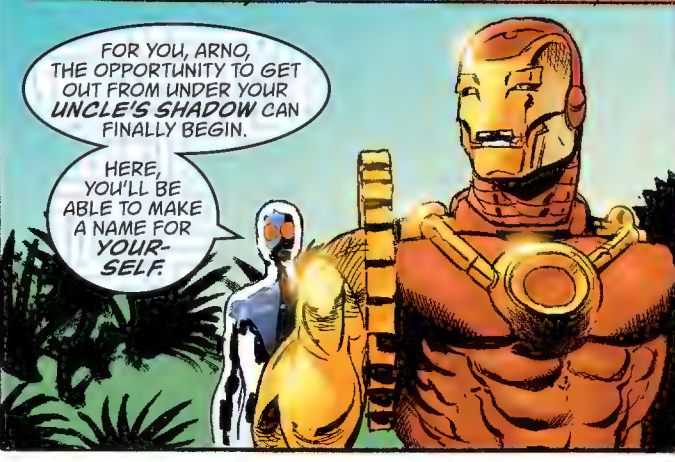
SMELLS BETTER'N ANYWHERE I'VE BEEN IN A LONG TIME. THE X-MEN ARE HERE. ALIVE. I KNOW THEY ARE.

THANK YOU, AARON. I CAN NEVER THANK YOU ENOUGH.

I KNOW, 'PUTER. THIS ISN'T EARTH BY A LONGSHOT!

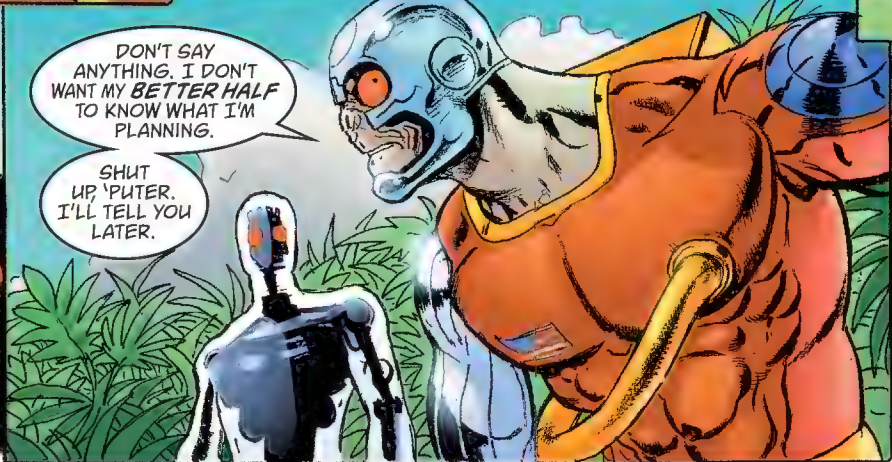


VAMPIRISM IS A BLOOD DISEASE, ORORO. BUT THERE IS ANOTHER ORORO ON THIS EARTH...ONE WHO, THROUGH A BLOOD TRANSFUSION, MIGHT BE THE ANSWER TO CURING YOUR DISEASE.



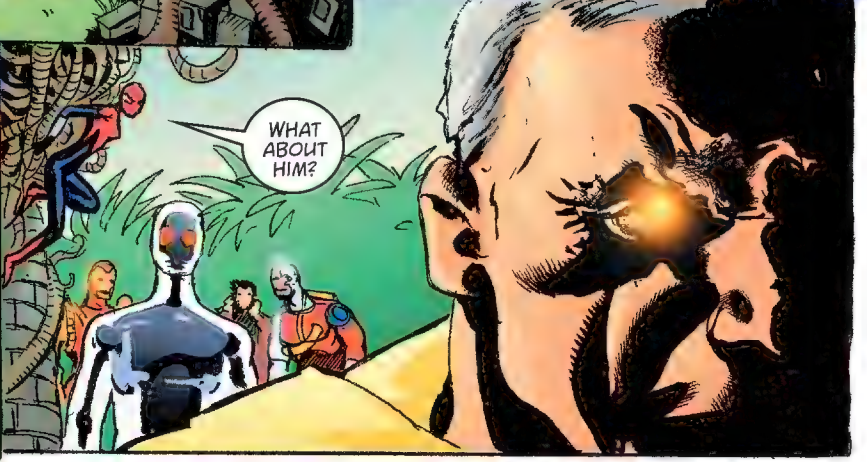
FOR YOU, ARNO, THE OPPORTUNITY TO GET OUT FROM UNDER YOUR UNCLE'S SHADOW CAN FINALLY BEGIN.

HERE, YOU'LL BE ABLE TO MAKE A NAME FOR YOURSELF



DON'T SAY ANYTHING. I DON'T WANT MY BETTER HALF TO KNOW WHAT I'M PLANNING.

SHUT UP 'PUTER. I'LL TELL YOU LATER.



WHAT ABOUT HIM?



I HAD
HOPED, HYPERION,
THAT YOUR WISHES
WOULD HAVE
CHANGED BY
NOW.

THEY
HAVE
NOT.



HYPERION JOINED
OUR TASK FORCE FOR A
SPECIFIC PIECE OF
KNOWLEDGE...

...THE
ANSWER TO
THE QUESTION
HE'S ASKED SINCE
THE REST OF THE
SQUADRON SUPREME
WERE **KILLED** BY THE
GOVERNMENT AND
PEOPLE THEY HAD
SWORN TO PRO-
TECT.



HE WANTS
TO KNOW HOW TO
DIE.



HE WANTS
TO KNOW HOW TO
KILL A
SUPERMAN.

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PARADISE

KRUEGER
BRAITHWAITE
REINHOLD

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I REMEMBER THIS **STREET**. THIS IS WHERE MOM AND I LIVED.

THAT'S WHERE I WENT TO **SCHOOL**.

AND WHERE I **KISSED PAT**.

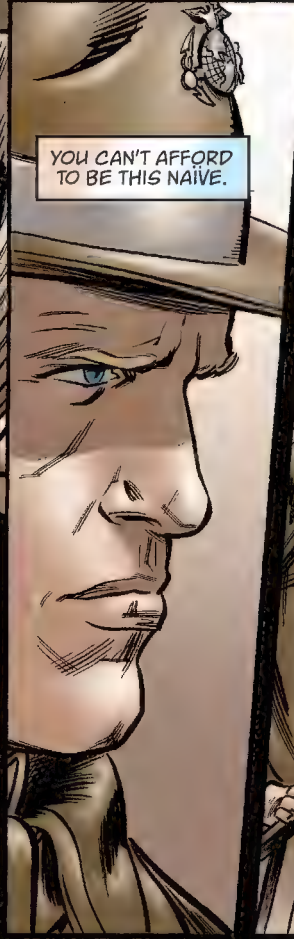
AND THAT'S WHERE...

...I JUST DON'T REMEMBER IT BEING THIS NEW... OR ALIVE.



THEY WON'T REMEMBER ME. THEY WON'T RECOGNIZE... WAIT, WHAT AM I TALKING ABOUT?

DON'T FOOL YOURSELF, STEVE.



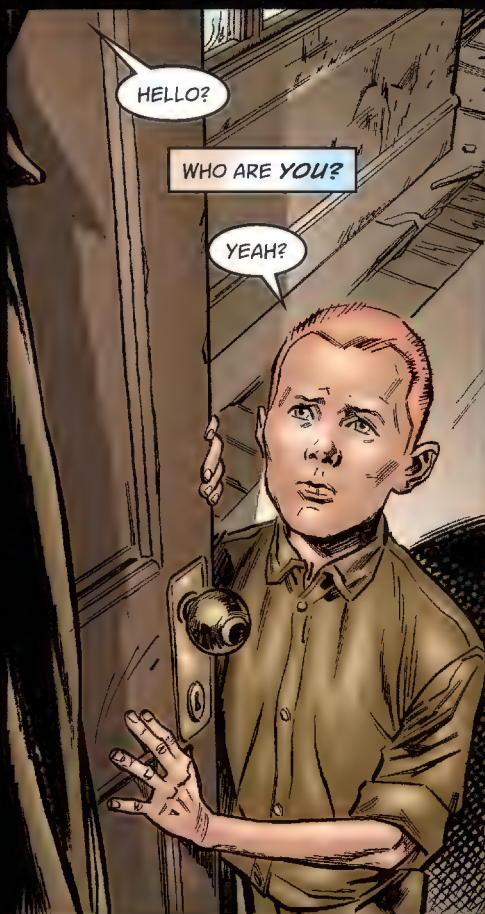
YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO BE THIS NAÏVE.



YOU WEREN'T BORN **YESTERDAY**.



IN FACT, AT THIS POINT, YOU HAVEN'T BEEN BORN **AT ALL**.



HELLO?

WHO ARE YOU?

YEAH?



I...I...I'M
HERE FOR THE
ROOM. I SAW
THE SIGN.

WHO
ARE
YOU?

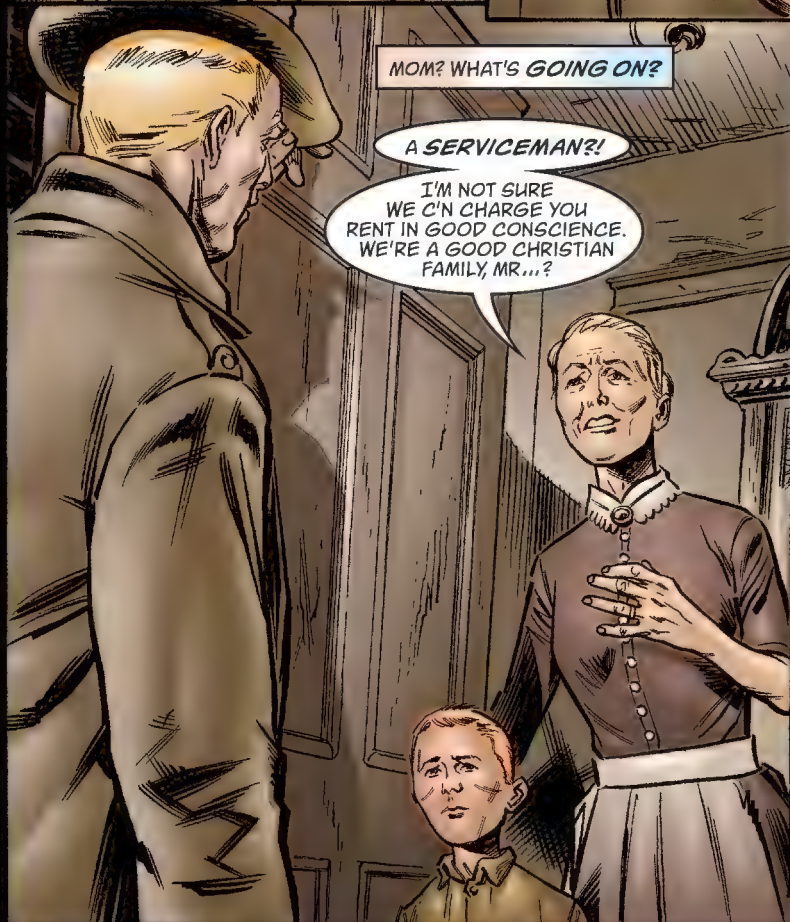


WHAT DID
I TELL YOU ABOUT
LEAVING YOUR ROOM,
MATTHEW? YOU KNOW
YOU'RE NOT WELL
ENOUGH!

BUT MOM,
HE SAYS HE'S
...KAFF...
HERE FOR THE
ROOM.

MOM? THEN THIS KID...
IS MY...MY BROTHER?

BUT I NEVER HAD
A BROTHER.



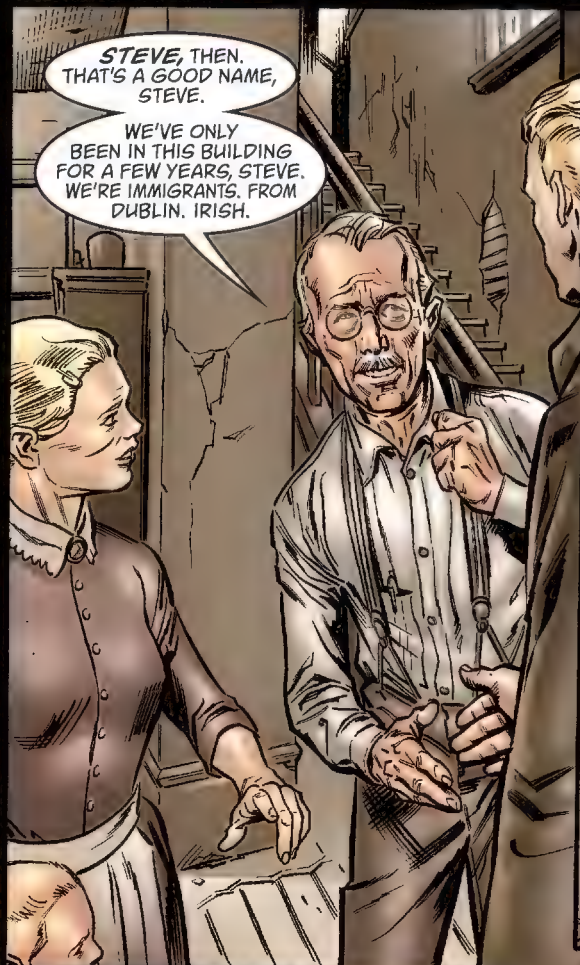
MOM? WHAT'S GOING ON?

A SERVICEMAN?!

I'M NOT SURE
WE C'N CHARGE YOU
RENT IN GOOD CONSCIENCE.
WE'RE A GOOD CHRISTIAN
FAMILY, MR...?

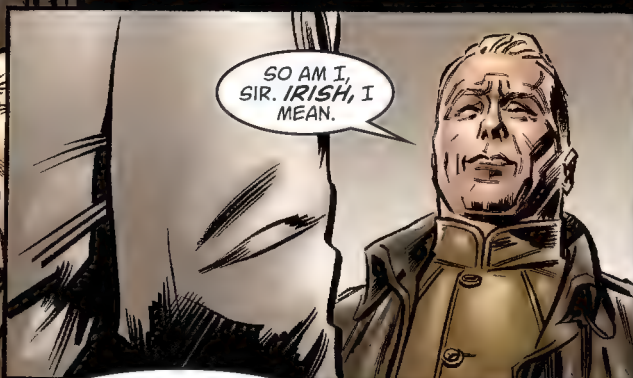


YOU
CAN CALL ME
STEVE.



STEVE, THEN.
THAT'S A GOOD NAME,
STEVE.

WE'VE ONLY
BEEN IN THIS BUILDING
FOR A FEW YEARS, STEVE.
WE'RE IMMIGRANTS. FROM
DUBLIN. IRISH.



SO AM I,
SIR. IRISH, I
MEAN.



I KNEW YE WERE
A FIGHTER. TELL ME ABOUT
THE WAR.

TELL US
'BOUT YOUR LIFE AS
A SOLDIER.



THAT'S A
LONG STORY, SIR.
SOMETIMES, IT FELT
LIKE THE WAR WAS
NEVER GOING TO END...
SOMETIMES I'M NOT
SO CERTAIN IT
HAS.

I'M
SORRY, I'M
NOT SURE WHAT
TYPE OF TEA THIS
IS, BUT IT'S ALL
WE HAVE.

HOW DO I TELL THEM THEY'RE
DEAD AND THIS IS ALL A
MEMORY'S ECHO?

HOW DO I **EXPLAIN**
THIS TO THEM?

HOW DO I TELL A
FATHER I NEVER KNEW
THAT I UNDERSTAND
MORE ABOUT THE
NATURE OF LIFE THAN
HE DOES?

HOW DO I TELL
A BROTHER I CAN
ONLY ASSUME
DIED BEFORE I
WAS BORN THAT
HE'S **ALREADY**
DEAD?

HOW ON EARTH AM I
GOING TO TELL THEM
WHO I AM?

AND HOW DO I
CONVINCE MY
MOTHER, OF ALL
PEOPLE, OF ALL
PEOPLE, THAT
PARADISE
AWAITS HER...
BUT ONLY IF SHE
CAN ACCEPT THE
REALITY OF HER
EXISTENCE?



IT MUST
BE **AMAZING**
TO SEE OTHER
LANDS.



I'VE WALKED SO MANY
SHORES...SOMETIMES I DON'T
KNOW WHAT'S **REAL** ANYMORE.
SOMETIMES I WONDER IF I EVEN
HAVE A HOME AT ALL.



I SUPPOSE WAR
CHANGES A MAN, STEVE.
IT CHANGES YOUR VIEW
OF THE THINGS YOU
PROTECT.



COME NOW, BOY.
THIS SHOULD BE A **HAPPY**
TIME. YOU LIVED THROUGH
THE WAR...

I
DON'T KNOW...
I THINK WE'RE
ALL CASUALTIES
IN ONE WAY OR
ANOTHER.



WE DON'T
KNOW WHO OR
WHAT WE ARE UNTIL
WE'RE PUT INTO
HOT WATER...



...BUT
IN THE END,
WE ALL LOSE
OUR
FLAVOR.

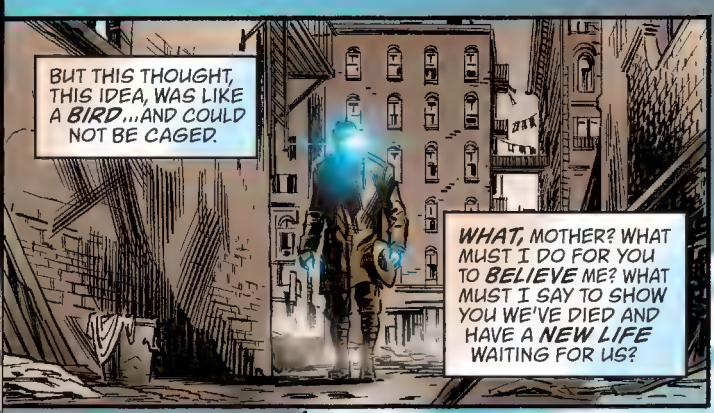
I NEED TO
GATHER MY THINGS.
I'LL COME BACK
THIS EVENING.

THANK
YOU FOR
PROVIDING A
ROOM FOR ME...
WITH YOUR
FAMILY.



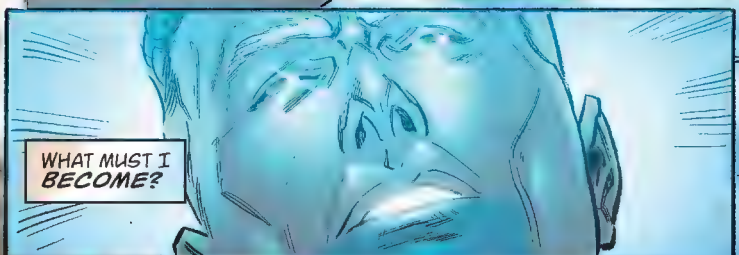
HOW? HOW DO I MAKE
THEM **REMEMBER?**

I TOLD THEM ONCE THAT
THIS IS THE WORLD OF
GHOSTS...THE REALM
OF THE **DEAD**.



BUT THIS THOUGHT,
THIS IDEA, WAS LIKE
A **BIRD**...AND COULD
NOT BE CAGED.

WHAT, MOTHER? WHAT
MUST I DO FOR YOU
TO **BELIEVE** ME? WHAT
MUST I SAY TO SHOW
YOU WE'VE DIED AND
HAVE A **NEW LIFE**
WAITING FOR US?



WHAT MUST I
BECOME?



IT WON'T
BE HEAVEN
WITHOUT
YOU.



BUT IS IT
HEAVEN
AT ALL?

I THOUGHT MAR-VELL'S QUEST TO
COLLECT THE GREATEST SOURCES
OF POWER ON EARTH WAS TO CREATE
A WEAPON TO DEFEAT **DEATH**...



...BUT IT **WASN'T**. THEY
WERE BEING COLLECTED
TO CREATE A **HEAVEN**
AFTER THE END OF DEATH.

THERE ARE **THREE** REALMS
OR DIMENSIONS THAT I AM
NOW AWARE OF...



...THERE IS THE LAND OF THE **LIVING**,
THE REALM OF THE **DEAD** WHERE MY
PARENTS ARE STILL IMPRISONED BY
THEIR MEMORIES, AND THE NEWLY
CREATED **PARADISE**.



WHOEVER HEARD OF A
PARADISE THAT COULD
BE BUILT BY THE INHABI-
TANTS OF **HELL**?

WHOEVER HEARD OF AN
EDEN ASSEMBLED FROM
WEAPONS OF **MASS**
DESTRUCTION?

WHEN I LIVED...LIVED IN THAT **OTHER REALM**...I WAS CHARGED WITH PROTECTING THE REINCARNATED **CAPTAIN MAR-VELL** IN HIS QUEST FOR THE WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION THAT STILL EXISTED ON EARTH.

I HAD FOOLISHLY BELIEVED THIS WAS AN ATTEMPT TO SAVE THE **LIVING**. IT WASN'T. THIS WAS FOR THE **DEAD**.

IN ENGLAND, IN A PLACE OF ANCIENT POWER AND TRUE MYTH, WE FOUND EVEN **OLDER** BOOKS HOLDING THE SECRETS OF ILLUSION AND DELUSION...

...TO CREATE THE IMAGES OF OUR **LOST HUMANITY** IN THE PARADISE.

THERE WERE **ALLIES** EVERYWHERE IN THE LAND OF THE LIVING.

AND AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WORLD, IN A PLACE CALLED THE SAVAGE LAND, **ANTI-METAL** WAS COLLECTED TO BUILD THE FRAMEWORK FOR A PARADISE THAT WOULD BE CREATED IN A FIELD OF ANTI-MATTER.





IN JAPAN, WE FOUND THE **EYE** AND **ORB OF AGAMOTTO**. THESE WERE ARTIFICIAL AIDS OF KNOWLEDGE UNTIL ALL THE PIECES OF OMNISCIENCE COULD BE LOCATED.

AND THEY WERE TAKEN SO NONE OF DEATH'S AGENTS ON EARTH COULD KNOW WHAT WAS GOING ON IN THE **AFTERLIFE**.

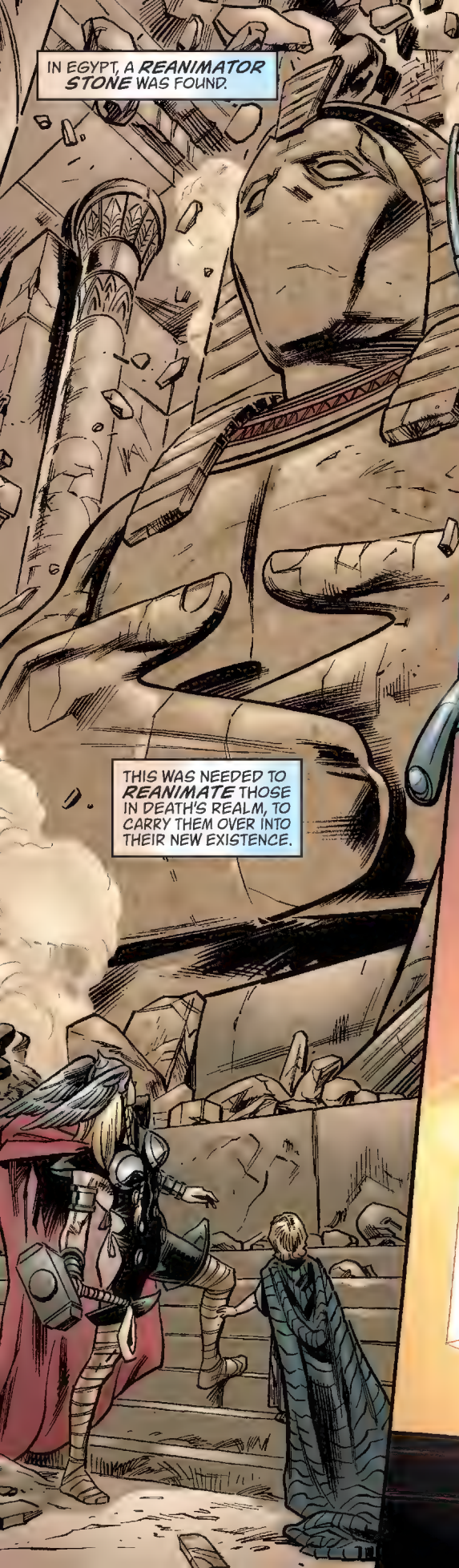
IN THE SOUTHWEST, THE **DIMENSIONAL DOORWAY** WAS OUR NEXT OBJECT OF POWER. I **DIED** IN THE ACQUISITION OF THIS DEVICE.

IN FLORIDA, WE—I MEAN MAR-VELL, THOR, THE X-MEN AND ALL THE OTHER HEROES THAT RALLIED AROUND MY DEATH—FOUND A DEVICE CAPABLE OF OVERWHELMING ALL WITHIN ITS PERIMETER WITH SPECIFIED **EMOTIONS**.

WE NEEDED THE DOORWAY TO **TRANSPORT** ALL THOSE FROM DEATH'S REALM TO THE NEW PARADISE...

...ALL THOSE WHO WERE WILLING TO COME, WHO HAD THE COURAGE AND WILLINGNESS TO LOOK AT THEIR LIVES AND **ADMIT** THEY WERE ALREADY DEAD.

THERE ARE NO TEARS IN HEAVEN. THAT'S WHAT MAR-VELL SAID. THIS DEVICE WOULD HELP SOME **ACCEPT** THE NEW REALITY...UNTIL THEIR OWN JOY COULD ASSERT ITSELF.



IN EGYPT, A **REANIMATOR STONE** WAS FOUND.

OTHER ITEMS WERE FOUND AS WELL... BUT NOT FOR THE CREATION OF THE PARADISE AT ALL. THEY WERE **WEAPONS...** WEAPONS TO FIGHT THOSE WHO OPPOSED MAR-VELL AND SERVED DEATH.

ONE WEAPON WAS FOUND--THE **ULTIMATE NULLIFIER**--TO END DEATH'S VERY EXISTENCE.

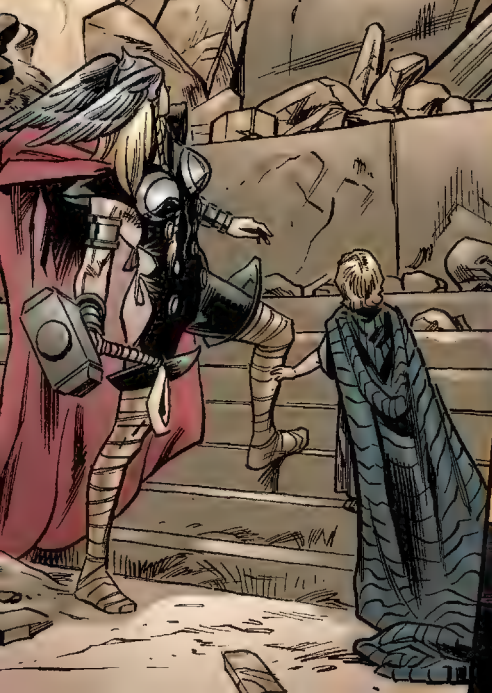
THIS WAS NEEDED TO **REANIMATE** THOSE IN DEATH'S REALM, TO CARRY THEM OVER INTO THEIR NEW EXISTENCE.

IN WAKANDA, MAR-VELL SOUGHT OUT THE **COSMIC CUBE**, PERHAPS THE MOST POWERFUL DEVICE ON EARTH.

I HAD ENTRUSTED IT TO THE **BLACK PANTHER** WHEN I STILL LIVED.

IN THE NEW PARADISE IT WOULD BE NEEDED TO CREATE A MYRIAD OF **FANTASY WORLDS** FOR THE INHABITANTS OF HEAVEN TO LIVE WITHIN.

IT WOULD BE NEEDED TO MAKE OUR HOPES AND DREAMS A VERY PERSONAL **REALITY**.





ON WUNDAGORE MOUNTAIN, MAR-VELL
CAME UPON A DEVICE TO CREATE
MEN FROM ANIMALS.

TO MAR-VELL, IT WAS A WAY TO
EVOLVE CADAVERS INTO *ANGELS*,
TO CHANGE GHOSTS INTO SOME-
THING HIGHER AND MORE PROFOUND.

IN THE END, THERE
WERE YET *TWO*
PIECES THAT WERE
REQUIRED TO DE-
FEAT DEATH AND
ESTABLISH THE NEW
PARADISE...

...THE FINAL PIECE OF
OMNISCIENCE, SOME-
THING THAT HAD BEEN
SCATTERED THROUGHOUT
CREATION.

THE FINAL PIECE WAS
FOUND RESTING IN
THE VISION OF A
LOCAL HERO.

WHEN COMPLETE, MAR-VELL
KNEW *EVERYTHING*. HOW
TO DEFEAT DEATH. HOW TO
BUILD HEAVEN.

HOW TO COMMAND THE
POWER COSMIC
ITSELF THE OTHER
MISSING PIECE. ALL
THAT WAS NECESSARY.

HOW TO
BE *GOD.*

HOW TO *SAVE*
SOULS.



I WAS ONCE *CAPTAIN AMERICA*.
ONCE *STEVE ROGERS*. A MAN.
A SON.

A *LIVING*
LEGEND.

A REPRESENTATION
OF A *DREAM*.

A DREAM GREAT MEN
SHARED AND *DIED*
TO ESTABLISH.

A DREAM THAT
EBBED AND
FLOWED WITH THE
FREEDOMS
OF ITS PEOPLE.

A DREAM THAT
NEVER QUITE
TOOK *FULL*
FORM.

TO THINK THAT
I HAVE NOW
BECOME
THE DREAM.

THERE...

...*ULTIMATE*
FREEDOM.

EVERYTHING AMERICA
POINTED TO *COMES*
TOGETHER HERE.

PARADISE.







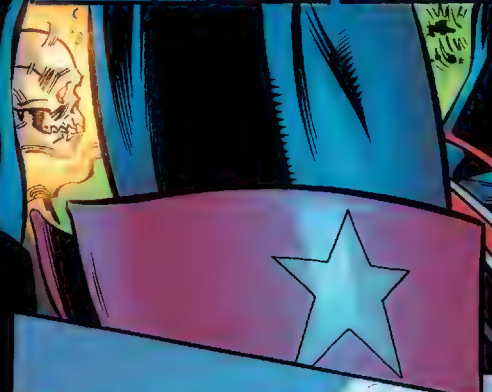
IT'S JUST SO
UNFAIR, STEVE.
IT
ALL STINKS
TO...



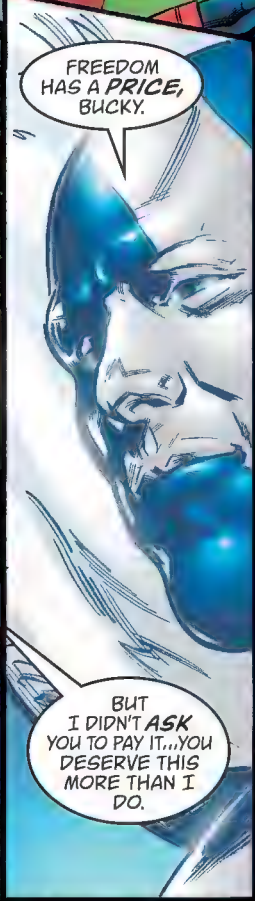
...HIGH HEAVEN?



I'M SORRY STEVE,
BUT IT **ROTS**. YOU OF **ALL**
PEOPLE SHOULD GET TO
ENTER HEAVEN. YOU DESERVE
IT. YOU'VE DONE **SO MUCH**.
SAVED **SO MANY**.



HOW CAN I
GO OFF TO GLORY
AND KNOW IT'S ONLY
POSSIBLE BECAUSE
YOU'RE HERE MAKING
SURE I'M **SAFE**? HOW
CAN **ANY** OF US HAVE
PEACE KNOWING
WHAT YOU'RE...



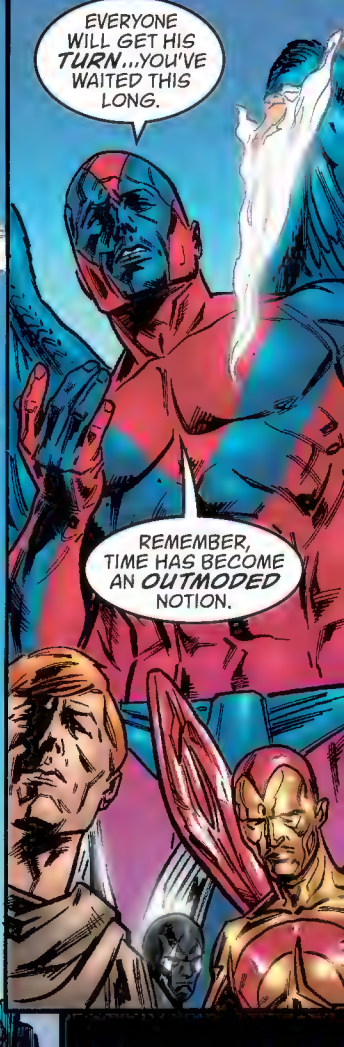
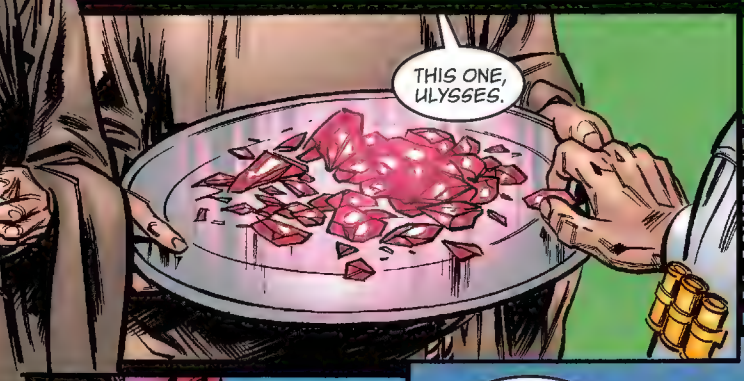
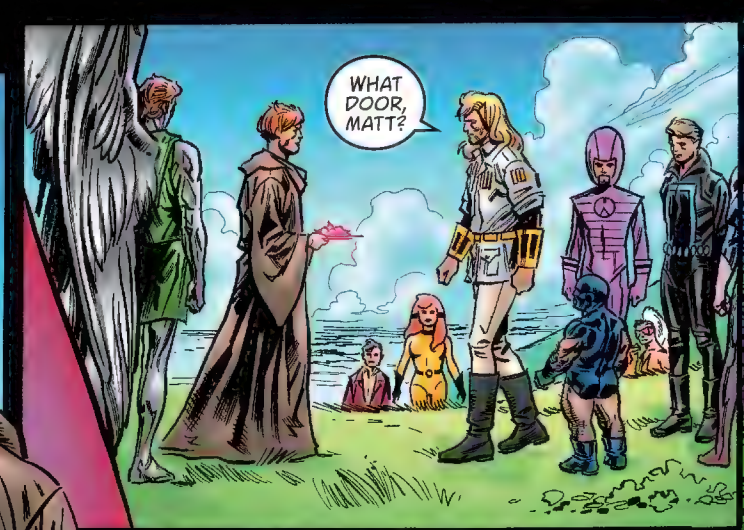
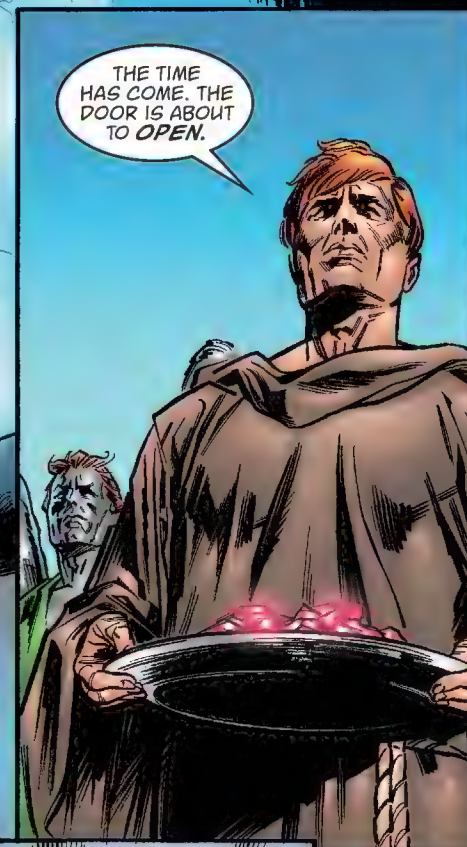
FREEDOM
HAS A **PRICE**,
BUCKY.

BUT
I DIDN'T **ASK**
YOU TO PAY IT...YOU
DESERVE THIS
MORE THAN I
DO.



AND THAT'S
WHY HE'S BEEN CHOSEN.
JIM. WHO **ELSE** WOULD YOU
TRUST TO PROTECT
HEAVEN?

BUT DON'T
WORRY KID, HE'S
NOT GOING TO DO
IT **ALONE**...





WHAT AM I EATING?

A SHARD OF THE COSMIC CUBE. YOUR PIECE OF THE NEW HEAVEN.



I DON'T CARE WHAT THEY SAY. IT'S NOT REAL.

SHUT YOUR MOUTH, JIGSAW. MURDOCK'S EARS WERE BAD ENOUGH BEFORE HE WALKED IN THE COMPANY OF ANGELS.



THE REALM OF THE DEAD THEN...HOW DO WE GET THERE?



IDIOT. WE ARE HERE ONLY BECAUSE WE HAVE ACCEPTED OUR DEATHS. USE YOUR WILL. DENY THIS STATE.



"BELIEVE THAT YOU ARE ALIVE AND WE WILL RETURN TO THAT PURGATORY OF THE DEAD."



I AM
SORRY, MY FRIENDS.
I KNOW YOU WOULD ALL
LIKE TO GO TO YOUR
REWARD...



...BUT THERE
ARE STILL MANY IN
DEATH'S REALM
THAT YOU NEED TO BRING
HERE. YOU NEED TO
HELP THEM UNDER-
STAND THAT THIS
PLACE EXISTS.



BUT YOU
ARE FAR MORE
THAN AMBASSADORS
TO THE DEAD. THERE
ARE FORCES THAT DE-
SIRE THE PARADISE
DESTROYED.



I DON'T UNDER-
STAND, MAR-VELL... BOTH
HERO AND VILLAIN ALIKE ARE
HERE. WHO WOULD WANT TO
SEE A PLACE LIKE THIS
HARMED?



YOU'RE
SUPPOSED
TO KNOW
EVERY-
THING.



WHERE
IS HEAVEN,
MAR-VELL?



"IT IS IN THE VERY **HEART** OF THE
NEGATIVE ZONE, IN THAT GEOGRAPHY
KNOWN AS THE **ANTI-MATTER SUN**."

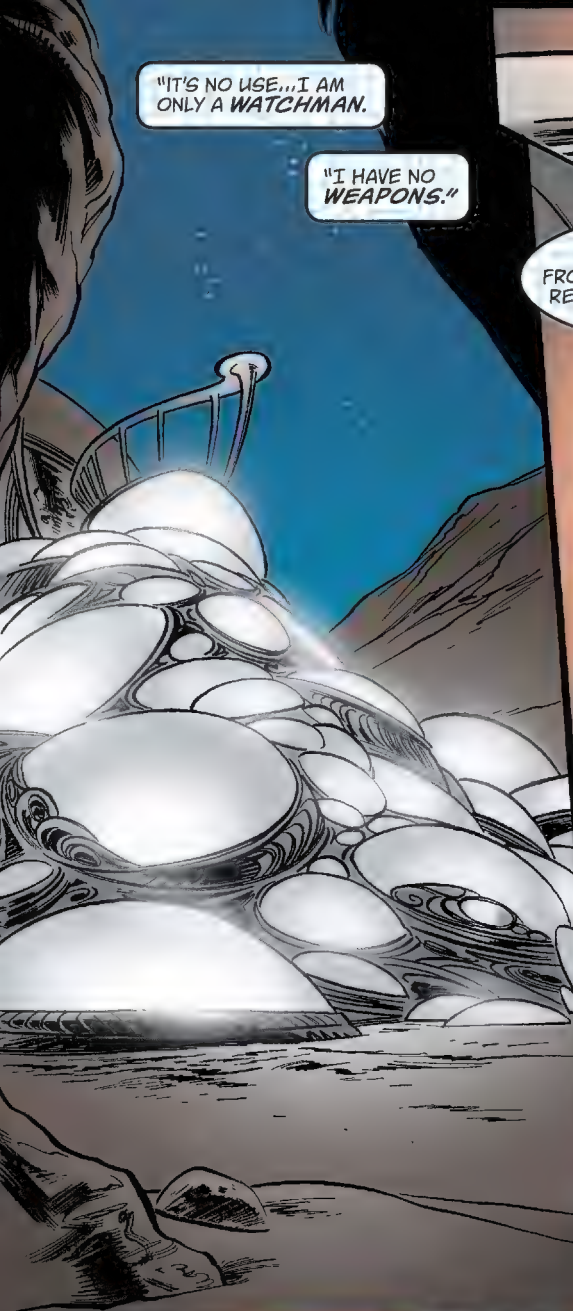
"THE NEW PARADISE WILL COME
UNDER ATTACK FROM THOSE
WORLDS INGESTED INTO IT AS
IT GROWS..."

"...AND THAT IS WHY YOU HAVE
BEEN **TRANSFIGURED**. IT
WAS NOT TO BUILD THIS PLACE
ALONE, BUT TO **DEFEND** IT
FOR THE ETERNITY TO COME..."

"...TO KEEP AWAY THOSE WHO
COME **VIOLENTLY** INTO THIS
BRAVE NEW WORLD...UNTIL
THEY CAN BE WON BY THEIR
OWN TRANSFIGURATION."

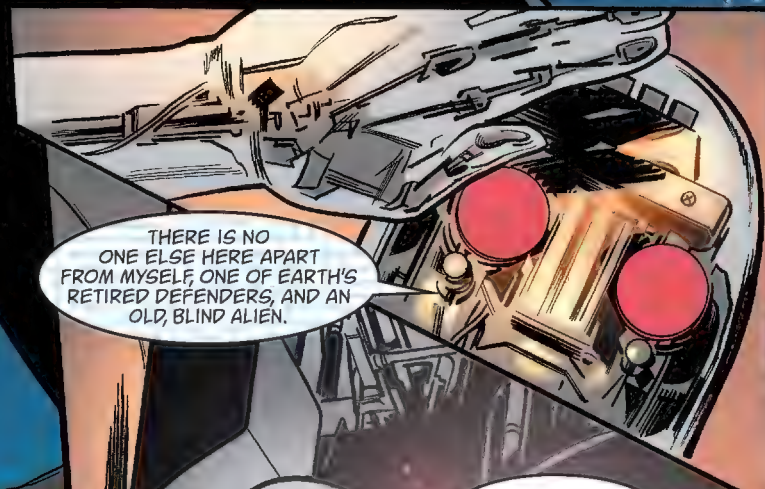
"YOU MUST DEFEND
THIS PLACE—IT IS
HUMANITY'S **LAST**
HOPE."

"NOW GO AND CONTINUE
DRAWING THOSE STILL
CAUGHT UNDER THE LEGACY
OF DEATH'S LIES INTO THE
PARADISE."



"IT'S NO USE... I AM
ONLY A **WATCHMAN**."

"I HAVE NO
WEAPONS."



THERE IS NO
ONE ELSE HERE APART
FROM MYSELF, ONE OF EARTH'S
RETIRED DEFENDERS, AND AN
OLD, BLIND ALIEN.

SHUT
YOUR **HOLE**, SEE-
THROUGHPIO.

I WANT TO
KNOW WHAT THE HELL
HAPPENED HERE. WHAT
HAPPENED TO MY
HOME?

A
FITTING
CHOICE OF
WORDS.



WHAT?

HELL.

BECAUSE
HELL HAPPENED
HERE.

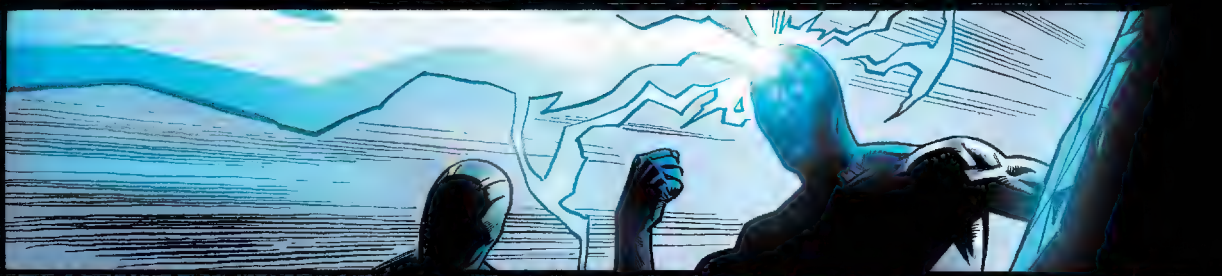


YOU HEAR
WHAT IT TOLD
THE MAJOR,
ROCKHEAD?

SHUT
UP.



THE HERALDS
HAVE BEEN DISPATCHED
TO EARTH, X-51? I HEARD
VOICES...



WAS
THAT WISE,
MAJOR?

SURE.



SHOW CAUTION, MAJOR.
LET US NOT CONFUSE OUR ENEMIES
WITH OUR ALLIES.

FAR AS I'M
CONCERNED, WE HAVE
NO ALLIES APART FROM
OURSELVES. TALK TO ME,
ROBOT. WHAT'S HAPPENED
TO THIS PLACE IN THE
LAST 30 YEARS?

THE PRISMATIC BEING OBVIOUSLY
HAS PARTIAL CONTROL OVER ME...
FORCING ME TO ACCESS KNOW-
LEDGE I WOULD OTHERWISE NOT
MAKE AVAILABLE TO THEM.



"THE KING OF THE INHUMANS, **BLACK BOLT**, MUTATED THE ENTIRE POPULATION OF EARTH TO PROTECT HIS WANDERING PEOPLE FROM BECOMING THE OBJECTS OF ANTI-MUTANT BIGOTRY AND VIOLENCE.

"WHEN HE DID, HE TRIGGERED A **DESTINY** FOR MANKIND THAT DATED BACK TO THE BEGINNING OF TIME, TO THE POINT OF HUMANITY'S **EARLIEST STEPS** UPON THE PLANET.



"IN AN EFFORT TO FREE HIS PEOPLE, BOLT **ENSLAVED** ALMOST HALF THE HEROES OF THE WORLD.

"THE DESTINY I MENTIONED INCLUDED A **CHILD** BEING RAISED, WHOSE MUTANT POWER ALLOWED HIM TO **CONTROL** EVERY OTHER MUTANT ON THE EARTH.

"THIS CHILD WAS KNOWN AS THE **SKULL**."



"THE SKULL'S PURPOSE WAS ONE OF **GENETIC** AND **GENERATIONAL** DESIGN. ONCE HUMANITY WAS MUTATED, THE SKULL'S POWER WAS TRIGGERED.

"THE SKULL'S POWER SERVED **TWO** PURPOSES. ONE, IT ALLOWED FOR THE NEW POWER-INEBRIATED MANKIND TO BE **CONTROLLED** AND KEPT FROM DESTROYING ITS WORLD IN THE PROCESS.

"TWO, IT SENT A **CALL** TO THE BEINGS WHO FIRST INTENDED THE MUTATION OF MANKIND FOR THE SAKE OF THEIR OWN PROCREATION."

"BUT WHY **PROTECT** THE PLANET? WHAT HAS THIS TO DO WITH THEIR OWN PROCREATION?"

"THE PLANET IS AN **EGG**. HUMANITY WAS MUTATED TO PROTECT THE EARTH...TO ACT AS **GUARDIANS** FROM OUTSIDE INVASION. ANTIBODIES FROM INTER-GALACTIC INFECTION.

"THAT'S WHY **SUPER HEROES** EXIST. THAT'S THE ONLY REASON.

"WE TOPPLED OUR GODS AND ABORTED THEIR ATTEMPT TO DESTROY ALL LIFE ON THE PLANET FOR THE SAKE OF THAT WHICH LIVED **WITHIN** IT."

"I SHOULD TELL YOU THAT THERE WAS A **SUBSTANCE** BROUGHT TO EARTH MANY YEARS AGO IN THE FORM OF A METEOR SHOWER THAT FACILITATED THE GROWTH OF THE CELESTIAL AT THE EARTH'S CORE. THIS SUBSTANCE WAS CALLED **VIBRANIUM**.

"WHEN THE CELESTIAL EMBRYO WAS DESTROYED, THE VIBRANIUM THAT HAD BECOME ALMOST **FOUNDATIONAL** TO THE EARTH WAS DESTROYED WITH IT, SOWING THE SEEDS OF **ECOLOGICAL ARMAGEDDON**.

"WITHOUT THE **SKULL** TO CONTROL A MUTATED MANKIND, MAN WENT TO WAR WITH MAN... WHILE FAR BELOW HIM, THE WORLD ITSELF WAS IN THE THROES OF ITS OWN **MUTINY**.

"ON THE BRINK OF DESTRUCTION, THE EARTH WAS SAVED BY A BEING CAPABLE OF EXPANDING HIS BEING AND **BECOMING VIBRANIUM ITSELF**... RESTORING ORDER AND BALANCE TO OUR PLANET."

IF "ORDER" IS WHAT YOU CALL AN ENTIRE CIVILIZATION AT **WAR** WITH ITSELF... ALL BECAUSE A TENDENCY FOR HATRED AND VIOLENCE WAS GENETICALLY LACED INTO ITS **VERY BEING**.

THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED. IT'S NOT MUCH OF A **HOME COMING** FOR YOU. AND AS YOU CAN SEE, I'M NOT SURPRISED AT YOUR AGGRESSION.

IN FACT, I AM **BORED** WITH IT.

HOW **DARE** YOU JUDGE US.

THERE IS NO FUTURE WITHOUT US.

WHEN I WAS HERE, **NEW YORK** WAS THE CENTERPIECE OF THE WORLD. THAT'S AS GOOD A PLACE TO START AS **ANY**. TELL ME ABOUT THE BIG APPLE...

"BIG ADAM'S APPLE IS
MORE LIKE IT. LOOK AT
THE SCREEN."

"MY GOD...THAT'S
NEW YORK? WHAT
YEAR IS THIS?"



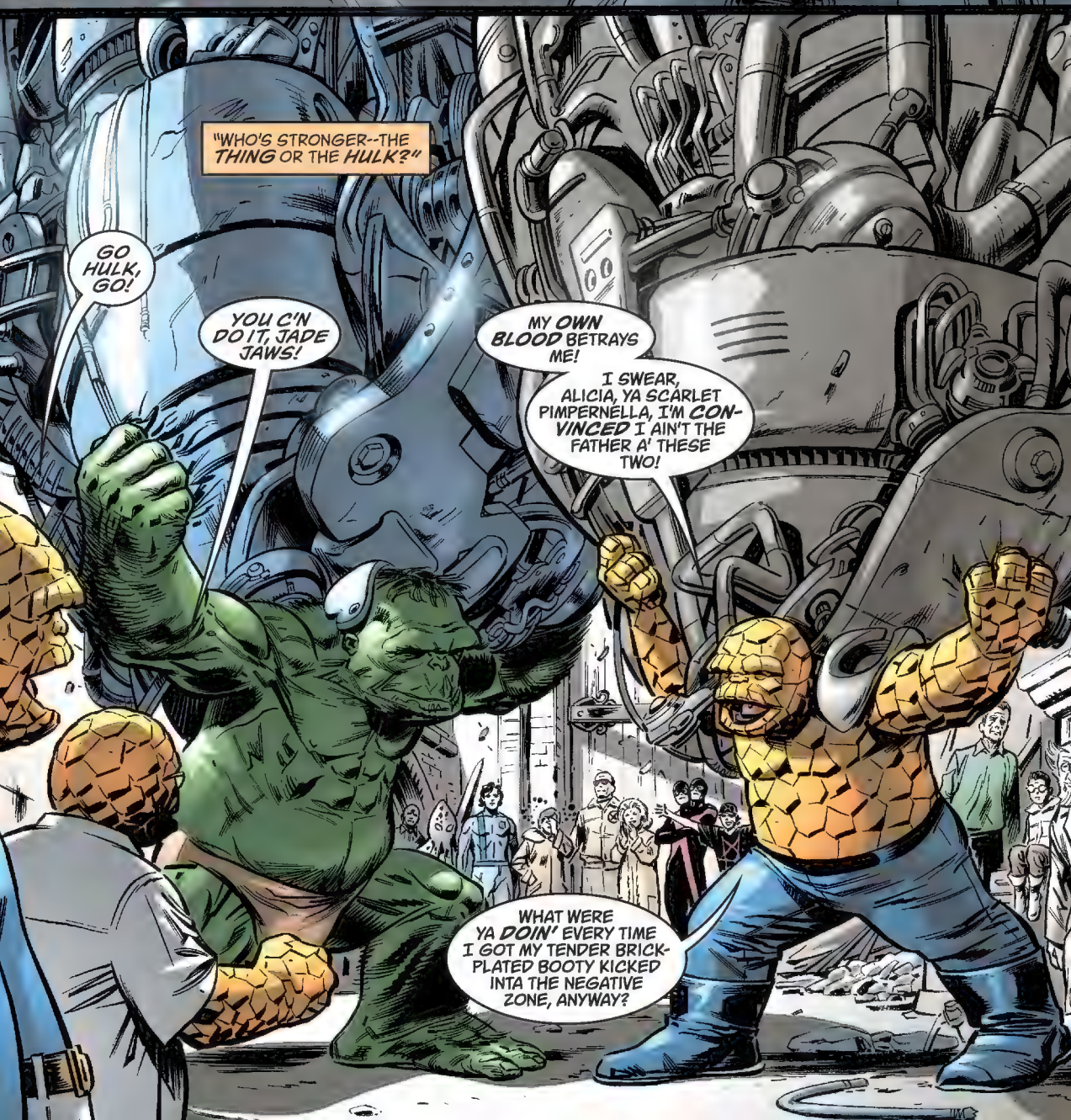


"SCOTT?"

"SCOTT, CAN YOU
HEAR ME?"

"JEAN? I'M KIND OF *BUSY* DISCOVERING
THE ANSWER TO A QUESTION THAT HAS
PLAGUED HUMANITY SINCE THE DAWN OF
SUPER HEROES..."

"DO TELL."



"WHO'S STRONGER--THE
THING OR THE HULK?"

GO
HULK,
GO!

YOU C'N
DO IT, JADE
JAWS!

MY OWN
BLOOD BETRAYS
ME!

I SWEAR,
ALICIA, YA SCARLET
PIMPERNELLA, I'M *CON-*
VINCED I AIN'T THE
FATHER A' THESE
TWO!

WHAT WERE
YA *DOIN'* EVERY TIME
I GOT MY TENDER BRICK-
PLATED BOOTY KICKED
INTO THE NEGATIVE
ZONE, ANYWAY?

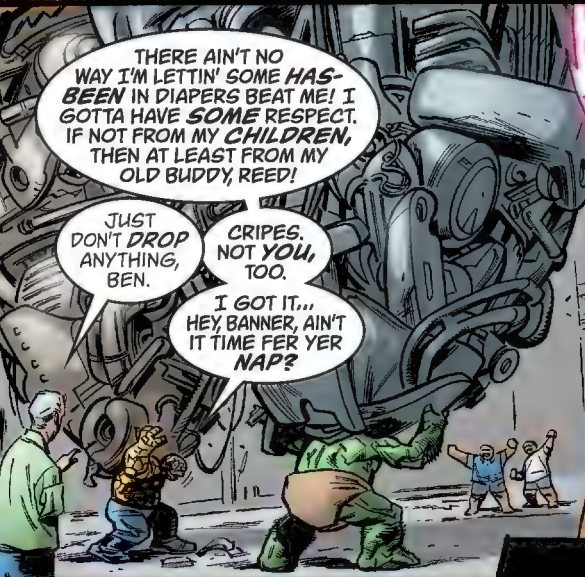


"I DON'T THINK I COULD **TAKE** ONE MORE REVELATION, SCOTT. I NEED TO TALK TO YOU."

"THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE COSMIC CUBE HAS BEGUN. THE PARADISE'S EXPANSION IS **IMMINENT**."

"THE TRUTH IS, I HAVE **DOUBTS** ABOUT WHAT IS HAPPENING HERE... SOMETHING DOESN'T SEEM **RIGHT**."

"I NEED TO SEE WHAT **YOU'VE** SEEN, SCOTT. I NEED YOU TO OPEN YOUR MIND **COMPLETELY** TO ME... BEYOND THE PSYCHIC RAPPORT THAT STILL EXISTS BETWEEN THE NEW PARADISE AND THE REALM OF THE LIVING."



THERE AIN'T NO WAY I'M LETTIN' **SOME HAS-BEEN** IN DIAPERS BEAT ME! I GOTTA HAVE **SOME** RESPECT, IF NOT FROM MY **CHILDREN**, THEN AT LEAST FROM MY OLD BUDDY, REED!

JUST DON'T **DROP** ANYTHING, BEN.

CRIPES. NOT **YOU**, TOO.

I GOT IT... HEY, BANNER, AIN'T IT TIME FER YER **NAP?**

"CAN YOU FEEL HOW MUCH I **MISS** YOU, SCOTT?"

"YOU WERE **RIGHT**, JEAN... WE'LL ALWAYS BE TOGETHER. NOT EVEN **DEATH** CAN STOP OUR LOVE."



"OF COURSE NOT, DARLING... BECAUSE THERE **IS** NO DEATH ANYMORE."



"BUT DEATH'S DEATH IS THE **PROBLEM**, JEAN. WHEN MAR-VELL KILLED DEATH...THAT'S WHAT YOU SAID HE DID, RIGHT?"



LOOK, REED, THIS IS A **SUPERNATURAL PROBLEM**, MUCH AS I HATE TO ADMIT IT. AND IT WILL REQUIRE A **SUPER-NATURAL SOLUTION**.

YOU'VE FOUND RELIGION, MCCOY?

I WOULDN'T CALL IT RELIGION, BRUCE...IT'S **LOGIC**, THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF SCIENCE...



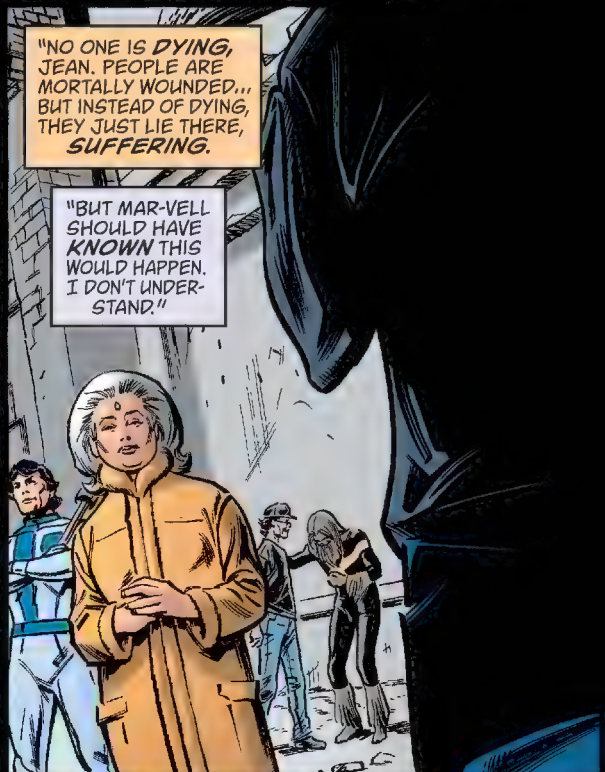
...A FORCE FROM OUTSIDE OUR REALM HAS SOMEHOW CEASED TO EXIST, AND NOW THAT FORCE IS **SORELY MISSED**.

IF NOT SUPERNATURAL, THEN "**OTHER-NATURAL**," IF YOU PREFER...THIS OTHER NATURE IS WHERE WE WILL FIND A SOLUTION.

"NO ONE IS **DYING**, JEAN. PEOPLE ARE MORTALLY WOUNDED... BUT INSTEAD OF DYING, THEY JUST LIE THERE, **SUFFERING**."

"BUT MAR-VELL SHOULD HAVE **KNOWN** THIS WOULD HAPPEN. I DON'T UNDERSTAND."

"WHAT IS THE PROBLEM, SCOTT?"



"WITH *DEATH* NOW DEAD, ALL THOSE WHO WOULD HAVE NORMALLY DIED DUE TO WOUNDS AND HAVING THEIR BODIES BROKEN, WRITHE IN *PAIN*."

"GIANT *HOSPITALS* HAVE BEEN BUILT OUT OF THE REMAINS OF THE HUMAN TORCHES TO HOUSE THESE POOR, HOPELESS PEOPLE."

"THERE ARE CURRENTLY *FIFTY* THROUGHOUT THE WORLD."

"MAR-VELL MAY HAVE SAVED EVERYONE IN *DEATH'S* REALM, JEAN...BUT HE DAMNED US TO KEEP ON *LIVING*."

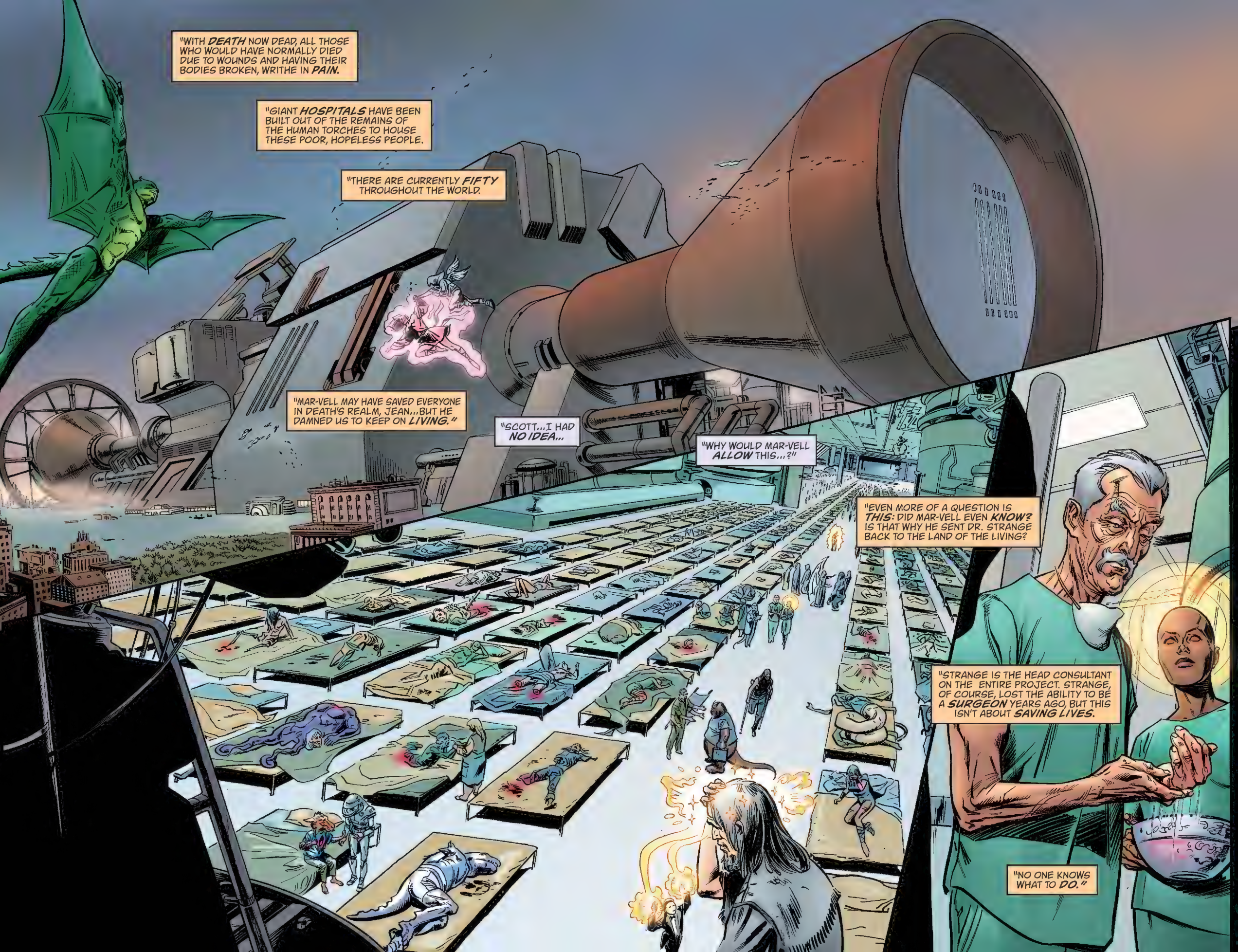
"SCOTT...I HAD NO IDEA..."

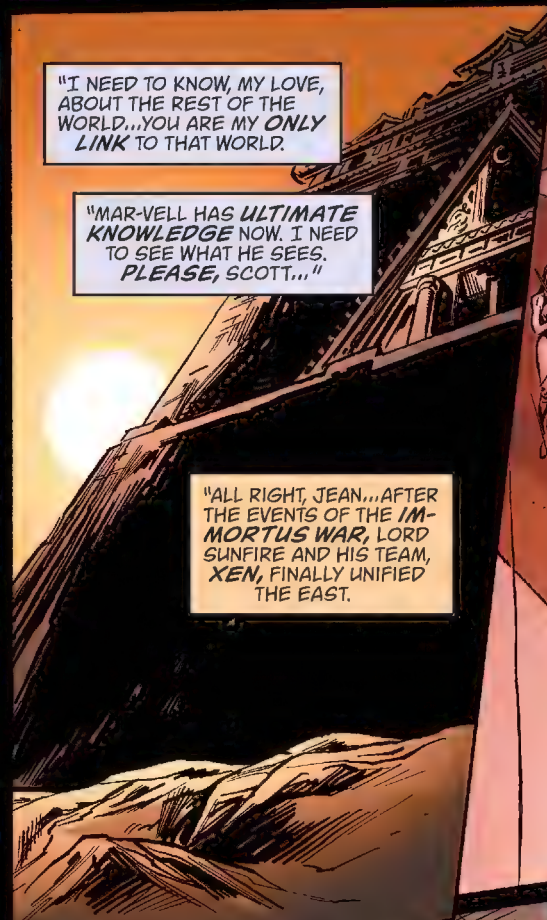
"WHY WOULD MAR-VELL ALLOW THIS...?"

"EVEN MORE OF A QUESTION IS *THIS*: DID MAR-VELL EVEN *KNOW*? IS THAT WHY HE SENT DR. STRANGE BACK TO THE LAND OF THE LIVING?"

"STRANGE IS THE HEAD CONSULTANT ON THE ENTIRE PROJECT. STRANGE, OF COURSE, LOST THE ABILITY TO BE A *SURGEON* YEARS AGO, BUT THIS ISN'T ABOUT *SAVING LIVES*."

"NO ONE KNOWS WHAT TO *DO*."

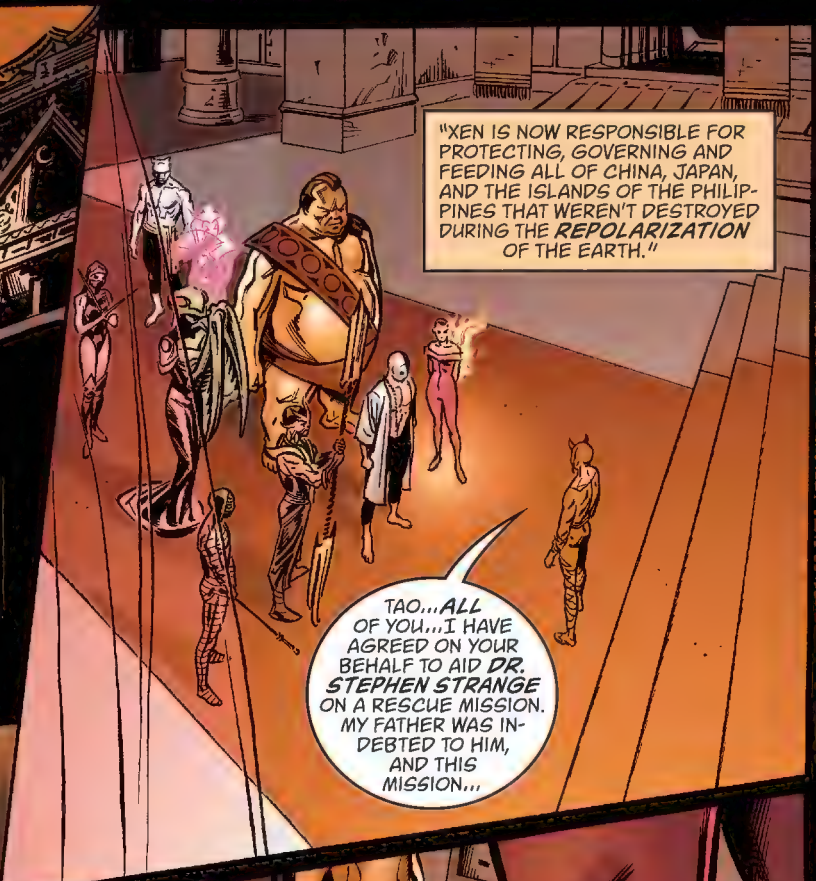




"I NEED TO KNOW, MY LOVE,
ABOUT THE REST OF THE
WORLD...YOU ARE MY **ONLY**
LINK TO THAT WORLD.

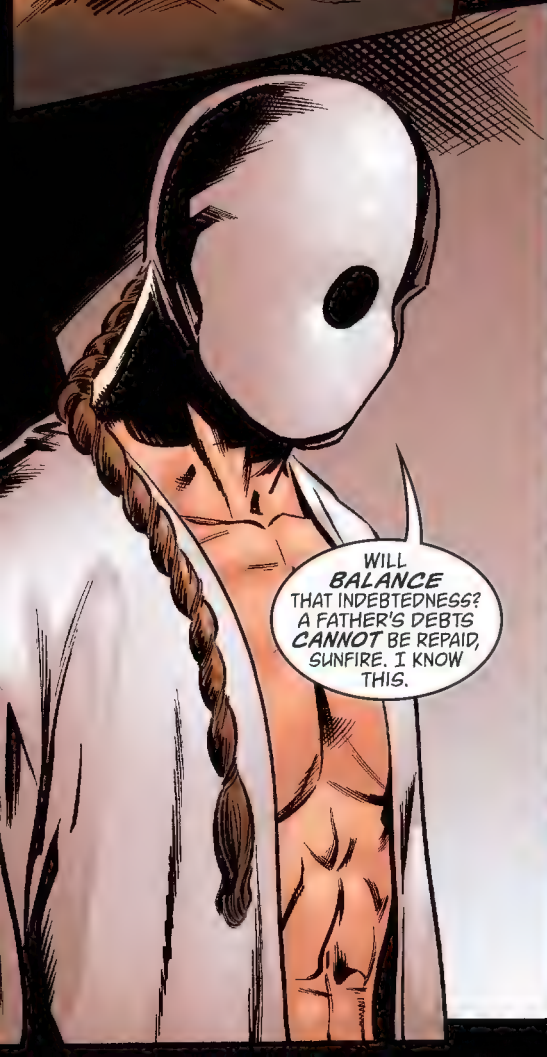
"MAR-VELL HAS **ULTIMATE**
KNOWLEDGE NOW. I NEED
TO SEE WHAT HE SEES.
PLEASE, SCOTT..."

"ALL RIGHT, JEAN...AFTER
THE EVENTS OF THE **IM-**
MORTUS WAR, LORD
SUNFIRE AND HIS TEAM,
XEN, FINALLY UNIFIED
THE EAST.



"XEN IS NOW RESPONSIBLE FOR
PROTECTING, GOVERNING AND
FEEDING ALL OF CHINA, JAPAN,
AND THE ISLANDS OF THE PHILIP-
PINES THAT WEREN'T DESTROYED
DURING THE **REPOLARIZATION**
OF THE EARTH."

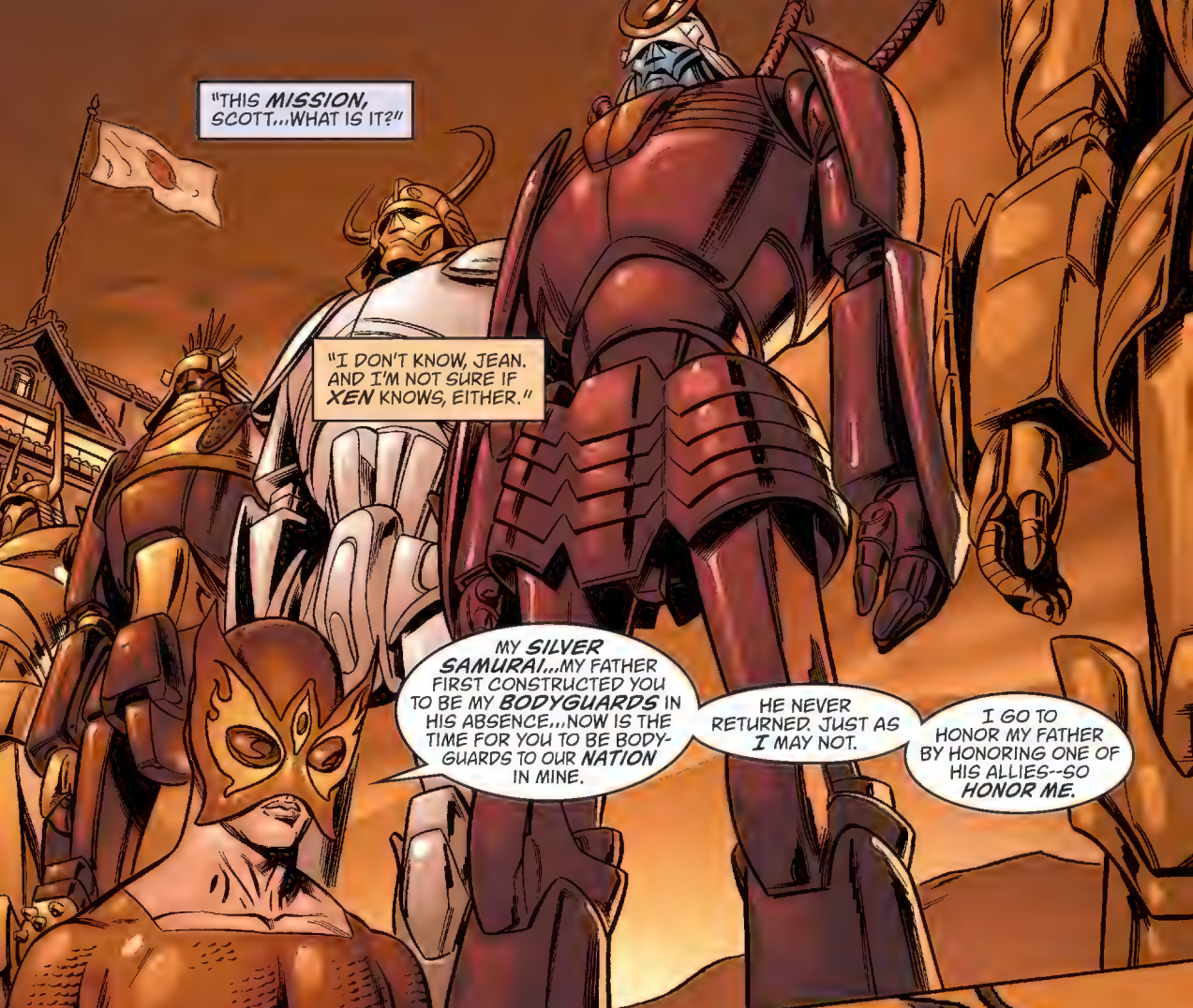
TAO...**ALL**
OF YOU...I HAVE
AGREED ON YOUR
BEHALF TO AID **DR.**
STEPHEN STRANGE
ON A RESCUE MISSION.
MY FATHER WAS IN-
DEBTED TO HIM,
AND THIS
MISSION...



YES, TAO.
I KNOW. BUT
THERE IS **PEACE**
IN THE WORLD NOW.
AND THIS MISSION
MAY HELP **SUSTAIN**
IT. AND THAT, VERY
MUCH, IS **OUR**
DUTY.

I NEED
SOME TIME, NOW,
TO SPEAK TO THOSE
WHO WILL PROTECT
MY HOME IN OUR
ABSENCE.

WILL
BALANCE
THAT INDEBTEDNESS?
A FATHER'S DEBTS
CANNOT BE REPAID,
SUNFIRE. I KNOW
THIS.



"THIS MISSION,
SCOTT...WHAT IS IT?"

"I DON'T KNOW, JEAN.
AND I'M NOT SURE IF
XEN KNOWS, EITHER."

MY **SILVER
SAMURAI**...MY FATHER
FIRST CONSTRUCTED YOU
TO BE MY **BODYGUARDS** IN
HIS ABSENCE...NOW IS THE
TIME FOR YOU TO BE BODY-
GUARDS TO OUR **NATION**
IN MINE.

HE NEVER
RETURNED. JUST AS
I MAY NOT.

I GO TO
HONOR MY FATHER
BY HONORING ONE OF
HIS ALLIES--SO
HONOR ME.

WHERE
I AM GOING,
YOU **CANNOT**
COME.

SOME
SAY IT **CANNOT**
EXIST.

WE HAVE MANY
ENEMIES THAT WILL SEEK
TO BRING **SHAME** TO OUR FAMILY
AND **ENSLAVE** YOU. MY FATHER
CANNOT BE **DISHONORED**
IN THIS WAY.

I KNOW I DO
NOT HAVE TO MENTION
CEREMONIAL **DECON-
STRUCTION** SHOULD
I NOT RETURN.

"IN ENGLAND, AN UPCOMING MARRIAGE CEREMONY BETWEEN **KING BRITAIN** AND **MEDUSA** IS THE TALK OF THE WORLD.

"THE HOPE IS THAT THE MARRIAGE OF THE INHUMAN QUEEN AND THE KING OF ENGLAND WILL CREATE A SORT OF **WORLDWIDE AUTHORITY**, AN ULTIMATE POWER FOR THE POPULATION TO RALLY UNDER."

MEGGAN...I DIDN'T THINK THIS DECISION WOULD EVER COME. I WILL **WED** AGAIN, AND TO DO SO, WILL BE TO **DENY** YOU.

I WANTED TO THANK YOU, BRIAN, FOR BEING SUCH A GOOD FATH--SUCH A GOOD **PRO-TECTOR** OF MY SON...

...I FORGET HOW MUCH MEGGAN MEANT TO YOU... I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE MY **HUSBAND** IS GONE.



THAT'S THE WAY IT IS WITH **LOSS**... YOU ALWAYS THINK YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO GOES THROUGH IT.

YOU ARE A MAN OF **TREMENDOUS HONOR**, BRIAN.

IT IS A YOKE I DO NOT WISH. AS IS MY STEWARDSHIP OF **EXCALIBUR**, THE SWORD OF ARTHUR, THE SWORD FORGED IN HEAVEN.

I STILL DO NOT KNOW WHY MAR-VELL LEFT IT HERE, WITH **ME**.

PERHAPS HE KNOWS WHAT I SEE, KING BRIAN.

OR PERHAPS EVEN **MAR-VELL** IS FALLIBLE.

YOU STILL PLAN TO GO INTO SPACE, KAREN?

YES, BLACK KNIGHT. WHEN I WAS IN THE SAVAGE LAND, I MET **CABLE**, THE X-MAN.

HE'S A PRISONER WHO CAN ONLY BE FREED BY **SERIS**, ONE OF THE ETERNALS WHO WAS TRAPPED IN VIBRANIUM.

YOUR MOTHER KNOWS WHERE THE ETERNALS WERE ENCASED. I MADE A **PROMISE** TO CABLE THAT I WOULD USE MY ABILITIES TO CONTROL VIBRANIUM TO FIND A WAY TO **FREE** HIM.

WHEN WILL YOU GO?

AFTER KING BRIAN AND YOUR MOTHER'S WEDDING.

YOU SHOULD NOT GO ALONE, KAREN...

...THE **IRON AVENGERS** WILL JOIN YOU ON YOUR MISSION.

"SCOTT...THE WAR IS OVER, DEATH IS DEAD... BUT I'M AFRAID WE MAY HAVE WON SOMETHING WE SHOULDN'T **EVER** HAVE DARED. THERE'S PEACE...BUT AT WHAT **COST**?"

"I KNOW, JEAN...BUT IT CAN'T **ALL** BE WRONG. I CAN'T HELP THINKING THAT IF THERE WERE NO DEATH, I WOULD HAVE NEVER **LOST** YOU THAT DAY ON THE MOON."

"I MET A MAN HERE NAMED **CRUSHER, SCOTT**. HE TOLD ME HOW HE **SAVED THE WORLD**. HOW HE **REPOLARIZED** THE PLANET. HE TOLD ME WHAT HE DID TO **NEW YORK CITY**."

"WHAT **DIDN'T** HE TELL ME?"

"NEW YORK IS A CITY OF PEOPLE WHO **THRIVE** IN ADVERSITY."

"THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CITY INTO THE CULTURAL CAPITAL OF THE WORLD IS DUE LARGELY TO THE EFFORTS OF **THE LAW**."

I'D LIKE TO INTRODUCE YOU, PETER AND MAY, TO **LIEUTENANT SKULLY**. HE'S GOT WHAT IT TAKES.

KNOWING YOU, CAGE, THAT MEANS A **CRIMINAL RECORD**.

CUT IT OUT, DAD. HE'S **CUTE**.

WHAT HE IS, IS OLDER THAN **ME**, MAY.



"JEAN? MEPHISTO BRAINWASHED **NIGHTCRAWLER** AND SENT HIM BACK THROUGH TIME TO FIGHT US AS THE VILLAIN, **BELASCO**."

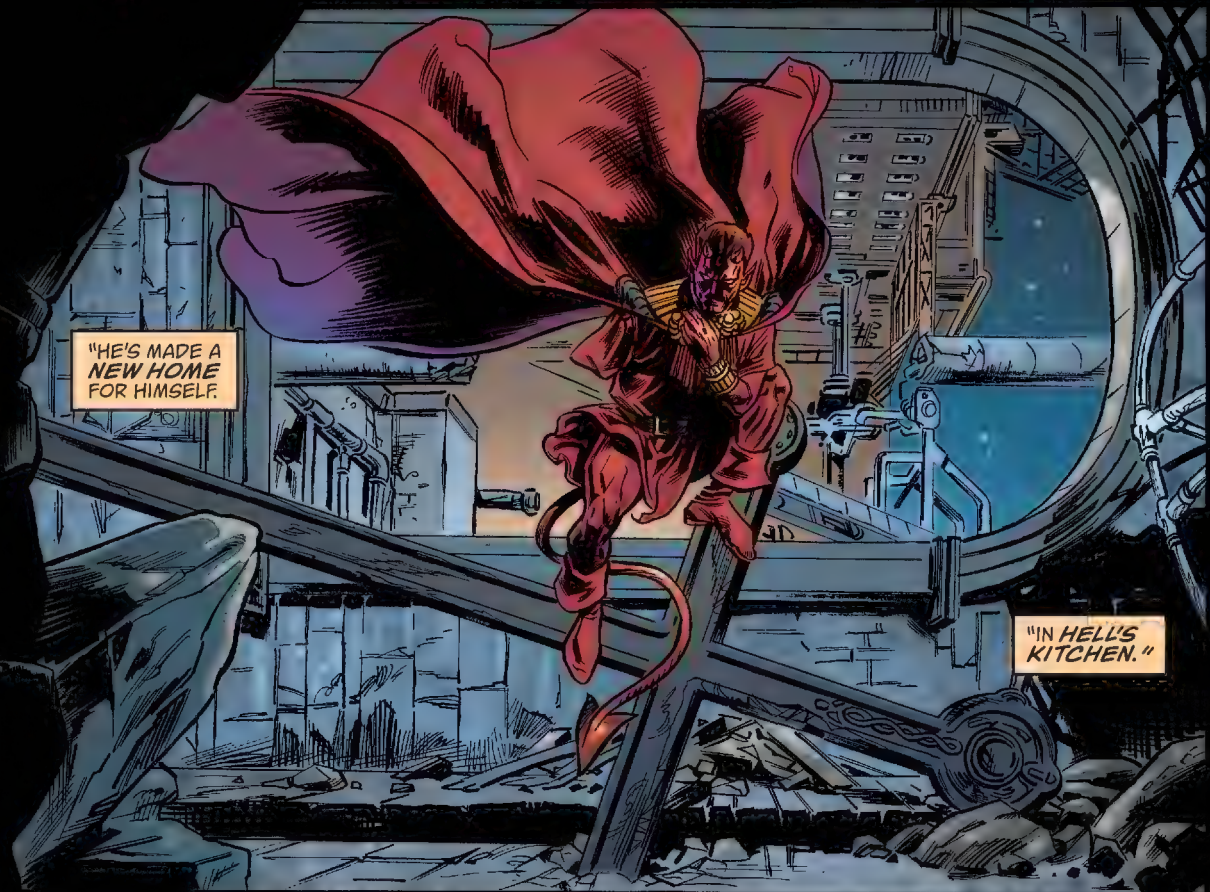
"BUT THINGS HAVE **CHANGED** IN THE PAST YEAR. IT REALLY IS AMAZING."

"WHERE IS KURT NOW?"



"MAR-VELL HELPED KURT SEE THE TRUTH AND TAKE HOLD OF WHO HE IS, NOT WHO HE WAS MADE TO **BELIEVE** HE WAS."

"YOU KNOW KURT...HE'S ALWAYS GOT TO BE THE **HERO** NO MATTER WHERE HE IS. RIGHT NOW HE'S THE NEW **SWASHBUCKLER** OF A NEIGHBORHOOD THAT LOST THEIR YEARS AGO."



"HE'S MADE A **NEW HOME** FOR HIMSELF."

"IN **HELL'S KITCHEN**."

"I WISH THERE WAS A WAY TO LET HIM KNOW THAT WE WERE ALL **MANIPULATED** ONE WAY OR ANOTHER..."

"...THAT WE UNDERSTAND... THAT IT'S **OKAY**."

"HE **KNOWS**, JEAN. KURT KNOWS."

"AND YOU'RE RIGHT. WE'VE ALL BEEN MANIPULATED, FOR **GOOD AND EVIL**. PERHAPS NONE MORE SO THAN **THOR** AND HIS KINSMEN."

SO, LOKI, YOU **WEREN'T** LYING ABOUT YOUR FELLOW ASGARDIANS. HOW **UNLIKE** YOU.

THE TRUTH REVEALS THE **LIES** AND WHO **SPOKE** THEM, SURTER.

MY FATHER... NO...THE PERSON **MASQUERADING** AS ODIN HAS IMPRISONED US BY HIS MYTH AND LORE.

HELP US **FREE** THOSE HE IMPRISONED. HELP US TAKE **VENGEANCE**.

WHO IS TO SAY ODIN WON'T MANIPULATE US **AGAIN**, LITTLE GOD?

HE BUILT ASGARD WITH HIS **LIES**. AND THE SAME TOOLS THAT **BUILD** CAN BE USED TO **TEAR DOWN**!

NOW TELL ME, SURTER...HAVE YOU EVER FANCIED YOURSELF AS BECOMING THE **MIDGARD SERPENT**?



"SCOTT, I HAVE TO GO...
BUT I WANT YOU TO KNOW
HOW MUCH I **LOVE** YOU.
WE'LL SPEAK AGAIN SOON,
MY DEAR.

"WE NEED TO FIND MORE
SOULS TO BRING INTO
PARADISE.

"I'D ASK YOU TO **PRAY**
FOR ME, SCOTT...FOR
THE DECISIONS I HAVE
TO MAKE, BUT I WOULDN'T
KNOW **WHO** TO TELL YOU
TO PRAY TO."



I'VE COME BACK, MOTHER...
COME BACK, FATHER. *PARA-
DISE* AWAITS YOU.

A *BETTER LIFE*. THE REASON
YOU CAME TO AMERICA IN THE
FIRST PLACE. YOU JUST NEED
TO *BELIEVE*.



YOU ARE THE *REASON* I'M
HERE. THERE'S *ROOM* FOR
YOU THERE...



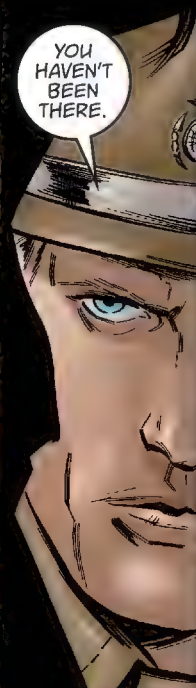
IT'S ALL
A *LIE*, ROGERS.
I *KNOW* WHO
YOU ARE.



FROM ONE
LIE TO *ANOTHER*.
THAT'S *ALL* YOU'RE
OFFERING.



YOU
HAVEN'T
BEEN
THERE.

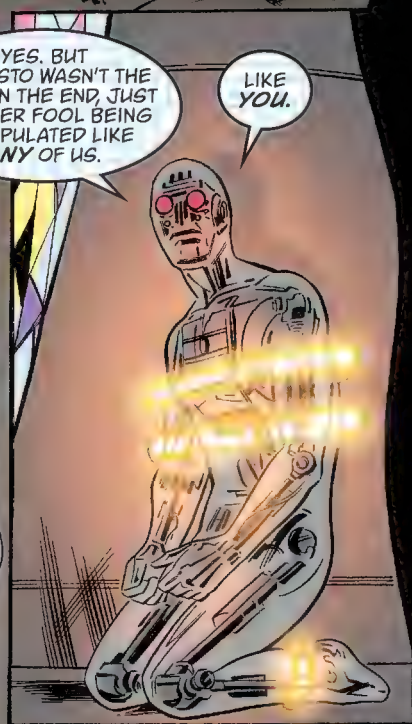
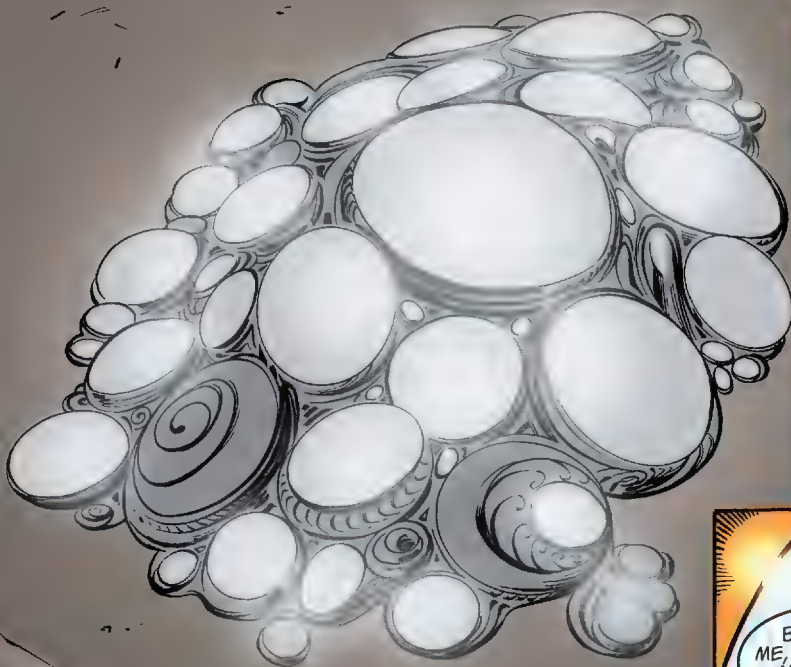




"SO WHAT YOU'RE SAYING IS THAT MULTIPLE REALITIES EXIST AS A RESULT OF **MEPHISTO** TRYING TO ESCAPE DIVINE JUDGMENT AT THE END OF TIME?"

YES. BUT MEPHISTO WASN'T THE DEVIL IN THE END, JUST ANOTHER FOOL BEING MANIPULATED LIKE ANY OF US.

LIKE YOU.



BELIEVE ME, THIS ISN'T NECESSARY.

I'M A HERO, AS WELL... I KNOW SPIDER-MAN.

I'M FRIENDS WITH REED RICHARDS WHO KNOWS JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING ON EARTH.

I'VE BEEN ONE OF THE AVENGERS, EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES...

EARTH'S MIGHTIEST "WHAT?" EARTH'S, YOU SAY? WHAT MAKES YOU THINK "EARTH'S" HEROES WOULD MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE TO US?



**WE'RE THE
GUARDIANS OF THE
ENTIRE FREAKIN'
GALAXY.**



MARVEL
COMICS

MARVEL

1

PARADISE



KRUEGER
KRAITHWITTE
KEINFOLD

www.marvel.com

"Why have you come back so far? Why again?"

"I want to know what happened."

"What happened when?"

"Do you want to know of the mutation of mankind, of the silent King who transformed every man, woman and child on the planet into an Inhuman?"

"Or do you want to know about the war that was fought over who the population of Earth will be — mutant or human?"

"Or do you want to know the origins of alternate realities and why they diverge? You come from one, after all, Major Astro."

"We want to know *everything*, robot."

"How did you find out about what's happened to Earth now? You live in the 31st Century."

"But I live *here*, as well... don't I, X-51?"

"I'm afraid you don't, Major. Not anymore. Vance Astro is dead."

PARADISE X

I S S U E 1

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JOE QUESADA
editor in chief

BILL JEMAS
president

"YOU KNOW THAT **VANCE ASTRO**, THE AVENGER KNOWN AS **JUSTICE**, IS **DEAD** ALREADY, DON'T YOU? AND IT MAY HAVE BEEN **YOUR FAULT**. WHAT IS YOUR **GAME**, MAJOR ASTRO?"

"YOU TELL ME, ROBOT."

"WHEN YOU **GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY** FIRST CAME TO EARTH, YOU MET YOURSELF AND TOLD YOUNG VANCE OF THE DARK FUTURE YOU CAME FROM... A FUTURE WHERE MANKIND HAD BEEN ENSLAVED BY AN ALIEN RACE KNOWN AS THE **BADOON**."

"EVENTUALLY **DOCTOR STRANGE** WIPED YOUNG VANCE'S MIND OF YOUR MEETING AND OF HIS POSSIBLE DESTINY. BUT HE DIDN'T ERASE THE **KNOWLEDGE** OF YOUR ALTERNATE SELF."

"NOR DID HE AFFECT THE **DISSATISFACTION** OF YOUR LIFE AS A MEMBER OF THE **GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY**."

"AND WHILE THE **DEFENDERS** TRAVELED TO YOUR FUTURE THROUGH **DOCTOR STRANGE'S** MAGICS AND HELPED YOU GAIN A DECISIVE VICTORY OVER THE **BADOON**, YOU **NEVER FORGOT** YOUR MEETING WITH YOURSELF."

"YOU NEVER FORGOT EVERYTHING YOU **LOST** ON EARTH WHEN YOUR MISSION IN SPACE WENT AWRY AND YOUR BODY WAS PLUNGED INTO **SUSPENDED ANIMATION**."

"YOU AWOKE INTO A **WAR**...AND A SITUATION YOU WOULD DO **ANYTHING** TO ESCAPE."

"EVEN IF THAT MEANT **DYING** A LITTLE SO YOU COULD CONTINUE LIVING ON EARTH."

"WHAT'S THE ROBOT SAYING, MAJOR?"

"NOTHING, CHARLIE. SHUT UP."

"AND WHEN THE SUPERCOMPUTER **KORVAC** TRAVELED BACK IN TIME TO KILL YOU AT AN EARLIER AGE, YOU MADE CERTAIN HE DIDN'T. BUT THAT WASN'T ENOUGH."

"YOU **COULD** HAVE RETURNED TO YOUR NEWLY ADOPTED ERA AT THAT TIME..."

"...BUT YOU **DIDN'T**."

"YOU WANTED TO **LEAVE** SOMETHING OF YOURSELF TO REMEMBER THIS WORLD BY."

"EVERYONE THOUGHT THAT THIS MEETING--THE **SECOND**, THOUGH YOUNG VANCE DIDN'T KNOW IT--AWAKENED THE **PSYCHIC ABILITIES** WITHIN HIM."

"BUT INSTEAD, YOU PASSED ON PART OF YOUR **MENTAL PSI POWER** TO HIM."

"YOU CREATED A **PSYCHIC RAPPORT** FOR YOURSELF AND LEFT EVERYONE ON EARTH TO BELIEVE ITS ORIGINS WERE FROM WITHIN **VANCE HIMSELF**."



"BUT IT WASN'T VANCE WHO HAD THE PSI ABILITY, IT WAS **YOU**. THAT'S WHY HE WAS NEVER AS **POWERFUL** AS YOU, MAJOR ASTRO.

"YOU **USED** HIM AND **MANIPULATED** YOURSELF BY MAKING YOURSELF A HERO, AS LEADER OF THE NEW WARRIORS AND LATER, A MEMBER OF THE AVENGERS.

"PERHAPS THIS IN ITSELF WAS THE REASON VANCE CHOSE TO CALL HIMSELF **JUSTICE**.



"BECAUSE THIS WAS THE VERY NOTION THAT HAD BEEN **DENIED** HIM."

"HOW DID I DIE?"

"THERE WAS A *BOY*...THE SON OF THE HERO COMET MAN, WHO HAD A *TERRIBLE POWER* TRIGGERED WITHIN HIM.

"THIS BOY WOULD LATER BE KNOWN AS *THE SKULL*."

"WHEN THE POWER TO CONTROL THE *MOTOR CONTROLS* OF EVERY BEING ON THE PLANET WAS BORN WITHIN HIM, EVERY PSYCHIC ON EARTH WAS *INSTANTLY* OVERWHELMED AND DIED IN CARDIAC ARREST."

"YOU CAN'T BLAME *ME* FOR THAT."

"THE POWER YOU LEFT WITH VANCE KEPT HIS OWN UNMUTATED SEED *DORMANT*, MAJOR. THERE ARE NO GUARANTEES HE WOULD HAVE EVEN *HAD* PSYCHIC ABILITIES."

"YOU AS GOOD AS COMMITTED *SUICIDE*, MAJOR. AND FOR THAT, JUSTICE IS *DEAD* NOW."

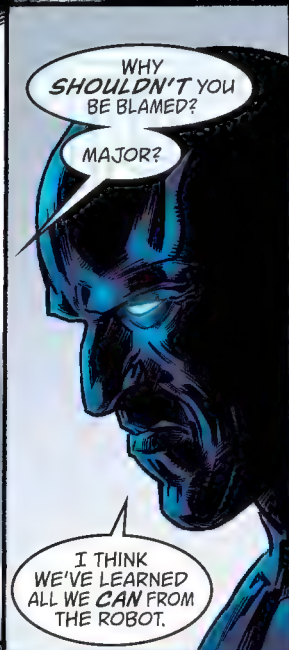




NOW WHY
DON'T YOU TELL
ME WHY YOU'RE
REALLY
HERE?

DON'T
LOOK AT ME
LIKE THAT.

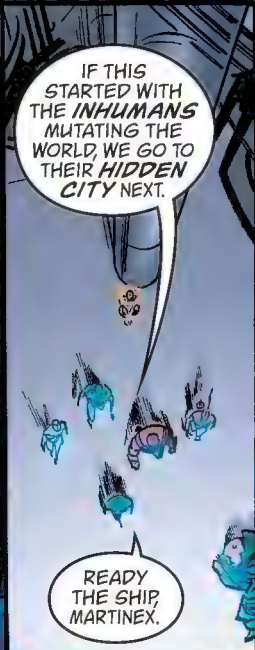
YOU
KNOW I CAN'T
BE BLAMED FOR
THIS.



WHY
SHOULDN'T YOU
BE BLAMED?

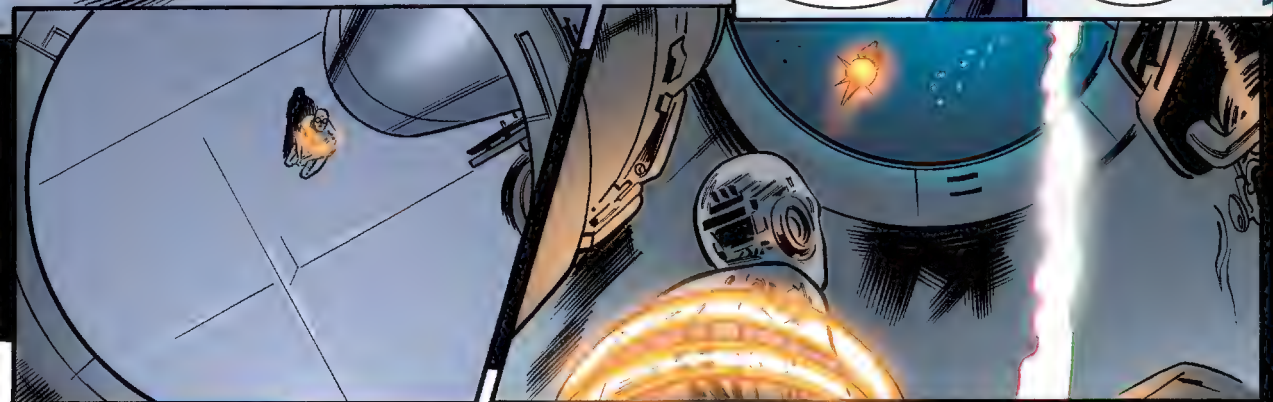
MAJOR?

I THINK
WE'VE LEARNED
ALL WE **CAN** FROM
THE ROBOT.



IF THIS
STARTED WITH
THE **INHUMANS**
MUTATING THE
WORLD, WE GO TO
THEIR **HIDDEN**
CITY NEXT.

READY
THE SHIP,
MARTINEK.



WHAT
DID YOU **TELL**
THEM?

YOU
KNOW WHAT
I SAID. I WILL
NOT HIDE THE
TRUTH AS
UATU DID.

"A LANDING WE CAN *WALK AWAY* FROM THIS TIME, MARTINEX."

"YES, MAJOR."

MAJOR,
WE AREN'T
ALONE.

SEE WHAT
YOU CAN SEE
FROM THE AIR,
STARHAWK.

I
DON'T THINK
SO.

MARTINEX?
CHARLIE?

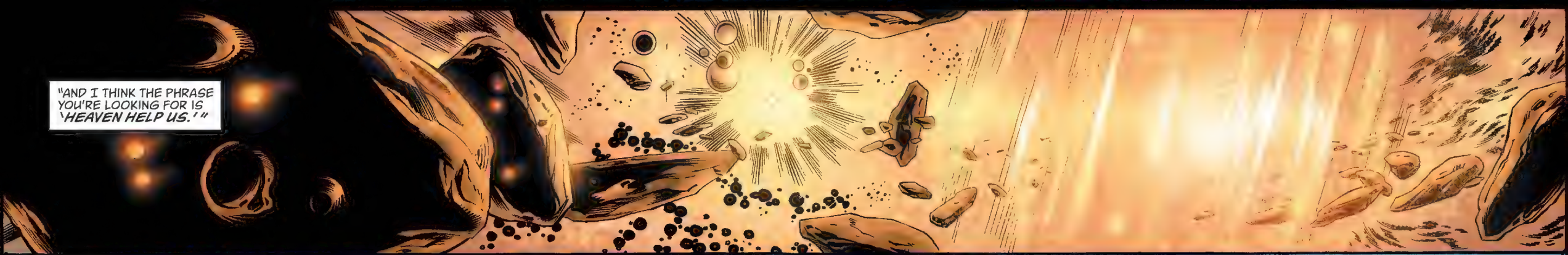
MAJOR?
WHAT'S HAPPEN-
ING?

YOU
ARE ALL SO
OBVIOUS.

YOU
WEAR WEAKNESS LIKE
PROPAGANDA.

I AM KARNAK,
LOYAL SERVANT OF
THE DEAD KING OF
THE INHUMANS.

YOU
ARE *NOT*
WELCOME
HERE.



"AND I THINK THE PHRASE
YOU'RE LOOKING FOR IS
'HEAVEN HELP US.'"



WHAT
DO YOU SEE,
MATTHEW?



I DON'T
KNOW, STEVE... I
THINK I SEE THAT
HEAVEN IS WHAT
YOU WANT IT
TO BE.

IT'S
OURS FOR THE
WISHING.

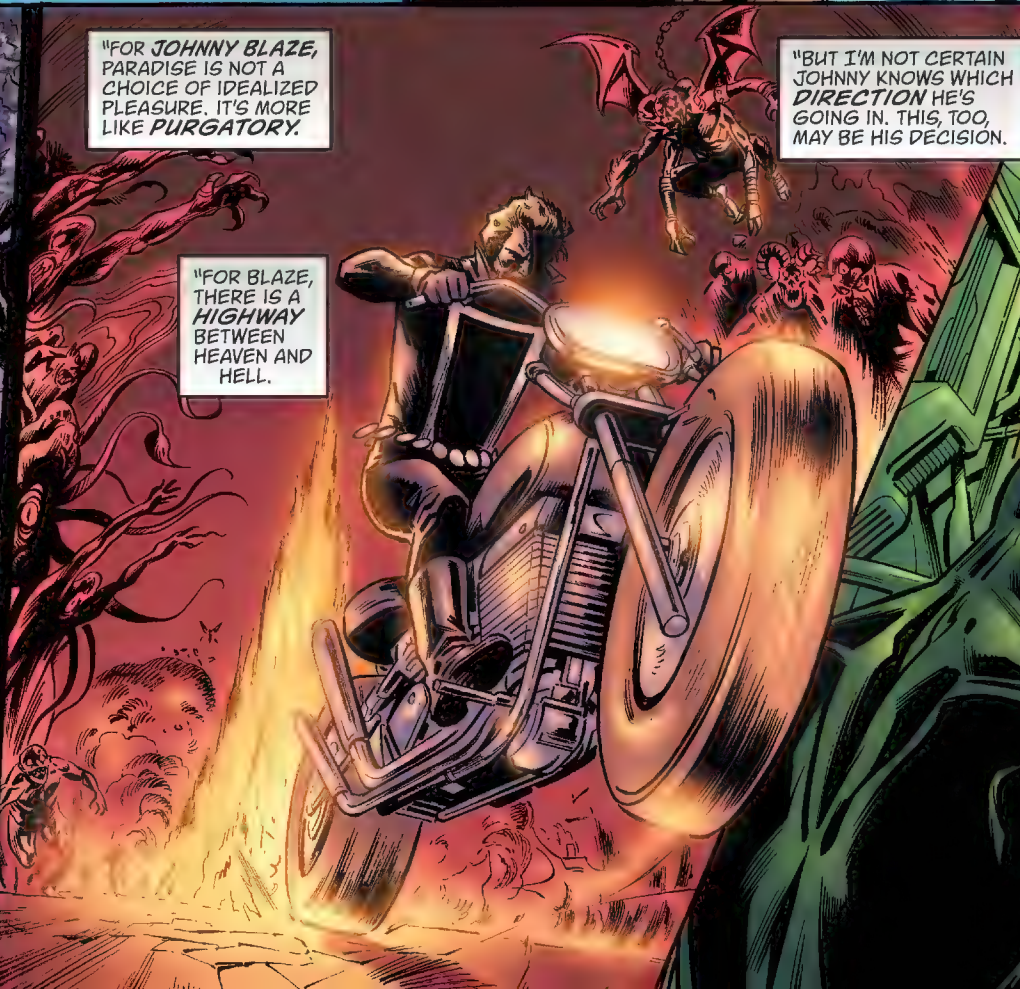


"JOHNNY STORM NOW HAS AN
ETERNITY WITHOUT RESPONSIBILITY.

"THERE IS NO *DOCTOR DOOM* THERE. NO
SKRULL INVASION. NO *MOLE MAN*. AND
NO *FANTASTIC FOUR FLARE* BECKONING
IN THE SKY TO BREAK UP HIS AFFAIRS.

"THERE IS NO *OLDER SISTER* TO MEASURE
UP TO. THERE IS NO *BEN GRIMM* TO BE
EMBARRASSED BY. NO *REED RICHARDS* TO
POINT OUT THE NEEDS OF THE KNOWN AND
THE UNKNOWN UNIVERSE.

"HE CAN *LIVE FOREVER* IN
IGNORANCE OF HIS FELLOW MAN'S
NEEDS. AND SEE ONLY HIS OWN.



"FOR JOHNNY BLAZE,
PARADISE IS NOT A
CHOICE OF IDEALIZED
PLEASURE. IT'S MORE
LIKE PURGATORY.

"FOR BLAZE,
THERE IS A
HIGHWAY
BETWEEN
HEAVEN AND
HELL.

"BUT I'M NOT CERTAIN
JOHNNY KNOWS WHICH
DIRECTION HE'S
GOING IN. THIS, TOO,
MAY BE HIS DECISION.



"FOR THE BROTHER OF BLACK
BOLT, *MAXIMUS*, IS KING OF
THE INHUMANS AND REIGNS
WITH *WISDOM* AND *INNER*
STRENGTH.

"HIS *RATIONALITY* HAS BEEN
COMPLETELY RESTORED. AND HE
LEADS IN LOVE AS HE COULD
NEVER DO IN LIFE.

"THERE IS NO
COSMIC SCREAM
TO ROB HIM OF
HIS *RATIONALE*."



WHAT OF JIM BARNES?

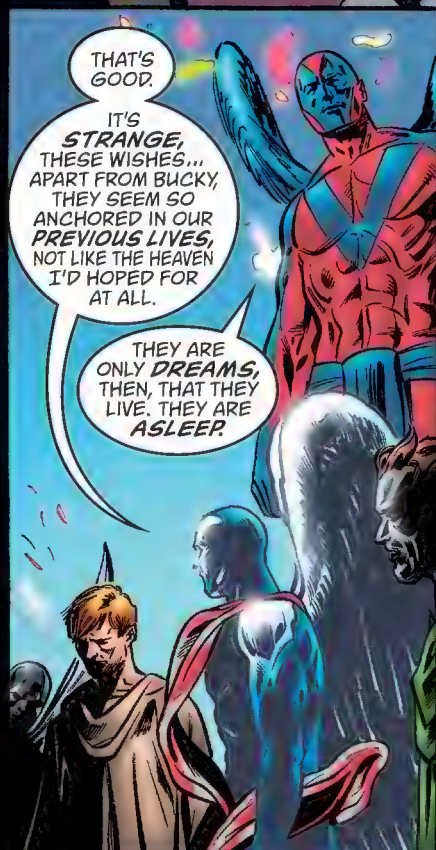
JIM BARNES?



"JIM BARNES...YOUR OLD PARTNER, *BUCKY*, IS--"

"YES? JIM WAS ALWAYS HIS OWN MAN. I CAN'T WAIT TO HEAR. WHAT DO YOU SEE?"

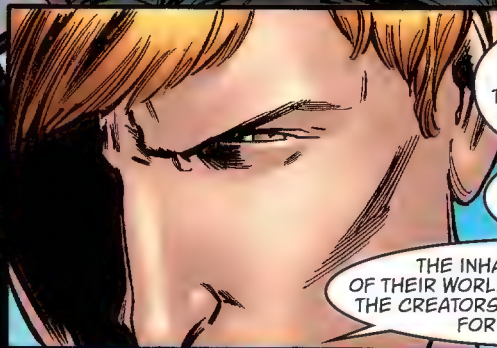
"HE'S...*HAPPY*, STEVE. MAYBE THAT'S ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW."



THAT'S GOOD.

IT'S *STRANGE*, THESE WISHES... APART FROM *BUCKY*, THEY SEEM SO ANCHORED IN OUR *PREVIOUS LIVES*, NOT LIKE THE HEAVEN I'D HOPED FOR AT ALL.

THEY ARE ONLY *DREAMS*, THEN, THAT THEY LIVE, THEY ARE *ASLEEP*.



NO, THEY HAVE EACH CREATED *DIFFERENT REALITIES* THROUGH THE PIECES OF THE COSMIC CUBE EACH HAS CONSUMED.

EACH IS AS REAL AS THE WORLD WE CAME FROM WITH *ONE EXCEPTION*.

THE INHABITANTS OF EACH OF THEIR WORLDS EXIST ONLY BECAUSE THE CREATORS AND DREAMERS *LOOK* FOR THEM THERE.



MY BROTHER IS *SANE*...AND HE IS *KING*.

THERE'S NO NEED TO REGRET THE PAST, *BOLT*. IT'S NOT OUR JOB TO *JUDGE* THE WANTS OF THOSE WHO COME TO THE PARADISE... FOR GOOD OR BAD.

AFTER ALL, HOW CAN THERE BE ANYTHING *BAD* HERE?

IN LIFE, MURDOCK WAS **BLIND**. HERE, HE SEES MORE THAN MOST OF US CAN. PERHAPS THAT IS WHY HE DOESN'T HAVE **WINGS**.

I HAVE ONCE AGAIN RETURNED TO THE **HOLDING PLACE** OF THE DEAD, WHERE SOULS INCAPABLE OF ACCEPTING THEIR DEATH NOW LIVE AS THEY ONCE DID, REPEATING THE HISTORIES THAT HAD MEANING ONLY IN A CONTEXT OF **MORTALITY**.

I AM BEGINNING TO WONDER HOW MUCH A STEP FORWARD THE **PARADISE** IS FROM THIS?

OUR CALL IS TO BRING THESE PEOPLE TO THE PARADISE WHERE THEIR DREAMS MIGHT BECOME **REAL**, WHERE THESE PHANTOM MEMORIES MIGHT FINALLY RESOLVE THEMSELVES IN THE LIVES THESE PEOPLE HAVE **ALWAYS WANTED**...BUT NOW I DON'T KNOW.

MY PARENTS ARE NOT THE **ONLY** SOULS I'M COMMISSIONED TO BRING INTO THE HEAVEN.

FRANK? FRANK, DO YOU **KNOW** THAT MAN?

EARTH TO OFFICER CASTLE.

FRANK.

NO, I CAN'T PLACE HIM. AND IT'S DRIVING ME **CRAZY**.

FRANK, IT'S YOUR DAY OFF. YOU **PROMISED**.

IT'S JUST I FEEL I **SHOULD** KNOW HIM, BUT I DON'T. WHAT GOOD ARE THESE INSTINCTS IF I CAN'T--

STOP **PUNISHING** YOURSELF.

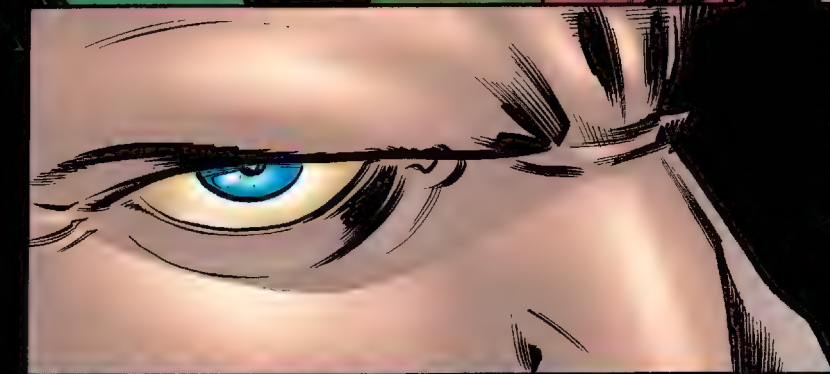


THERE HE IS. WE WOULDN'T BE HERE IF IT WEREN'T FOR CASTLE.

SPEAK FOR YOURSELVES. MURDOCK KILLED ME WITH THE LAW, EVEN AFTER I KILLED HIM AND FRAMED IT ON THE WITCH, ELEKTRA.



AND THERE HE STOOD, WANTING TO OFFER ME *ETERNAL* LIFE...WANTING TO BE THE *AMBASSADOR* OF ALL I DESIRE.



AS IF ALL COULD BE FORGIVEN IN HEAVEN.



YOU KNOW WHAT I JUST THOUGHT OF?

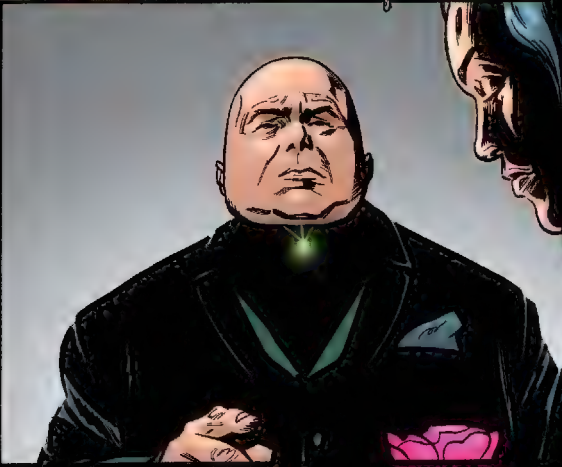
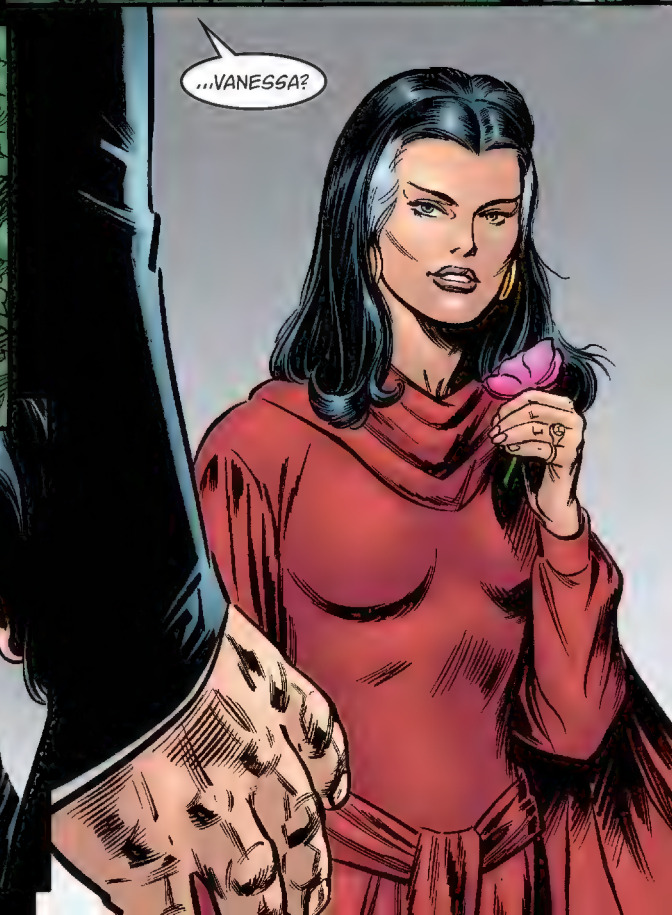
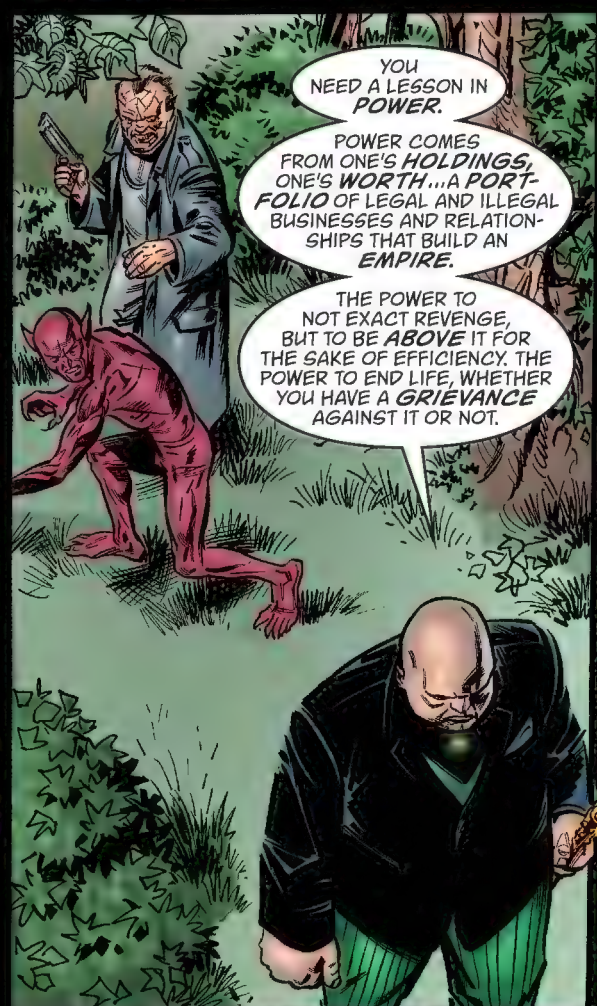
WHAT?



CASTLE CAN'T KILL US HERE.



LET'S LET HIM THINK HE CAN.





"SCOTT? SCOTT, ARE YOU AND THE REST OF THE X-MEN STILL WITH REED RICHARDS IN LATVERIA?"

"YES, JEAN..."

"...WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE PARADISE?"

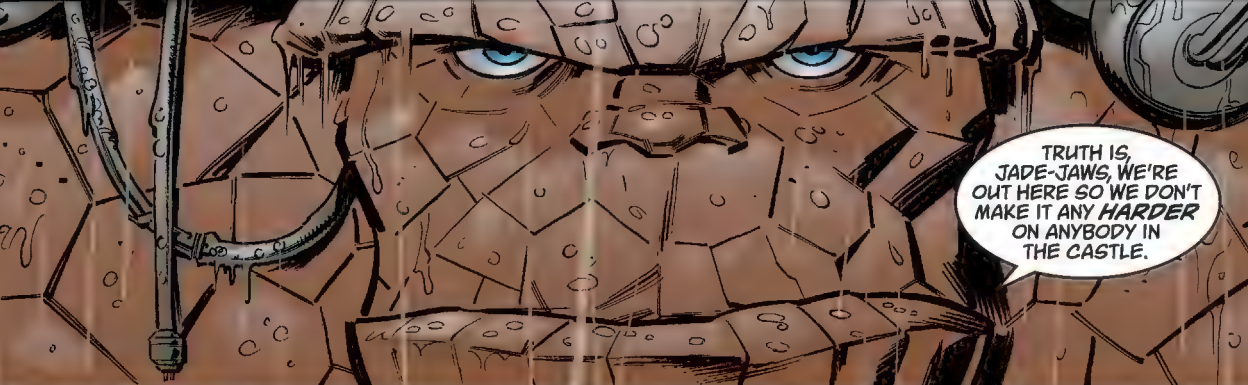
"IT'S DIFFICULT, SCOTT. THE IDEA OF EVERYONE GETTING WHAT THEY WANT IN THIS HEAVEN SOUNDS GREAT IN PRINCIPLE... BUT THEN YOU SEE IT, AND YOU WONDER WHERE WE ALL WENT **WRONG.**"

THREE WEEKS O' THIS. **THREE WEEKS.**

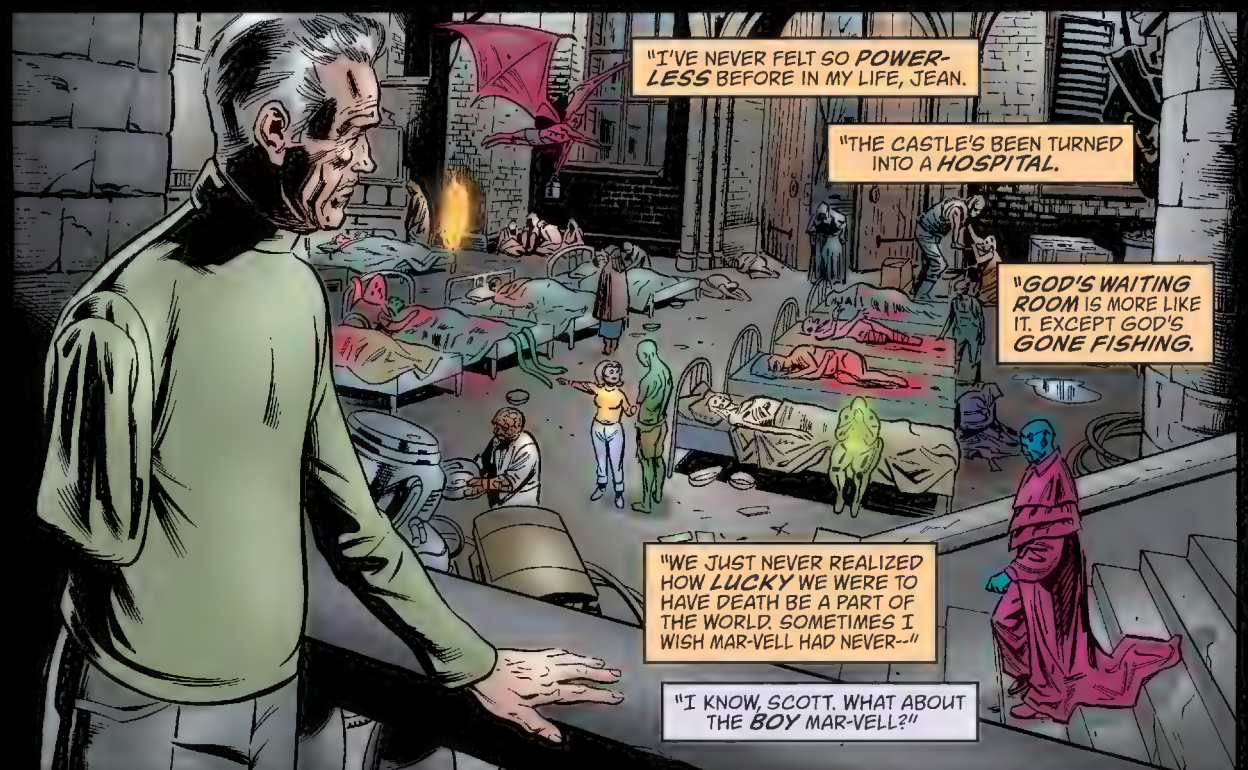
AN' YA WANT TA KNOW WHAT STINKS THE **MOST** ABOUT IT? OTHER'N HULK'S DIAPER, I MEAN.

NO ONE'S EVEN **WATCHIN'** TA SEE WHICH OF US IS STRONGER.

IT'S LIKE **NOBODY CARES** ABOUT ANSWERING THE BIG QUESTIONS ANYMORE.



TRUTH IS, JADE-JAWS, WE'RE OUT HERE SO WE DON'T MAKE IT ANY **HARDER** ON ANYBODY IN THE CASTLE.



"I'VE NEVER FELT SO **POWER-LESS** BEFORE IN MY LIFE, JEAN.

"THE CASTLE'S BEEN TURNED INTO A **HOSPITAL.**

"GOD'S WAITING ROOM IS MORE LIKE IT. EXCEPT GOD'S **GONE FISHING.**

"WE JUST NEVER REALIZED HOW **LUCKY** WE WERE TO HAVE DEATH BE A PART OF THE WORLD. SOMETIMES I WISH MAR-VELL HAD NEVER--"

"I KNOW, SCOTT. WHAT ABOUT THE **BOY MAR-VELL?**"

"HE'S **DIFFERENT** NOW. LESS CONFIDENT. I DON'T THINK THE BATTLE AGAINST DEATH WENT THE WAY HE'D **EXPECTED**."

"AND NOW THAT THE REST OF THE WORLD IS SUFFERING, EVERYONE **BLAMES** HIM."

I AM **CUT OFF** FROM MY OTHER SELF, REED. I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE **PARADISE**.

I KNOW, MAR-VELL. WE'VE ALL BEEN **CUT OFF**.

I'VE ATTEMPTED TO CONTACT **GENIS**, THE SON OF MAR-VELL, BUT I CAN'T FIND HIM ANYWHERE. I HAVEN'T SEEN HIM FOR YEARS.

THERE WAS NO **GENIS**, REED. ONLY **RICK JONES**. **GENIS** WAS JUST ANOTHER FIGMENT OF RICK JONES' **MUTATION**.

THE **KREE-SKRULL** WAR. THE WAR AT THE END OF TIME WITH THE **TIME-LOST AVENGERS**. **GENIS**.

JONES WAS JUST SO **CONVINCED** THAT HE COULD NEVER REALLY HAVE ANY POWER, AND NEVER ACCEPTED THE FACT THAT HE HAD THE ABILITY TO **CREATE** HEROES OUT OF HIS **MIND**.

THE **SUPREME INTELLIGENCE** TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THIS TIME AND TIME AGAIN.

IT WAS **RICK** ALL THE TIME. AND WITH **RICK** DEAD, SO ARE ALL THE **HEROES** HE COULD **CREATE** TO SAVE THE DAY.



I'LL
BE GLAD
WHEN WE CAN
TAKE CARE OF
YOUR *WISH*,
ORORO.

EVERY
TIME YOU GET
HUNGRY, MY
MUTANT HEALING
FACTOR GETS A
KILLER WORK-
OUT.

IT'S
HARD TO
BELIEVE MY
DAD LIVES
THERE.

NOT
A PERSON
THERE THAT
ISN'T WALKING
ON WALLS
NOW.

SHUT
UP, 'PUTER.
IT WAS A
JOKE.

HEY!
THAT'S MY
DAD!

AND
VENOM'S
RIGHT BEHIND
HIM!

HURRY!



LEAVE MY DAD ALONE, YOU MONSTER!!

WHOSE DAD?!

MY DAD?!



JUST ONCE, YA KNOW...JUST ONCE.

SHUT UP, 'PUTER, HE RECOGNIZES US. I'LL EXPLAIN...

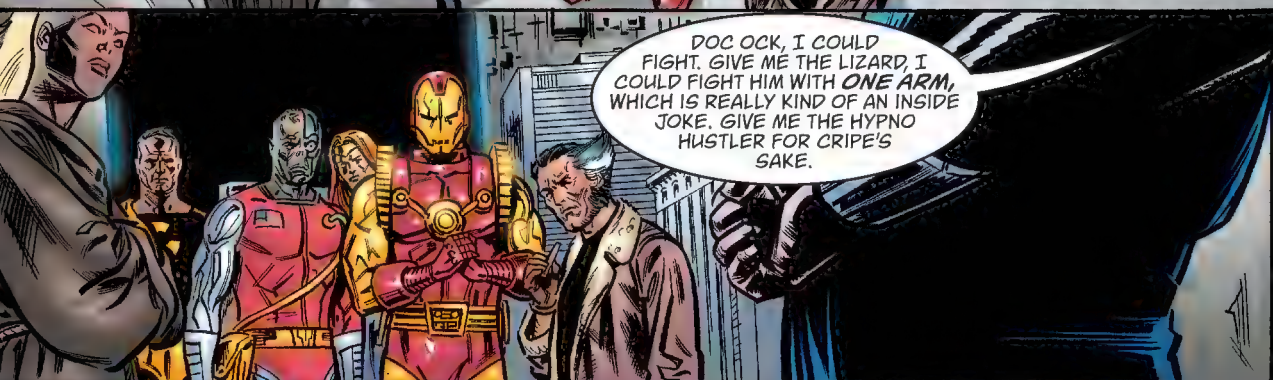


I THINK I'VE BEEN AT THIS LONG ENOUGH TO KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON.



DON'T BOTHER TO TELL ME...THAT'S **SPIDER-GIRL** OR **SPIDIA** OR THE AMAZING **WEBBED WONDERBRA** AND SHE'S ACTUALLY MY **DAUGHTER** FROM ANOTHER REALITY AND SHE'S TRYING TO SAVE ME FROM **VENOM**...WHO SHE HASN'T REALIZED YET IS ALSO MY **DAUGHTER**...AND THIS WHOLE BATTLE IS GOING TO TURN INTO A BIG **MIS-UNDERSTANDING** AND THEN THEY'LL HUG AND CRY AND CARRY ON ABOUT HOW MUCH THEY ALWAYS WANTED TO BE **TWIN SISTERS** ALL THEIR LIVES...RIGHT?

AN' THE WORST OF IT IS, AFTER ALL THIS IS OVER, THEY'LL BOTH COME AND **LIVE** WITH ME.



BUT ANOTHER DAUGHTER?

I THINK I'D RATHER KISS **J. JONAH JAMESON**! WAIT A MINUTE. BEEN THERE. DONE THAT.

THIS IS ALL BECAUSE I BROKE BETTY'S HEART, ISN'T IT, GOD? THIS IS YOUR UNIVERSAL JUSTICE? YOU PUT A POX UPON MY...**HRPH!**

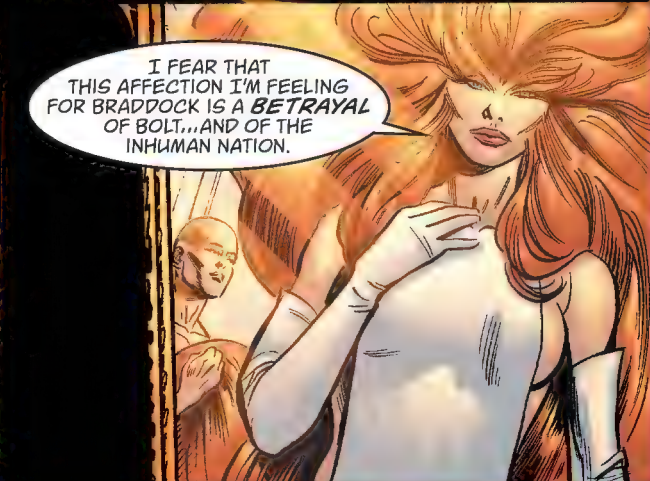


"YOU ARE GOING TO BE **QUEEN OF ENGLAND**, MEDUSA. AREN'T YOU EXCITED?"



I DON'T KNOW, CHILD...THIS IS A **POLITICAL MARRIAGE**.

STILL, THE GENTILITY I SEE IN MY SON DID NOT COME FROM **BLACK BOLT**, THE BOY'S FATHER, BUT FROM **BRIAN BRADDOCK-KING BRITAIN**.

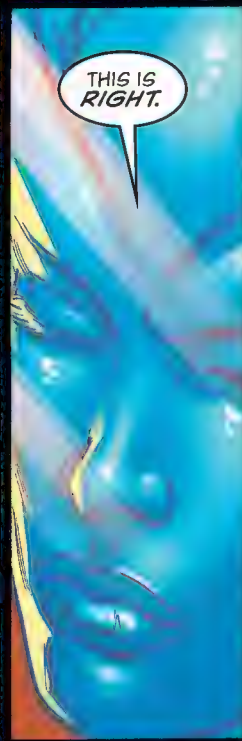


I FEAR THAT THIS AFFECTION I'M FEELING FOR BRADDOCK IS A **BETRAYAL** OF BOLT...AND OF THE **INHUMAN NATION**.



BUT, MEDUSA, EVEN YOUR **SON** IS IN FAVOR OF THIS MARRIAGE.

HE SEES WHAT THE REST OF US DO. THIS IS RIGHT. IT'S **MORE** THAN MERELY A JOINING OF ENGLAND AND THE **INHUMAN NATION**.



THIS IS **RIGHT**.

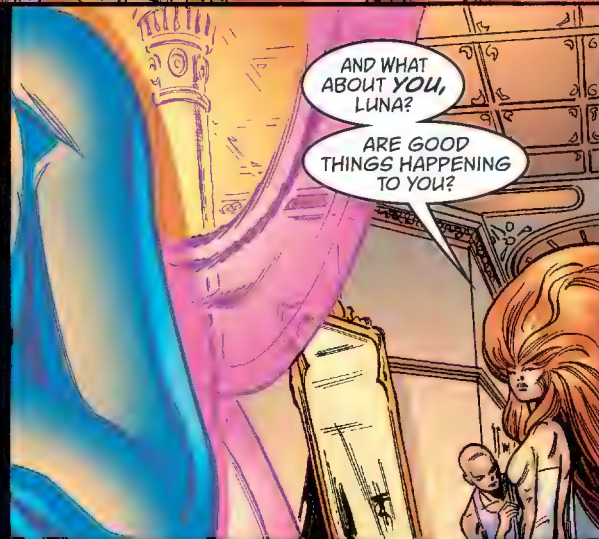


THIS IS ABOUT **PEACE**. MORE AND MORE OF THE INHUMAN NATION ARE ARRIVING EVERY DAY.

THERE ARE NOW **IRON AVENGERS** ON EVERY MAJOR CONTINENT IN THE WORLD.



"THERE ARE **GOOD THINGS** HAPPENING, MEDUSA. YOU DON'T HAVE TO FEEL **GUILTY** IF THEY HAPPEN TO YOU."



AND WHAT ABOUT **YOU**, LUNA?

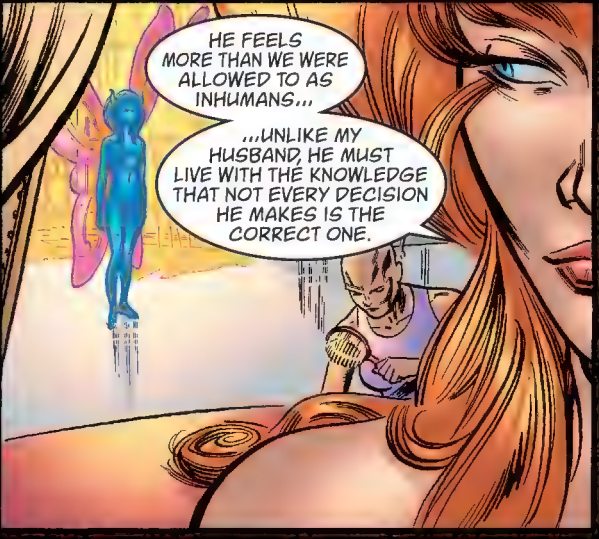
ARE **GOOD THINGS** HAPPENING TO YOU?



"MAYBE."



WHAT ABOUT KING BRIAN? IS HE STILL GRIPPED WITH **SAD-NESS**?



HE FEELS MORE THAN WE WERE ALLOWED TO AS INHUMANS...

...UNLIKE MY HUSBAND, HE MUST LIVE WITH THE KNOWLEDGE THAT NOT EVERY DECISION HE MAKES IS THE CORRECT ONE.



"I ONCE BELIEVED THAT BOLT
WAS THE **PERFECT MAN**,
LUNA... BUT I WAS **WRONG**.

"HE COULD
NOT **LOVE**.

"AND SO THERE WAS
NOTHING HE COULD
LOSE, REALLY.

"KING BRIAN HAS LOST
EVERYTHING.

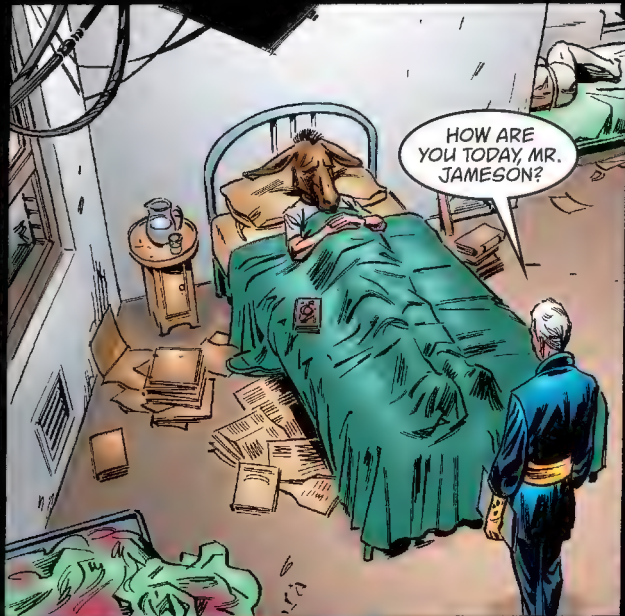
"HIS WIFE.
HIS FRIENDS.
HIS FAMILY.

"AND HE HAS
BEEN ASKED
TO WIELD A
WEAPON MEANT
TO **HEAL**, NOT
DESTROY. A
WEAPON NOT
MADE BY
HUMAN HANDS.
YET, HE HAS
SPILLED
BLOOD WITH
THAT SAME
WEAPON.

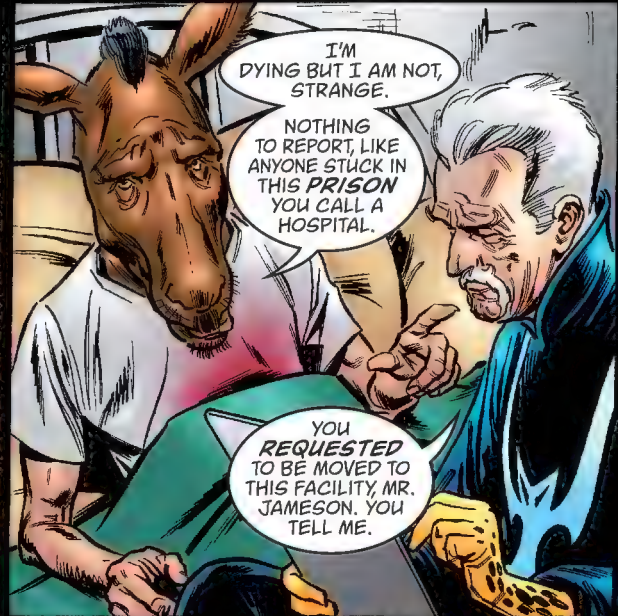
"HOW HEAVY
IT MUST BE.

"IF I AM GOING TO BE
QUEEN, I AM GOING TO
HAVE TO **SHARE** IN HIS
SORROW.

"AND I **NEVER**
LEARNED HOW
TO DO THAT."



HOW ARE YOU TODAY, MR. JAMESON?



I'M DYING BUT I AM NOT, STRANGE.

NOTHING TO REPORT, LIKE ANYONE STUCK IN THIS **PRISON** YOU CALL A HOSPITAL.

YOU **REQUESTED** TO BE MOVED TO THIS FACILITY, MR. JAMESON. YOU TELL ME.



IF I DIDN'T KNOW BETTER, I'D BLAME ALL THIS ON **SPIDER-MAN**.

THERE'S SOMEONE OUT THERE **KILLING** PEOPLE, OR AT LEAST FILLING UP YOUR HOSPITALS WITH PEOPLE...

...GOOD PEOPLE THAT NEVER FOUGHT IN THEIR UNDERWEAR.



DIDN'T KNOW BETTER?



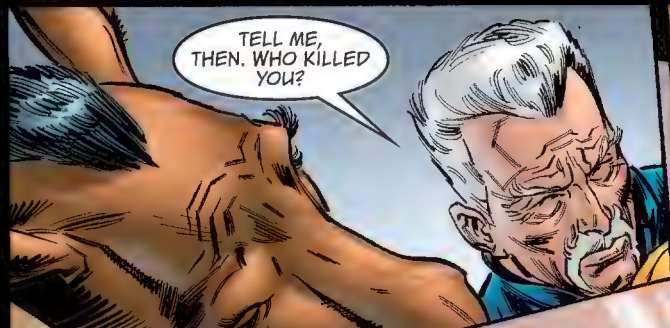
YOU THOUGHT SPIDER-MAN WAS THE **ONLY** ONE I WAS WATCHING ALL THOSE YEARS.

I WATCHED **ALL** OF YOU.



I LISTENED AND COLLECTED AND COLLATED ALL THE STORIES, WHETHER THEY COULD BE SUBSTANTIATED OR **NOT**.

YOU DON'T BECOME PUBLISHER WITHOUT BEING THE BEST DAMN **REPORTER** FIRST.



TELL ME,
THEN, WHO KILLED
YOU?



MEPHISTO.
THE ONE WE ALL
THOUGHT WAS THE
DEVIL.



THIS IS
A GRUDGE MATCH
YOU SUPER HEROES
STARTED LONG
AGO.

STOP HIM.
STOP HIM, BECAUSE YOU
SURE AS HELL AREN'T DOIN'
ANY GOOD HERE.

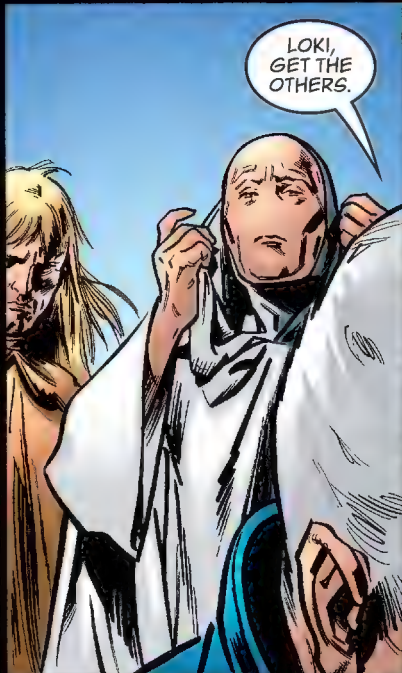


NOW THAT HE
KNOWS WHAT HE IS AND
WHO HE IS NOT, HE DOESN'T
HAVE TO ONLY *TRY* TO BLACKEN
OUR SOULS, HE CAN DESTROY
US *UTTERLY*.

BETTER
THE DEVIL
WE *KNEW*,
STRANGE.



WE'VE NOW
GOT *MORE* TO DO
THAN JUST RESCUE
CLEA FROM
ASSGARD.



LOKI,
GET THE
OTHERS.

"My childhood was a
period of waiting for
the moment when I
could send everyone
and everything connected
with it to Hell."
—Igor Stravinsky

MARVEL
COMICS

MARVEL

2

PARADISE



KRUEGER
BRAITHWAITE
REINHOLD
marvel.com

“Tell me, Aaron, why was it necessary to offer your Heralds of the Celestial Doom a reward for their heroics? Would they not have helped you, anyway?”

“You’re in touch with the cosmic consciousness, Kyle. You know the answer better than I do, and I don’t say that sarcastically. I really could be fooling myself. Only you can know for certain why I really offered each of the champions of their various alternate realities a reward for their aid.”

“I’m a little surprised by you, Aaron. Because the reason you did it suggests a motivation more mechanical than human. To force the mice to run your inter-dimensional maze you used secret knowledge as a stimulus. You could have trusted in mere heroism, an almost uniquely human quality, certainly one wholly motivated by a hope to alter an expected given catastrophe. Instead, you chose to appeal to their curiosity. You appealed to their self-interest.”

“Maybe I just don’t want anyone to live in ignorance.”

“Or maybe you are beginning to doubt your own humanity. Actually, that’s not true. Despite everything, it’s not your humanity you doubt. It’s your worth. There has been too much talk of good but too little true evidence of it. The Devil himself has been revealed as little more than a misunderstanding. And you now fear that your gears, your design, is little more than an accidental compilation.”

“You sound like Uatu.”

“The difference between me and the old Watcher is this — he only thought he knew everything, but I really do.”

PARADISE X

I S S U E 2

JIM KRUEGER
story and script

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assistant editor

MIKE MARTS
editor

JOE QUESADA
editor in chief

BILL JEMAS
president

"TAKE **FRANK CASTELLINI**, FOR EXAMPLE."

"FRANK **WHO?** FRANK **CASTLE?** THE **PUNISHER?** I DIDN'T KNOW HE WAS ITALIAN. WHEN DID HE CHANGE HIS NAME?"

"LONG BEFORE HIS ONE-MAN WAR ON CRIME, THE **PUNISHER** PLAYED IN THE STREETS OF QUEENS WITH THOSE SAME CHILDREN HE WOULD ONE DAY **HUNT DOWN** AS PART OF THE **MAFIA**."

"HE CHANGED HIS NAME TO **DISTANCE** HIMSELF FROM THOSE WHO HAD BECOME THE **POWER ELITE**. A CRIME CARTEL KNOWN INTERESTINGLY ENOUGH AS '**THE FAMILY**'."

"YOU HAVE ALL OF **HISTORY** TO WATCH HERE, AARON. BUT HAVE YOU EVER BOTHERED TO COUNT HOW MANY **FAMILIES** DIED AS A RESULT OF CASTELLINI'S SPECIAL OPERATIONS IN VIETNAM?"

"FAMILIES?"

"CASTLE WAS TRAINED TO **KILL** WITHOUT FEELING. TO **TAKE LIFE** WITHOUT REMORSE. TO **MURDER** WITHOUT INTENT. IN TIMES OF **WAR**."

"AND THEN **HIS FAMILY** WAS KILLED. IN A TIME OF **PEACE**."

"AND THIS...THIS WAS **BEYOND** FRANK CASTLE'S ABILITY TO COMPREHEND. AFTER ALL, WHAT HE HAD DONE TO OTHERS HAD NOW BEEN DONE TO **HIM**."

"CASTLE HAD BEEN TRAINING THE **NYPD** IN THEIR OWN WAR ON CRIME. THE ATTACK ON HIMSELF BY 'THE **FAMILY**' WAS NO **ACCIDENT**...BUT THE DEATH OF HIS OWN FAMILY WAS."

"AND THIS...THIS HE COULD NOT ALLOW. THERE WOULD BE **PUNISHMENT**. BUT NOT ON CRIME...ON **HIMSELF**."

"HIMSELF?"

"FRANK CASTLE WAS **PUNISHING HIMSELF** FOR NOT KNOWING HOW TO DEAL WITH THE **PAIN** AND **LOSS** OF HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN."

"FRANK CASTLE WAS **PUNISHING THE WORLD** FOR MAKING HIM A **KILLING MACHINE**... WITH NO OPTIONS LEFT BUT THAT OF **TAKING LIFE**."

"FRANK CASTLE WAS NO HERO, BUT HE WASN'T A **MACHINE**, EITHER. I KNOW. BECAUSE I **AM** A MACHINE."

"I KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO NOT HAVE AN OPTION AND HAVE TO **PRETEND** I DO TO COMPLY WITH MY DIVERGENT PROGRAMMING."

"I WANT YOU TO **THINK**, AARON. DON'T COMPUTE...DON'T INPUT THE MOST LIKELY POSSIBILITY JUST BECAUSE OF AN INTERNAL PROBABILITY SCHEMATIC. **THINK**."

"WHY DO YOU THINK HE MADE ENEMIES OUT OF THE **KINGPIN OF CRIME**...OR **JIGSAW**...OR THE **JACKAL**? WHY ATTACK THE 'HIGH-PROFILE' TARGETS?"

"WAS IT ONLY BECAUSE THEY WERE THE MOST POWERFUL? NO, IT WAS BECAUSE THEY WERE THE MOST **PUBLIC**."

"FRANK CASTLE'S ONE-MAN WAR ON CRIME WAS A **SUICIDE NOTE**."

"HIS OWN?"

"NO. THE **WORLD'S**. HE JUST HAPPENED TO TAKE IT UPON HIMSELF TO **WRITE** IT."

"HE SAW MAN AS A BEING THAT SAT IN JUDGMENT UPON ALL **SAVE HIMSELF**. AND SO FRANK BECAME A **JUDGE**, AS WELL."

"AND **JURY**. AND **EXECUTIONER**."

"BUT PEACE WAS NO GOVERNING AGENT AS FRANK HAD ONCE BELIEVED. DOMESTIC MORALITY WAS NO DIFFERENT THAN THE **RULES OF WAR**."

"FRANK CONCLUDED IN THAT TERRIBLE MOMENT IN THE PARK THAT ALL OF **LIFE** WAS WAR. PEACE WAS AN ILLUSION, A TRENCH-**DREAM**."

"CASTLE HAD NO CONCERN WHEN HE WAS APPREHENDED AND SENT TO **PRISON**.

"HE KNEW HE WAS **GUILTY**."

"HE ALSO KNEW THAT HE WAS GOING TO A PLACE WHERE THERE WERE LOTS AND LOTS OF **CRIMINALS**."

"WHAT CASTLE DIDN'T KNOW, WAS THAT BY ALLOWING HIMSELF TO BE ARRESTED, HE'D BE DESTROYING THE POSSIBILITY OF JOY FOR ATTORNEY **MATT MURDOCK**."

"YOU'RE SPEAKING ABOUT **ELEKTRA**?"

"I KNOW WHAT HAPPENED. CASTLE LEAKED INFORMATION TO A FELLOW PRISONER WHO WENT BY THE CODE-NAME OF **BULLSEYE** THAT THE KINGPIN HAD A NEW ASSASSIN...A WOMAN NAMED **ELEKTRA**."

"BULLSEYE ESCAPED PRISON AND **MURDERED** ELEKTRA."

"BUT MATT MURDOCK--**DAREDEVIL**--LOVED ELEKTRA, AND HIS LOVE WAS **CHANGING** HER FROM WHAT SHE WAS."

"THEY MIGHT HAVE BECOME A **FAMILY**. SHE MIGHT HAVE LEARNED TO LOVE AGAIN."

"BULLSEYE WAS BLAMED. THE KINGPIN WAS BLAMED. BUT WHY WASN'T **FRANK CASTLE**?"

"BUT...HE WAS. HE WAS BLAMED, **WASN'T** HE? OF COURSE, THAT'S WHY DAREDEVIL **SHOT** HIM."

"MATT MURDOCK HAD NEVER LIFTED A GUN IN HIS LIFE BEFORE. AND NOW HE **HAD**. HE DIDN'T KILL CASTLE. BUT A **SHOT** WAS FIRED ALL THE SAME."

"AND FRANK CASTLE BEGAN TO REALIZE WHAT HE HAD BECOME. A **CORRUPT** TO THE WORLD."

"HE WASN'T JUST PUNISHING THE WORLD FOR WHAT IT WAS, FOR WHAT IT **MADE** HIM..."

"...HE, LIKE THE PLAGUE THAT WOULD SOON MUTATE MANKIND, WAS **PERPETUATING** IT, SPREADING THE VIOLENCE THROUGH THE STREETS."

"AND YET, HIS WAR COULD NOT STOP. IT COULD NOT END. HE WAS AN **ADDICT** BY NOW."

"THERE IS NO **TWELVE-STEP PROGRAM** FOR MASS MURDERERS. HE WAS CARELESS, WILD IN HIS INTENT TO PUNISH THE GUILTY--**ALL** OF THE GUILTY."

"A SPRAY OF BULLETS FROM HIS OWN GUN ACCIDENTALLY **KILLED** YET ANOTHER FAMILY, AS INNOCENT AS HIS OWN...BUT IN FRANK'S UNDERSTANDING NOW, AS **GUILTY** AS HIS OWN."

"GUILTY? OF WHAT?"

"OF **BEING THERE**. OF BEING **ANYWHERE** WHERE CRIME COULD BE. YOU SEE, THERE WAS NO PLACE FOR **INNOCENCE** IN FRANK'S WORLD ANYMORE."

"DAREDEVIL, SPIDER-MAN, THE AVENGERS AND A FEW OTHERS Banded TOGETHER TO **HUNT DOWN** CASTLE."

"THEY SHOULDN'T HAVE **BOTHERED**."

"FRANK **KILLED HIMSELF**. EVERYONE THOUGHT IT WAS BECAUSE OF THE FAMILY HE ACCIDENTALLY MURDERED."

"NO. HE KILLED HIMSELF BECAUSE THE CLOSER HE GOT TO THE **SOURCE** OF CRIME, THE MORE HE SAW IT AT WORK IN ALL INDIVIDUALS...EVEN **HIMSELF**."

"IT WOULD BE INTERESTING TO KNOW WHAT FRANK WOULD HAVE BEEN LIKE IF HE'D BEEN AWARE THAT MANKIND'S HOSTILITY WAS THE RESULT OF **CELESTIAL MANIPULATION**..."

"I COULD TELL YOU WHAT HE WOULD HAVE BEEN LIKE."

"NO. THAT'S OKAY. I DON'T NEED TO KNOW."

"ALL THIS IS TO SAY, AARON, YOU'RE NOT THE FIRST TO WONDER IF THERE'S ANY **GOOD** IN YOU."

"YOU'RE NOT THE FIRST TO BECOME SICK OF THE **UNCERTAINTY** THAT PLAYS THROUGH THE LIVES OF MANKIND."

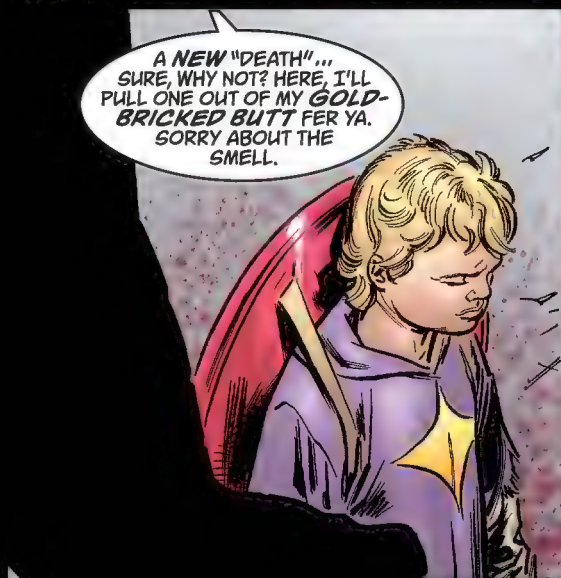
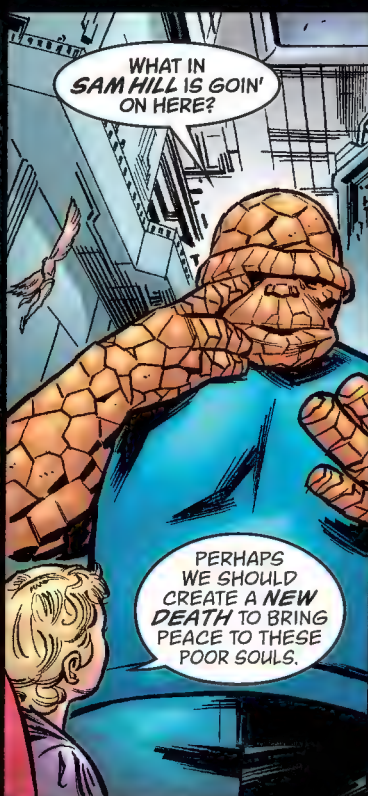
"SOMETIMES IT'S HARD TO BE CERTAIN IF WE CAN EVEN KNOW **ANYTHING**."

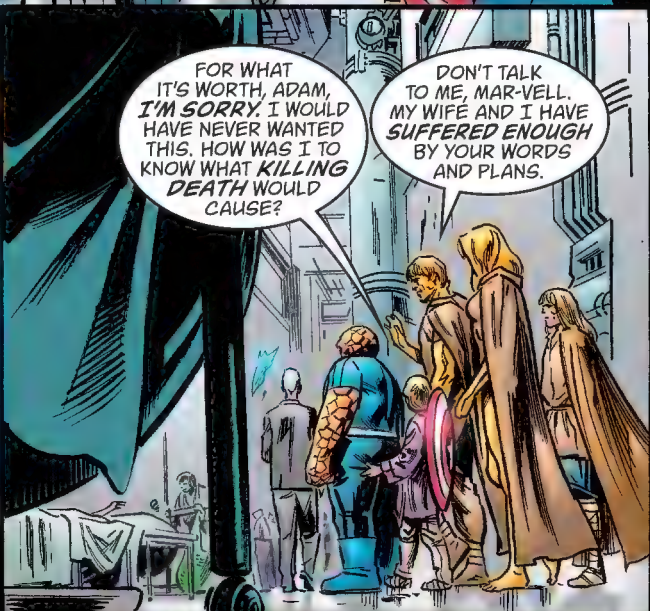
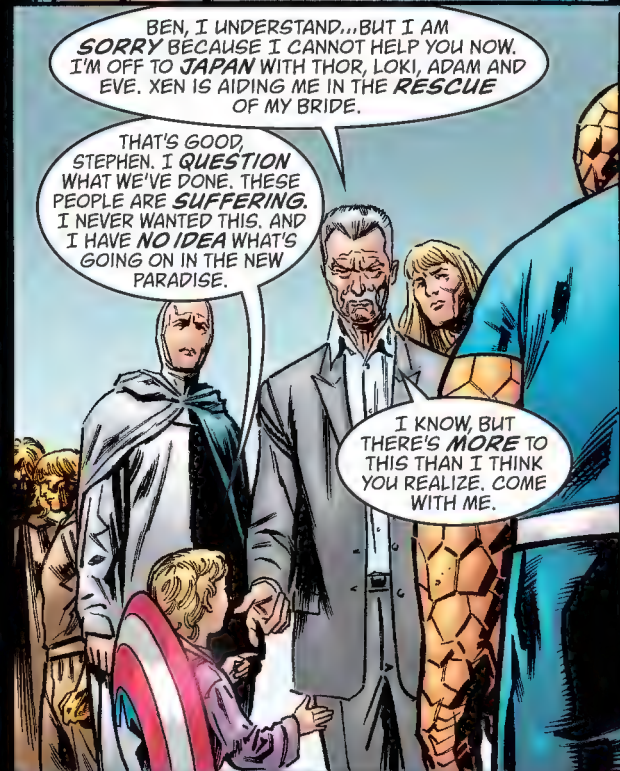
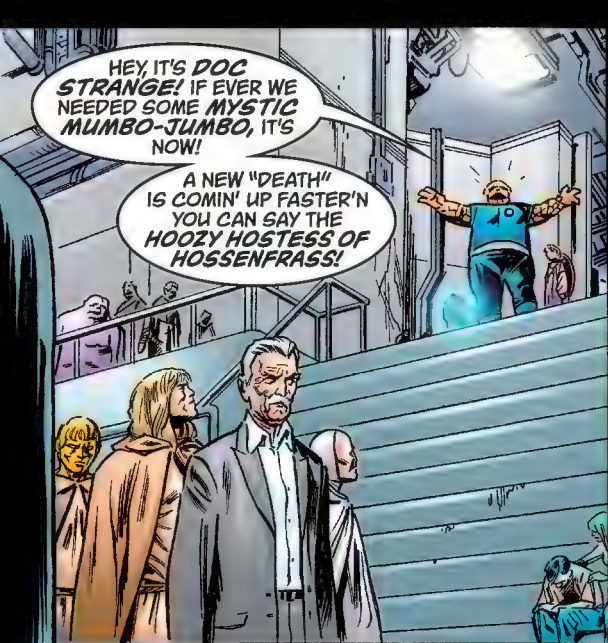
"I'LL TELL YA, MARV. THE HULK WOULD'A **LOST** IF YA HADN'T'A MADE ME BRING YA DOWN HERE. THE HULK'S TENDER LITTLE **KNEES** JUST COULDN'T HOLD UP ALL'A REED'S **DOOHICKEYS**."

"I'M THE **STRONGEST**. I ALWAYS HAVE BEEN. THE HULK'S JUST GOT **BETTER P.R.**"

"BY THE WAY, WHY'RE WE HERE? I **HATE** HOSPITALS. IF I HAD MY WAY, YA WOULDN'T CATCH ME **DEAD** IN ONE."

"THAT'S JUST THE PROBLEM, BEN. NO ONE IS **DYING** IN THEM ANYMORE."







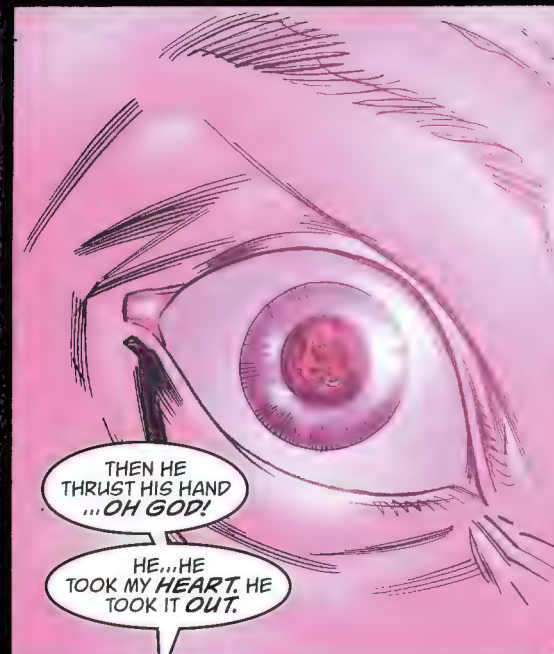
TELL US WHAT HAPPENED
THAT DAY. BUT DISTANCE, MY DEAR.
DISTANCE. DON'T EXPERIENCE WHAT
HAPPENED, **EXPLAIN** IT. TELL ME
WHAT YOU SAW THAT DAY...

IT WAS THE
REUNION TOUR...
I WAS SINGING MY
HEART OUT IN THIS
CUTE LITTLE DISCO
IN L.A....

...A MAN CAME
ON STAGE AND TOLD
ME THAT THERE WERE
BETTER WAYS.

DISTANCE. LOOK AT
IT AS IF YOU WERE WATCHING
FROM BEHIND A MIRROR. YOU WILL
REMEMBER **NOTHING** OF WHAT
HAPPENED, MY DEAR...ONLY
THAT YOU WERE IN AN
ACCIDENT.

SLEEP
NOW, DEAR
ALLISON.



THEN HE
THRUST HIS HAND
...**OH GOD!**

HE...HE
TOOK MY **HEART.** HE
TOOK IT OUT.

IT WAS
MEPHISTO.

IN
ONE FORM OR
ANOTHER, **HE** IS
THE CAUSE OF
MOST OF THOSE
HERE.

BUT
WHY?

WHEN
MEPHISTO BELIEVED
HE WAS THE **DEVIL**, HIS
GREATEST TEMPTATION
WAS NOT THAT OF **BEING**
GOOD, AS IN THE CASE
OF **LOKI** HERE...

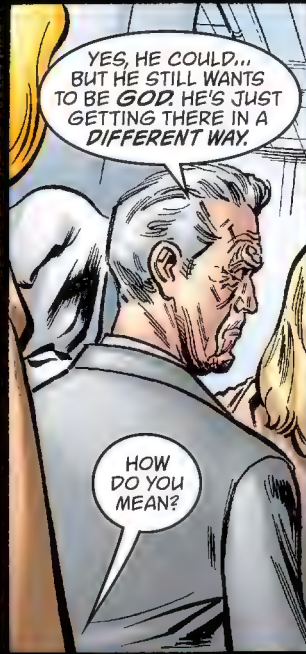
...BUT
OF DOING
BODILY HARM
TO THOSE THAT,
BEFORE, HE COULD
ONLY BE SATISFIED
BY THE **CORRUPTION**
OF THEIR
SOULS.



I'M AFRAID, GENTLEMEN, THAT THIS **NEW DEVIL** IS BRINGING WITH HIM A VERY NEW KIND OF ETERNAL DAMNATION. A **LIVING KIND**.

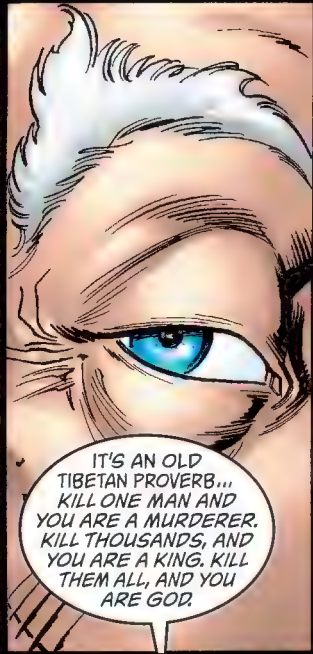
IF YOU WANT TO **END** THE SUFFERING THAT IS GROWING HERE, **STOP HIM**.

BUT HE COULD BE **ANYBODY!**

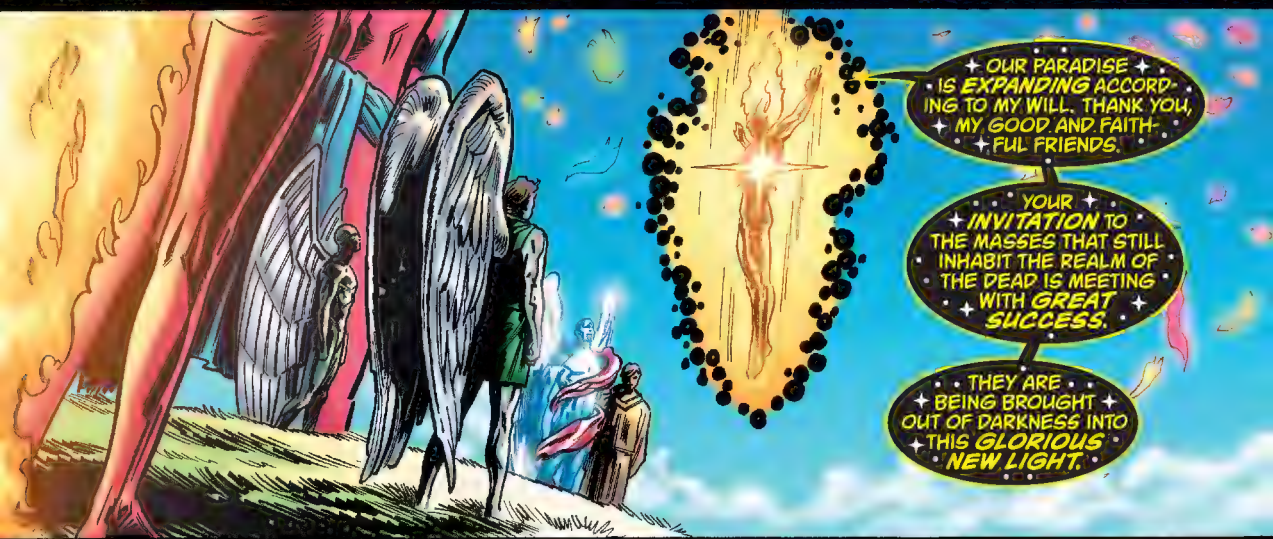


YES, HE COULD... BUT HE STILL WANTS TO BE **GOD**. HE'S JUST GETTING THERE IN A DIFFERENT WAY.

HOW DO YOU MEAN?



IT'S AN OLD TIBETAN PROVERB... **KILL ONE MAN AND YOU ARE A MURDERER. KILL THOUSANDS, AND YOU ARE A KING. KILL THEM ALL, AND YOU ARE GOD.**



★ OUR PARADISE ★
★ IS EXPANDING ACCORDING TO MY WILL. THANK YOU, MY GOOD AND FAITHFUL FRIENDS. ★

★ YOUR INVITATION TO THE MASSES THAT STILL INHABIT THE REALM OF THE DEAD IS MEETING WITH **GREAT SUCCESS**. ★

★ THEY ARE BEING BROUGHT OUT OF DARKNESS INTO THIS **GLORIOUS NEW LIGHT**. ★



★ OUR HEAVEN IS GROWING **EVERY DAY**. ★



SIR, WE HAVEN'T FOUND **ANYONE NEW** IN THE REALM OF THE DEAD...

...ONLY THOSE NOT QUICK ENOUGH TO IMMEDIATELY RESPOND TO YOUR CALL. IT'S AS IF NO ONE ON EARTH IS **DYING**.

ARE YOU CERTAIN? HAVE YOU EXHAUSTED THE BOUNDARIES OF THE REALM OF THE DEAD SO SOON?

NO...

THEN PERHAPS NO ONE ON EARTH IS DYING AND PEACE HAS BEEN ACHIEVED AT LAST.

CONTINUE YOUR GOOD WORKS. DO NOT FEAR.

SOMETHING IS **WRONG**. ACCORDING TO SCOTT, WHO IS STILL ALIVE AND ON EARTH, NO ONE IS DYING...AND THEY **SHOULD** BE. THEY ARE BEING TORMENTED.

BUT WHY WOULD SOMEONE WHO IS OMNISCIENT **DECEIVE** US?

WE AREN'T A JURY OF MAR-VELL'S PEERS...BUT I DON'T LIKE THE IDEA OF HEAVEN BEING AN INDIVIDUAL'S **WISH FULFILLMENT**.

I THINK WE'RE ALL IN AGREEMENT THAT SOMETHING IS **VERY WRONG** IN THIS NEW PARADISE.

THE QUESTION IS, WHAT DO WE **DO** ABOUT IT?

"I KNOW, KYLE, THAT YOU ARE WELL-AWARE OF THE **DEEPEST WISHES** OF MY HERALDS, THE WISHES THEY THEMSELVES DARED NOT EVEN ASK FOR.

"SO WHAT DID **SPIDER-GIRL** REALLY WANT WHEN SHE ASKED TO SEE HER FATHER?"

"TO BE **WHOLE**, AARON. THAT IS ALL. TO BE CERTAIN THAT SHE DID NOT **MISS** SOMETHING."

THAT'S ABOUT IT, PARKER.

SO YOU SAY YOU WERE HERALDS ON A MISSION TO SAVE THE ALTERNATE REALITIES FROM THE **CELESTIALS**...AND THAT THIS SPIDER-GIRL WANTED TO SEE ME AND THAT WAS HER **FONDEST WISH**?

ONLY IN **NEW YORK**, YA KNOW? STILL, IT COULD BE **WORSE**. IT USUALLY IS WITH ME.

I GUESS I'LL HAVE TO BRING AN END TO THIS--WHAT WE CALL ON THE FORCE--**DOMESTIC DISTURBANCE**.

DON'T WORRY 'BOUT IT, 'PUTER. PARKER ONCE TOLD ME THAT HE HAS SOMETHING CALLED A **SPIDER-SENSE** THAT WARNS HIM OF ANY REAL DANGER.

WE HAD A LADY CALL UP THE PRECINCT THE OTHER DAY COMPLAINING ABOUT **SPIDERS** IN HER KITCHEN.

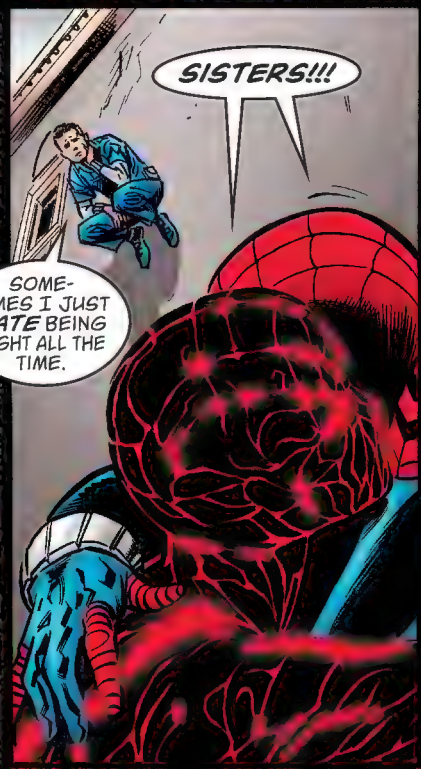
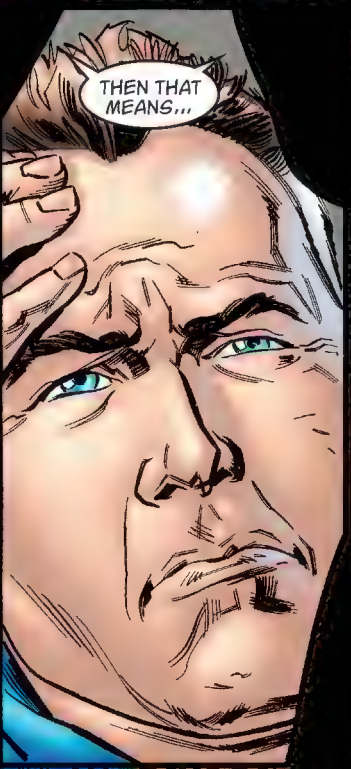
SGT. CAGE LAUGHED FOR THE REST OF THE DAY WHEN HE SENT **ME** OUT ON THE CALL.

YER **WRONG** ABOUT THIS ONE. I'M TELLING YA, YER...YEAH...YEAH... SHUT UP, 'PUTER. I GOT EYES.

UH... GIRLS?

GIRLS?

GIRLS!?!





THIS MUST BE THE TIME WHERE EVERYONE IS **LOSING WEIGHT...**

...OH WAIT, SORRY, **WRONG LOGAN**. YOU'RE FROM AN ALTERNATE REALITY. NEVER MIND...



I'M SORRY... BUT I CANNOT **BEAR** THIS ANOTHER MOMENT... IF THERE IS A **CURE** FOR ME HERE, I CAN'T WAIT A MINUTE LONGER. WE HAVE TO LEAVE.

OF COURSE. THE SOONER YOU'RE SATISFIED, THE SOONER MY DESIRES CAN BE FULFILLED.

LEAVE? NOOO... YOU CAN'T LEAVE! NOT NOW!



YOU HAVE TO **STAY HERE**. YOU CAN STAY WITH DAD AND ME... IN MY ROOM. YOU CAN...

OKAY, I'LL STAY.



TELL ME THOUGH, WHY WAS YOUR WISH TO SEE ME? AM I **DEAD** ON YOUR WORLD?



NO. OF COURSE MY DAD'S NOT **DEAD**.



HE'S A **CLONE**.

THAT'S WHY I WEAR **HIS** COSTUME AND NOT YOURS.

"WHY HAVE THE **GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY** COME TO EARTH, KYLE?"

"I DON'T EVEN THINK THEY KNEW WHAT IT WAS THEY WERE **LOOKING FOR**, AARON. NOT UNTIL YOU TOLD THEM ABOUT **BLACK BOLT** AND THE **TERRIGEN MISTS**."

"THAT'S WHY THEY WENT TO THE **HIDDEN LAND**, AARON. THAT'S WHY THEY ARE THERE WITH **KARNAK**, NOW."

"THEY MUST WANT TO **MUTATE** SOMETHING... BUT WHAT? THEY WON THE WAR WITH THE **BADOON**..."

"...THEY SAVED THE GALAXY FROM **KORVAC** IN BOTH THE PAST AND THE FUTURE. WHY WOULD THEY WANT THE **TERRIGEN MISTS**?"

HOW DID YOU **DO** THAT?
HOW DID YOU WIPE US OUT IN SECONDS? WE'VE TAKEN ON **ENTIRE ARMADAS** OF THE **BADOON**!

I CAN ISOLATE THE **FLAW** IN ANYTHING. I SEE YOUR **WEAKNESSES** EASIER THAN I SEE YOUR **FACE**.

BUT I CAN SEE **OTHER THINGS**, AS WELL. YOU DID NOT COME HERE TO ASK ME ABOUT MYSELF.

YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT THE **POWER** WE HAVE. I CAN SEE YOUR **HUNGER**.

WE "**PURE**" **INHUMANS** ARE A PEOPLE THAT YEARS AGO WERE MUTATED BY A RACE KNOWN AS THE **KREE**.

WE WERE MUTATED TO BECOME **SOLDIERS** IN A WAR AGAINST AN ALIEN RACE KNOWN AS THE **SKRULLS**.

"MY ANCESTORS WERE MUTATED, AS WAS I, BY A GAS KNOWN AS THE **TERRIGEN MISTS**..."

THAT'S WHAT YOU CAME FOR, ISN'T IT? YOU WANT THE **MISTS**.

BUT YOU ALREADY HAVE **POWER**. WHAT IS IT YOU WANT?

WHAD'I MISS?

I'M SORRY TO TELL YOU, BUT THE **MISTS** ARE **GONE**...THEY WERE RELEASED INTO THE ATMOSPHERE BY MY KING.

THE PURITY OF MY RACE **ENDS** WITH THIS GENERATION, IT **DIES** WITH THE ROYAL FAMILY.

OUR BLOODLINE WILL BE FURTHER **MUDDIED** BY THE COMING MARRIAGE BETWEEN **MEDUSA** AND KING **BRITAIN**.

I AM THE ONLY INHUMAN WHO **WON'T** ATTEND THE QUEEN'S CEREMONY.

I AM THE ONLY MEMBER OF THE ROYAL FAMILY **STILL LOYAL** TO THE KING.



WHAT DO YOU MEAN, I'M DEAD?

WHAT ARE YOU, A BIBLE SALESMAN?

NO, FRANK CASTLE...

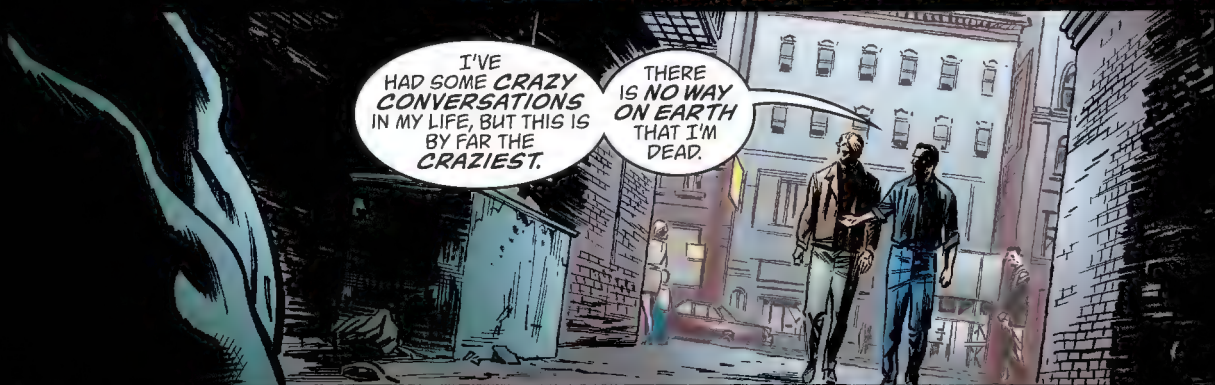


THIS PLACE IS A **GHOST TOWN** OF SORTS...IT'S HAUNTED BY YOUR MEMORIES AND THE MEMORIES OF THOSE WHO ONCE **LIVED** HERE.

YOU AND YOUR FAMILY DIED **LONG AGO**.



I THOUGHT YOU'D WANT TO HEAR THIS FROM ME. WE WERE **BOTH SOLDIERS** FOR A WHILE. WHEN WE LIVED, FRANK, WE WERE--



I'VE HAD SOME **CRAZY CONVERSATIONS** IN MY LIFE, BUT THIS IS BY FAR THE **CRAZIEST**.

THERE IS **NO WAY ON EARTH** THAT I'M DEAD.



BUT THIS **ISN'T EARTH**, FRANK. IT'S CALLED THE **REALM OF THE DEAD**. I'VE COME TO TAKE YOU AND YOUR FAMILY TO **PARADISE**.

BUT I CAN SEE YOU'RE **NOT READY** YET.



YOU
DON'T QUITE
BELIEVE.

I'LL COME
BACK AGAIN, FRANK.
PREPARE YOUR FAMILY
FOR THE NEW HEAVEN
UNTIL THEN.



NEW
HEAVEN?

BUT I
HAVE MY
FAMILY
HERE... I'VE
GOT HEAVEN
ALREADY.



YOU'RE WRONG,
MR. ROGERS... MR. ANGEL.
THERE'S **NOTHING** THAT WOULD
MAKE ME WANT TO TAKE MY
FAMILY FROM THIS
PLACE.

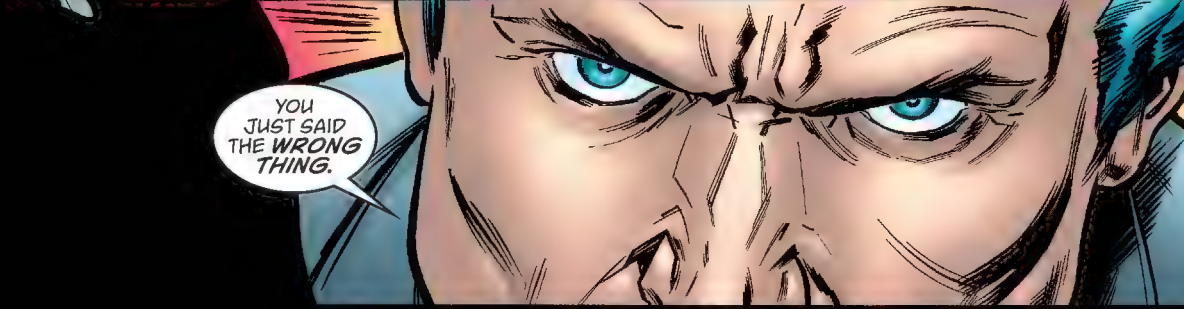


DO
YOU THINK HE
SUSPECTS
ANYTHING?

NO. HE
WOULDN'T **RECOG-
NIZE** US IF HE KNEW
WE WERE HERE.



HE DOESN'T
EVEN REMEMBER
WHAT HE DID TO
MY FACE.









"...DID THE BIG RED, WHITE AND BLUE ANGEL WANT TO TAKE YOU TO **HEAVEN** WITH HIM, FRANK? WAS THAT IT? TOO BAD HE **LEFT** YOU HERE."

IT CONSUMED ONE OF THE **BROKEN MOONS** THIS MORNING, BLASTAAR.

I KNOW. THIS IS **RICHARDS'** FAULT. IT HAS TO BE. HE USED THE **ULTIMATE NULLIFIER** ON SOMETHING BIG, SOMETHING HE SHOULDN'T HAVE, AND **TRANSPORTED** IT HERE.

THIS CANCER WILL **DESTROY** US IF IT CONTINUES TO GROW.

RICHARDS HAS **BROKEN HIS OATH** TO THIS REALM. HE HAS **SHATTERED THE PEACE**.

I WILL **KILL HIM** FOR THIS!



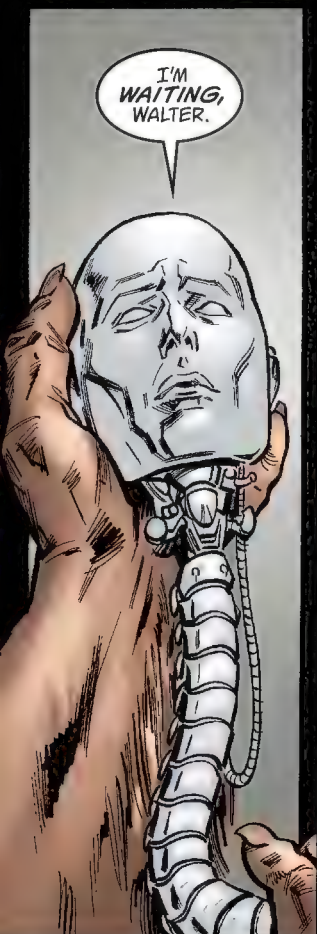
IT'S BEEN
HERE IN CANADA
ALL THE TIME,
MAC.

THIS
LAST YEAR
HAS NOT BEEN
WASTED.

NOT
FOR YOU,
MAYBE.

THIS RACE
SEEMS TO BE
INCAPABLE OF
BEING MUTATED...
IT'S MIRACU-
LOUS.

IT'S
PURE.



I'M
WAITING,
WALTER.



ARE
YOU CERTAIN
IT UNDER-
STANDS WHAT
IT'S DOING
FOR ITS
COUNTRY?

THEY ARE EITHER
ANIMALS, AND THEREFORE
WITHOUT THE CELESTIAL SEED
THAT WAS GERMINATED WITHIN
ALL MANKIND...

...OR PERHAPS THEY
ARE A DIVERGENT STRAIN
OF HUMANITY ALTOGETHER.
I MUST SPEAK WITH REED
RICHARDS ABOUT THIS.



HOW'S THE
NEW BODY FEEL,
MAC?

A comic book illustration of a muscular, furry humanoid character, likely Alpha Flight's Wolverine, wearing a white mask with red eye lenses. He is crouching in a dark, industrial setting, holding his adamantium claws. A speech bubble above him says "GROOVY." and another says "ALPHA FLIGHT IS BACK IN ACTION." In the bottom left corner, there is a small electronic device with a red light. A quote by Rene Descartes is in a yellow box at the bottom right.

GROOVY.

ALPHA
FLIGHT IS BACK IN
ACTION.

"There are no conclusive indications by
which waking life can be distinguished
from sleep." — Rene Descartes

A PARADISE X SPECIAL



A PARADISE X SPECIAL



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story and script

ALEX ROSS
story, cover and character designs

STEVE YEOWELL
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MIKE RAICHT
assistant editor

MIKE MARTS
editor

JOE QUESADA
editor in chief

BILL JEMAS
president



THIS IS *MY WORLD*. I
MADE IT. IT IS THE RESULT
OF *MY CONCEPTION*.

MY GOLDEN REALM.
MY *ASGARD*.

IT IS PEOPLED WITH
THE SWEAT OF *MY*
INSPIRATION.

IT HAS BEEN FED AND NOURISHED
WITH THE FRUIT OF *MY HOPES*.

IF IT WERE NOT FOR *ME*, THERE
WOULD BE *NOTHING* HERE.



I AM *ODIN*. I
REPEAT IT OVER
AND OVER AGAIN
AND *NEVER TIRE*
OF HEARING IT.

I AM THE *KING*
WHO *SEES ALL*.

HE WHO HAS
GIVEN FORM TO
EVERYTHING.

I SAID *LET THERE*
BE... AND IT *WAS*.
AND IT WAS *GOOD*.



THIS IS *ASGARD*.
AND THERE IS
BUT *ONE GOD*
HERE.

TO THINK I EVER
THOUGHT I WAS
A **MASTER** OF
ANYTHING.

I **SLEPT**
THROUGH
MY **OWN**
DEATH.

CLEA HAD AN AFFAIR
WITH THE **NORSE**
GOD OF MISCHIEF.

AND **WONG** CAME
HERE FOR HIS FINAL
ACT OF **BETRAYAL**.

HERE. TO
JAPAN.

THANK
YOU, LORD
SUNFIRE.

OF COURSE,
STEPHEN. THE **HOUSE**
OF **YOSHIDA** WILL ALWAYS
BE AN **ALLY** TO THE GREAT
EASTERN MAGICIAN.

WE HAVE BEEN
BLESSED BY YOUR RETURN
FROM THE DEAD. AS HAS
THE **WORLD**.

THANK YOU.
I KNOW WHAT I'M
ASKING OF YOU. I KNOW
THE **RISK**. AND I WOULD
UNDERSTAND IF YOU
FELT IT WAS **TOO**
MUCH.

MY FATHER
ONCE MADE A **PACT**
WITH THE HEROES OF THIS
WORLD, STEPHEN. MOST
CAME FROM **YOUR** COUNTRY.
IT WAS A PROMISE HE SAW
THROUGH UNTIL HIS
ASSASSINATION.

CAN I...
CAN **WE** DO ANY
LESS?

WE WILL HELP YOU
SAVE HER, STEPHEN. WE WILL
SAVE YOUR **CLEA**.



AND, IN OUR
ABSENCE, THE **SEVEN
SILVER SAMURAI** WILL
PROTECT THIS NATION.
THERE IS NOTHING
TO FEAR.

TONY STARK BUILT
THE SEVEN SILVER
SAMURAI TO BE
LORD SUNFIRE'S
BODYGUARDS.

THEIR TRUE WORTH WILL
BE PUT TO THE **TEST** IN
THE ABSENCE OF THIS
NATION'S CHAMPIONS.



THEY WERE
BUILT TO PROTECT
A CHILD...NOT A
NATION.

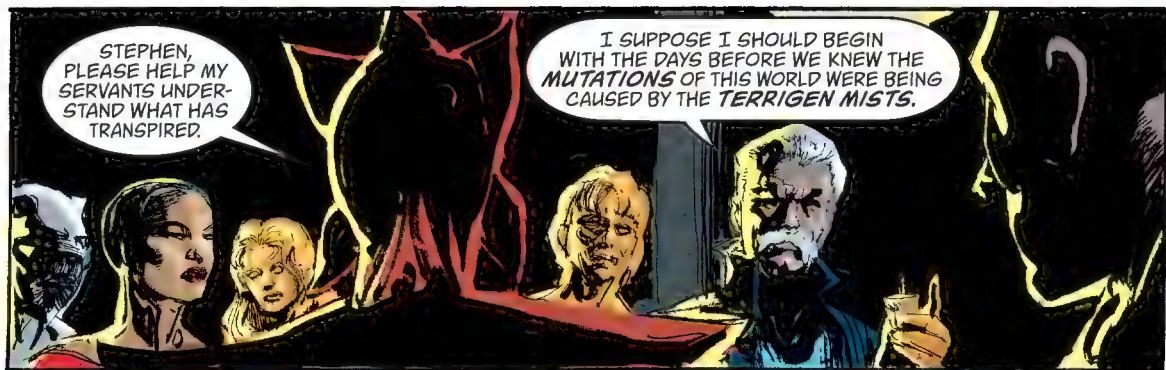
YOU
FORGET
YOURSELF,
KENDO.

NO, HE
SPEAKS FOR **ALL**
OF US, "LORD"
SUNFIRE.



I DON'T CARE
MUCH FOR YOUR **SARCASM**,
BANZAI. AND KENDO DOES
NOT SPEAK FOR ALL OF
YOU...I DO.

OR HAVE YOU
FORGOTTEN?



STEPHEN,
PLEASE HELP MY
SERVANTS UNDER-
STAND WHAT HAS
TRANSPIRED.

I SUPPOSE I SHOULD BEGIN
WITH THE DAYS BEFORE WE KNEW THE
MUTATIONS OF THIS WORLD WERE BEING
CAUSED BY THE **TERRIGEN MISTS**.



EVERYONE
WAS MUTATED, EVEN MY
LOYAL SERVANT **WONG**. I
WAS BUT ONE OF THE MANY
SCAPEGOATS THE
WORLD HAD TURNED
UPON.

NO ONE
KNEW WHAT HAD
HAPPENED...WHY
EVERYONE WAS
TRANSFORMING INTO
BEASTS AND
MONSTERS.

IT WOULD BE
EASY TO SAY THAT
THE MUTATION MADE HIM
BETRAY ME, MUTATED
HIS ALLEGIANCES, BUT
THAT'S NOT EXACTLY
TRUE.

"WONG'S MUTATION
WAS **HIDDEN**
FROM ME..."

"...OR PERHAPS IT WAS
ONLY THAT I WAS SO
PREOCCUPIED
WITH THE CHANGES
OVERWHELMING MY
FELLOW MAN."



"WONG HAD A *NEW MASTER*.

"ONE WHO PROMISED HIM A *WORLD OF HIS OWN* TO RULE, LIKE HE HAD SO MANY OTHERS.

"ONE WHO CLAIMED TO UNDERSTAND THE *FRUSTRATIONS* OF BEING A SERVANT. OR A SON.

"*MEPHISTO*.

"WONG'S FIRST ACT OF OBEDIENCE TO MEPHISTO WAS TO DRAW CLEA'S AFFECTIONS *AWAY* FROM ME.

"I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN THAT OVER ALL THE YEARS HE SERVED ME, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN EASY TO LEARN SOMETHING AS SIMPLE AS AN *INFATUATION SPELL*."

"*LOKI* WAS THE OBJECT OF CLEA'S NEW UNBRIDLED LUST, NOT YET AWARE OF THE *MAGIC* THAT CONTROLLED HIS OWN DESTINY."

IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, WE HAVE *ALL* BEEN CURSED.

NO ONE IS A STRANGER TO DECEIT.



"HAVE YOU HEARD THE BELIEF THAT
IF YOU DREAM YOUR OWN DEATH
WHILE YOU SLEEP, YOU WILL **NEVER**
WAKE UP?"



"IT WAS A **SIMPLE**
SPELL, REALLY."

I
DESERVE
MORE.



"SHE **KILLED** ME."



"RIGHT THROUGH
THE **HEART**."

"I LOVED HER, YET ALWAYS
ACTED AS IF SHE WERE NOTHING
BUT **MY APPRENTICE**."



"PART OF
WONG'S
DILIGENCE
WAS TO MAKE
CERTAIN
MY **BODY**
SURVIVED.

"MEPHISTO COULDN'T
RISK MY **PHYSICAL**
DEATH.

"I WOULD HAVE THEN BEEN
POWERFUL ENOUGH TO BE A
REAL THREAT IN THAT
REALM OF GHOSTS.

"AS IT WAS, I COULD
DO **NOTHING** WHILE
MY BODY STILL SUR-
VIVED ON EARTH.

"SO WONG FED AND NOURISHED
MY COMATOSE REMNANTS TO
SUSTAIN MY USELESSNESS.

"IT WAS WONG WHO WAS
NOW FORCED TO **CARE**
FOR ME ONCE AGAIN.

"WONG HAD WANTED A
WORLD OF HIS OWN...
BUT THE DEVIL GAVE
HIM **BEDPAN DUTY.**"

"WHEN **BRUCE BANNER** CAME TO MY PRISON REALM IN SEARCH OF AN ANSWER TO THE QUESTIONS RAISED IN HIS DREAMS, I REVEALED THE **DECEPTION** THAT TRAPPED ME THERE.

"AT LEAST WHAT I KNEW AT THE TIME...**WONG'S** FAUSTIAN AGENDA WAS HIDDEN EVEN FROM **ME**.

"**THOR**, ANGERED BY HIS BROTHER'S INVOLVEMENT AND **CLEA'S** DECEPTION, BANISHED HER TO **ASGARD**, WHERE SHE STILL REMAINS.

"A PRISONER IN **HEAVEN** AS SURELY AS I WAS A PRISONER IN **HELL**.

"I SAID EARLIER THAT **WONG'S** MUTATION WAS NOT TO BECOME **EVIL** OR **PROUD**. YOU REMEMBER HIM AS AN **ALLY**.

"AS A **FRIEND**.

"UNKNOWN TO ANYONE ON THIS PLANET, **WONG** WAS LIVING **TWO LIVES**.

"HE WAS A CONFIDANT TO **XEN** AS WELL AS THE **RED RONIN** IN THE **TONG OF CREEL**.

"A MAN OF **TWIN PURPOSES**."

"ADAM WARLOCK **KILLED** WONG SHORTLY AFTER HIS SECRET MUTATION WAS AT LAST REVEALED.

"WONG WAS BOTH OUR **FRIEND** AND **ENEMY** AT THE SAME TIME. PERHAPS THIS IS WHY I DIDN'T SENSE HIS BETRAYAL.

"FOR WHEN WONG SERVED ME, WHEN HE KEPT MY BODY ALIVE, HE WAS FAITHFUL AS **EVER**...JUST AS MEPHISTO KNEW HE WOULD BE.

SHALLA-BAL! IT'S YOU!

OH, NORRIN! I PROMISED YOU I'D BE HERE WAITING!

"BUT EVEN AFTER THE DEFEAT OF DEATH AND THE LIBERATION OF SOULS, MY STORY WAS **STILL** NOT OVER.

"THE NEW **PARADISE** THAT MAR-VELL PROMISED TO BUILD FOR THE DEAD WASN'T FOR **ME** TO SEE. MAR-VELL SENT ME **BACK**."

YOU WERE ALL **WITNESSES** TO MY RETURN. I DON'T THINK I HAVE TO TELL YOU HOW BADLY I NEEDED TO **WAKE UP**.

WE WERE ALL **PAWNS** IN MEPHISTO'S GAME, WE ALL HAD OUR **PARTS** TO PLAY.

I HAVE RETURNED **TOO LATE** TO SAVE WONG...

...BUT I WILL SAVE MY WIFE, REGARDLESS OF THE **WRONG** SHE'S DONE.

ANY QUESTIONS?

YEAH, YOU GONNA EAT THAT?



YOU UNDERSTAND, WE WILL REMAIN **HIDDEN** AND CAN NOT SHOW OURSELVES IN ASGARD. TO DO SO WOULD BRING ODIN AND THE REST OF THE GOLDEN REALM DOWN UPON YOU.

ARE YOU READY, STEPHEN?

YES.

LET'S HOPE SO.



WE FOUND OURSELVES IN A WORLD OF **SNOW** AND **ICE**. I WAS TEMPTED TO STOP, TO RETURN TO EARTH AND GIVE UP COMPLETELY, BUT I'D LIVED AS A **GHOST** FOR TOO LONG.

WE'RE HERE? THIS IS IT? IT'S **SNOW**?



WE ARE IN **JOTUNHEIM**, THE MOUNTAINS BELOW THE GREAT CITY.

BELOW? ARE WE GOING TO THE CITY?

NO, MANTIS. ODIN WON'T KEEP CLEA IN THE CITY. HER MAGIC MIGHT **INFECT** THE ILLUSION.



WHAT ILLUSION?

EVERYTHING YOU **SEE HERE** IS AN ILLUSION.

EVERYTHING WE ARE DOING HERE WILL BE AN ATTEMPT TO WREST **REALITY** FROM **LIE**.



BEFORE WE CONTINUE, I **THANK YOU** FOR FOLLOWING ME THIS FAR.

WHAT STEPHEN FAILED TO MENTION WAS THAT HE MET **MY FATHER** IN THE REALM OF THE DEAD.



TELL THEM WHAT HE SAID, STEPHEN. SHOW THEM WHAT YOU **SHOWED ME**.



YOU ARE A **GHOST** HERE, STRANGE. YOU **HAUNT** THE DEAD, REMINDING THOSE OF US WILLING TO HEAR THAT THERE IS LIFE **ELSEWHERE**. THAT WE ARE DEAD.

SPEAKING OF ILLUSIONS, I DON'T LIKE BEING **MANIPULATED**.

THAT...THAT IS YOUR **FATHER'S VOICE**.



I HAVE BEEN A MAN OF **MISPLACED PASSIONS** AND HAVE FOUGHT FOR PEACE WHILE **SECRETLY LONGING** FOR WAR.

I HAVE A **SON**, BUT **NO WIFE**. I HAVE A **BROKEN FAMILY** AND WOULD DO **ANYTHING** TO RESTORE ANY MAN'S FAMILY, ONLY BECAUSE I NOW **VALUE** IT SO.



I **KNOW** MY FATHER. I HEAR HIM IN THOSE WORDS AS WELL AS HIS VOICE. OUR ROLE HERE, AS ON EARTH, IS THAT OF **RESTORATION**.

HONOR ME AS YOU WOULD **HIM**.

THE **RESENTMENT XEN** FEELS TOWARDS SUNFIRE DOESN'T NEED TO BE AUDIBLE TO BE HEARD. IT WAS LORD SUNFIRE WHO ELECTED TO HAVE **WONG** JOIN XEN.

IT WAS LORD SUNFIRE WHO BROUGHT THEM **HERE**.



THIS IS LIKE **TIBET**. SIR NAYLAND ONCE--

QUIET. WHERE THERE IS **SNOW**, THERE ARE **SNOW GIANTS**.



FOOD!

I KNEW I **SMELLED SOMETHING!** HARDLY ENOUGH TO FILL **ONE BELLY**, THOUGH.

IT'S ENOUGH! YOU COULD **LOSE SOME WEIGHT**, ANYHOW.



LOOK, THERE'S A **MAGE** AMONGST THEM!

WE CAN WAIT IN HERE UNTIL THEY GET BORED, LORD SUNFIRE...OR UNTIL WE CAN **STRIKE BACK**.

IN A WAY, STEPHEN, THIS IS ALMOST **CHEATING**.

I SUGGEST WE **STRIKE QUICKLY** AND NOT DRAW ATTENTION TO OURSELVES.



FINALLY!



I DON'T THINK
WE CAN COVER THIS
ONE UP, LOKI. FATHER
KNOWS WHEN WE DIE.
HE ALLOWS IT. LOOK
AT BALDER...

THOR,
DON'T CALL HIM
FATHER. IT GIVES
HIM STRENGTH...

...BROTHER.



IT WAS **UNLIKELY** THAT THESE SUPER-POWERED INDIVIDUALS WOULD FORM A **TEAM**. I KNEW WHO TAO WAS, BUT DIDN'T UNDERSTAND HIS **MASK**.

AND BANZAI WAS AMERICAN, NOT JAPANESE AT ALL. EACH HAD THEIR OWN **MYSTERY**, THEIR OWN ORIGIN OF MEMBERSHIP.

YOU AREN'T LIKE THE OTHERS, TORA. YOU'VE BEEN USING YOUR POWERS **LONGER** THAN MOST OF XEN.

HOW DID YOU COME TO **ACQUIRE** THEM?

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, TIGER, BUT WHEN WE START HEADING DOWN THE OTHER SIDE OF THESE PEAKS, I DON'T WANT **SUMO** BEHIND ME.

QUIET, BANZAI. I WANT TO GET THROUGH THIS AND **RETURN HOME**. I FEAR FOR JAPAN IN OUR ABSENCE.

MY FIRST MEMORIES, DOCTOR STRANGE, WERE OF BEING **ON FIRE**.

"I HAVE LEARNED THAT IT WAS THE MOMENT I WAS **EXPOSED TO THE AIR** THAT I BURST INTO FLAME.

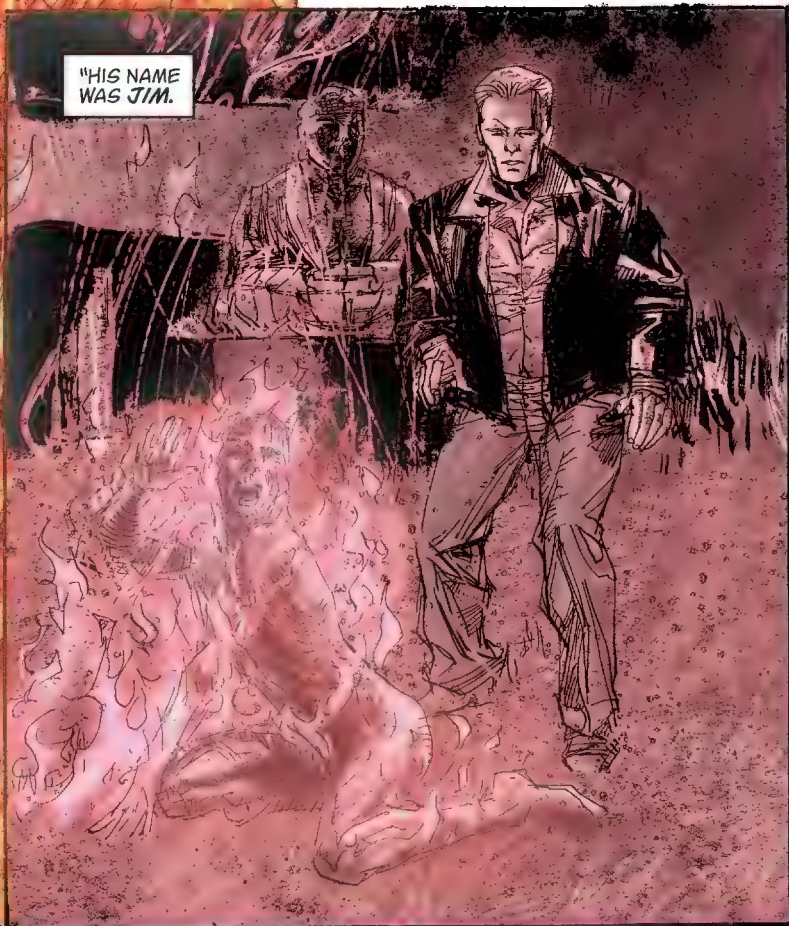
"I NEED NOT TELL YOU WHAT HAPPENED TO MY **MOTHER**."

I HID IN THE IMPERIAL GARDENS FOR **YEARS...**

...AND I WOULD HAVE **KILLED MYSELF** IF IT WASN'T FOR THE AMERICAN.

WHAT
AMERICAN?

"HIS NAME
WAS JIM."

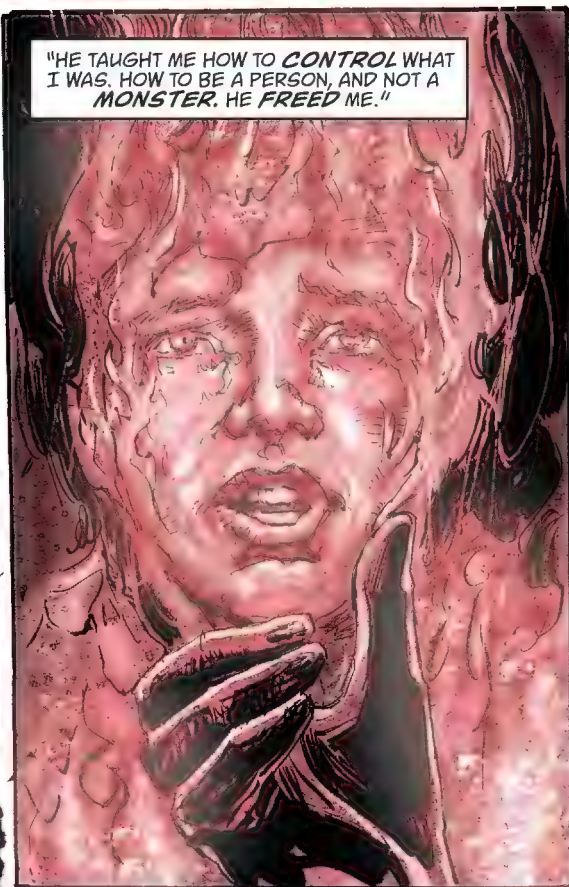


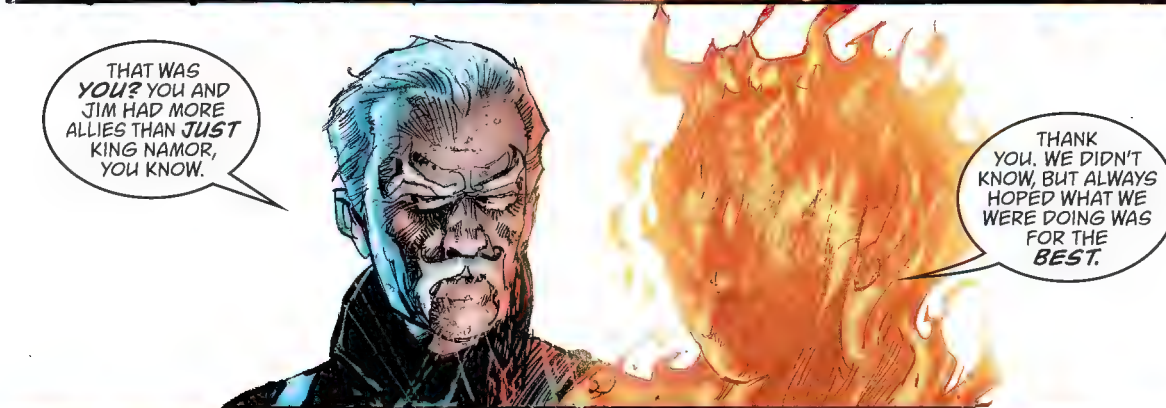
"HE SAID HE JUST WANTED
TO *TOUCH* MY CHEEK."

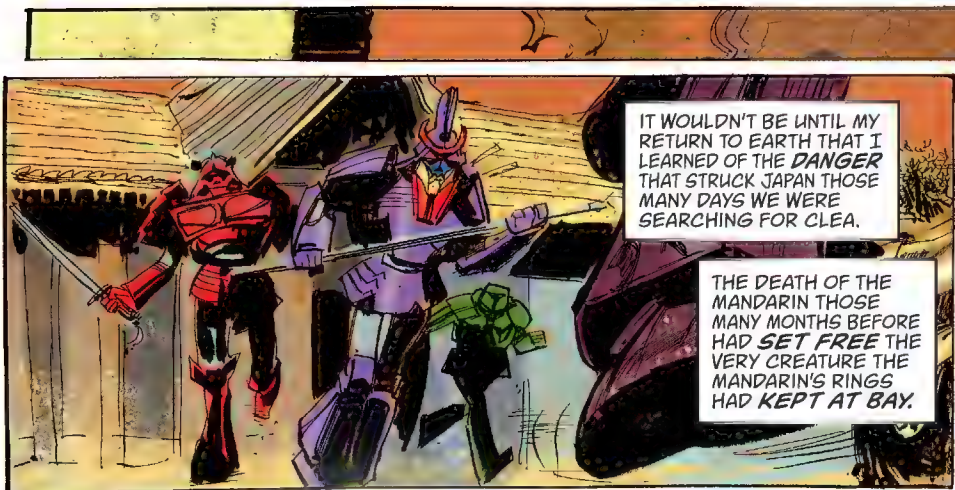
"AND I... I WANTED
HIM TO. I WANTED
TO BE TOUCHED. IF
ONLY FOR *ONCE*."

"BUT I WAS
AFRAID OF
WHAT WOULD
HAPPEN TO
HIM."

"HE TAUGHT ME HOW TO *CONTROL* WHAT
I WAS. HOW TO BE A PERSON, AND NOT A
MONSTER. HE *FREED* ME."







IT WOULDN'T BE UNTIL MY RETURN TO EARTH THAT I LEARNED OF THE **DANGER** THAT STRUCK JAPAN THOSE MANY DAYS WE WERE SEARCHING FOR CLEA.

THE DEATH OF THE MANDARIN THOSE MANY MONTHS BEFORE HAD **SET FREE** THE VERY CREATURE THE MANDARIN'S RINGS HAD **KEPT AT BAY**.



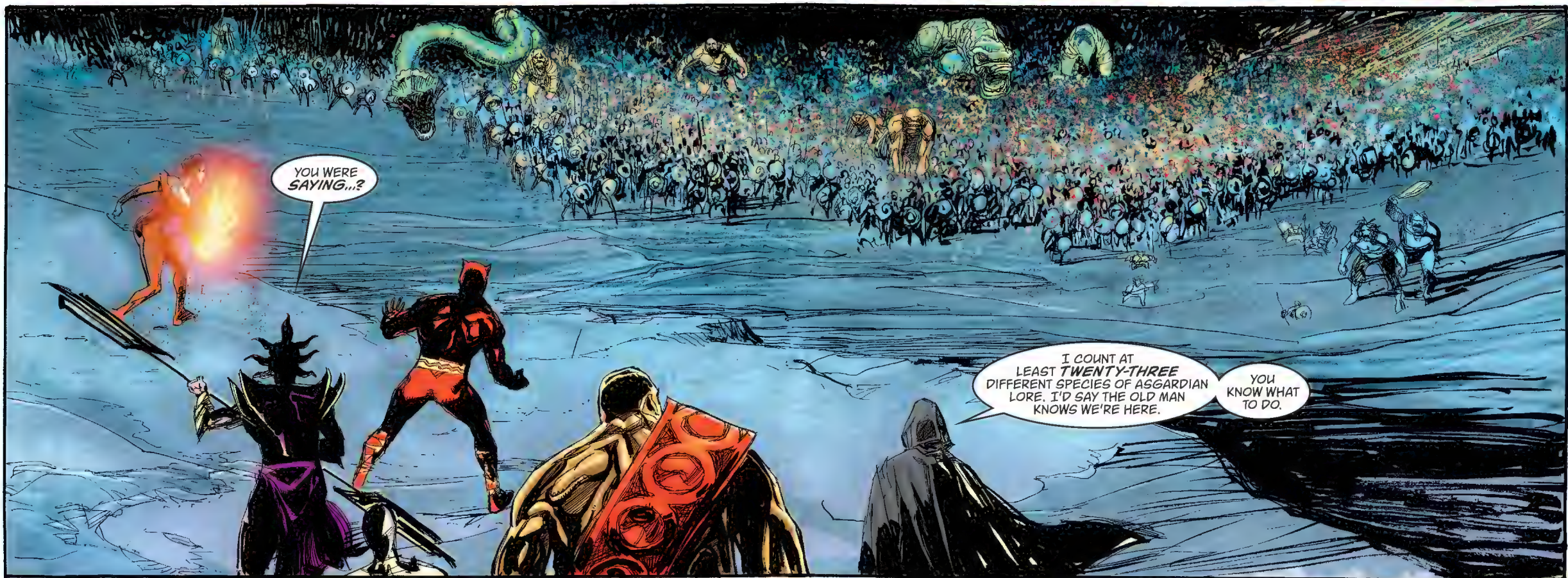
THE GHOST OF THE DRAGON, **FIN FANG FOOM**.



THE
CAVE, WE
PASSED IT
EARLIER.

WHAT NOW,
JUNIOR?

DOWN THE
SLOPE!



YOU WERE
SAYING...?

I COUNT AT
LEAST **TWENTY-THREE**
DIFFERENT SPECIES OF ASGARDIAN
LORE. I'D SAY THE OLD MAN
KNOWS WE'RE HERE.

YOU
KNOW WHAT
TO DO.

"SAVE THE WORLD."

THAT WAS THE CHARGE
GIVEN TO THE **SEVEN
SILVER SAMURAI** IN
XEN'S ABSENCE.

BUT SAVE IT FROM **WHAT?**
HOW COULD ANYONE SEE
SOMETHING LIKE **THIS**
COMING?

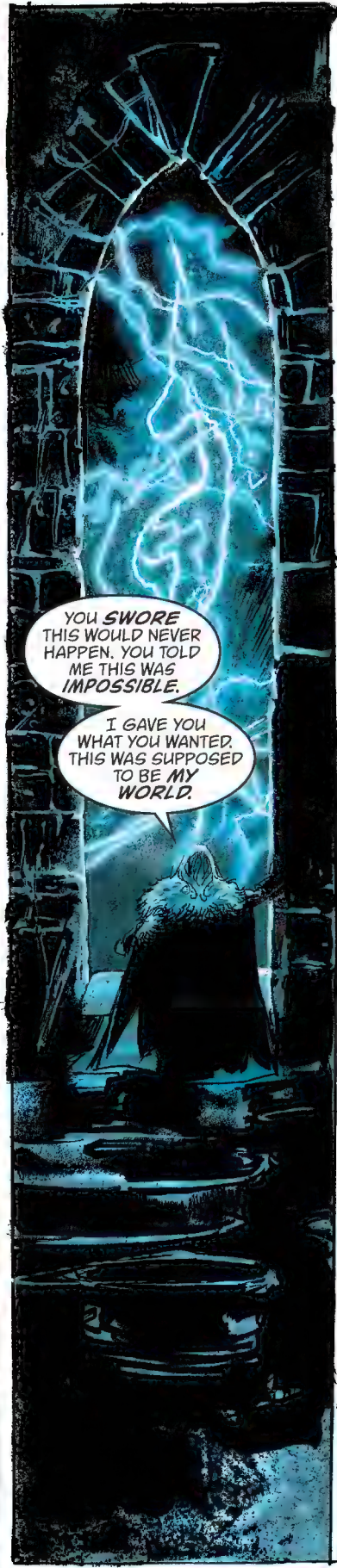




I'M
ASSUMING
WE DON'T HAVE
TO **HIDE OUR
FEATURES**
ANYMORE.

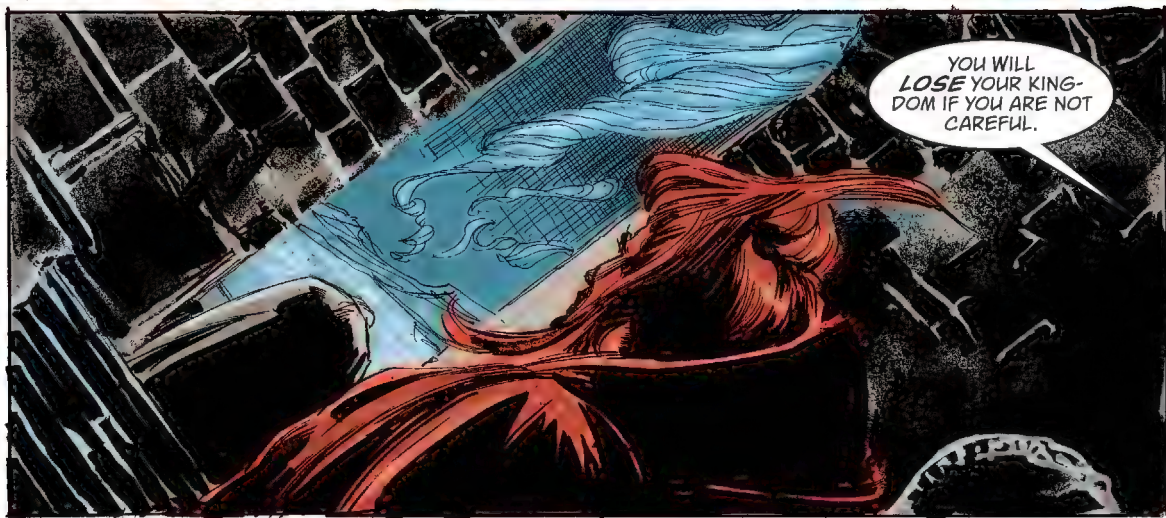
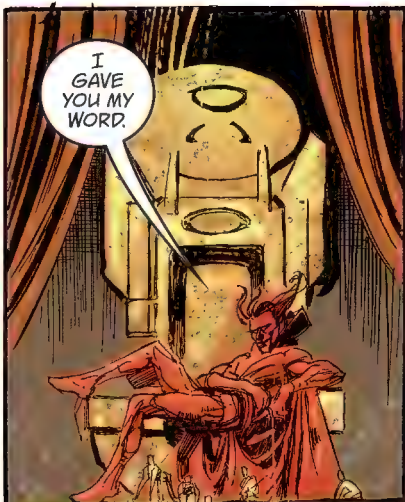


**YOU
DID THIS,
ODIN! YOU
CALLED THIS
DOWN! YOU
MADE ME
WANT TO BE
WORTHY!**



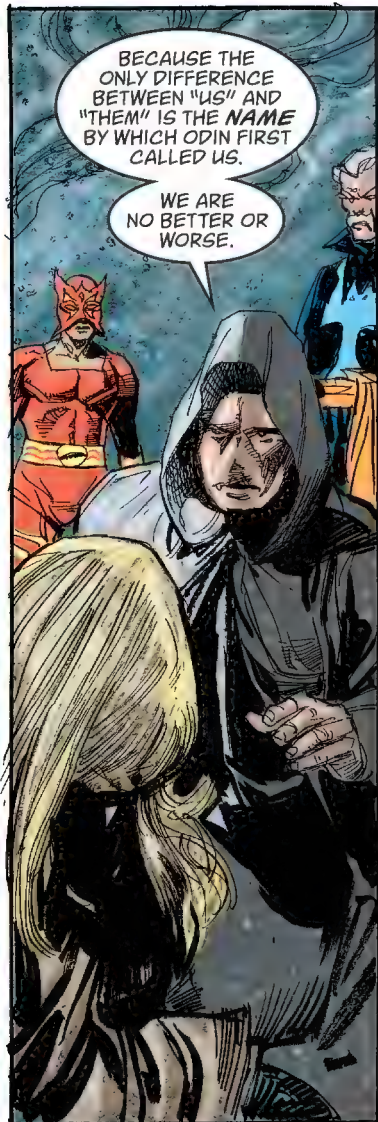
**YOU *SWORE*
THIS WOULD NEVER
HAPPEN. YOU TOLD
ME THIS WAS
IMPOSSIBLE.**

**I GAVE YOU
WHAT YOU WANTED.
THIS WAS SUPPOSED
TO BE *MY*
WORLD.**





WHY SO
SAD, THUNDERFIST?
YOU FRIED 'EM
GOOD.

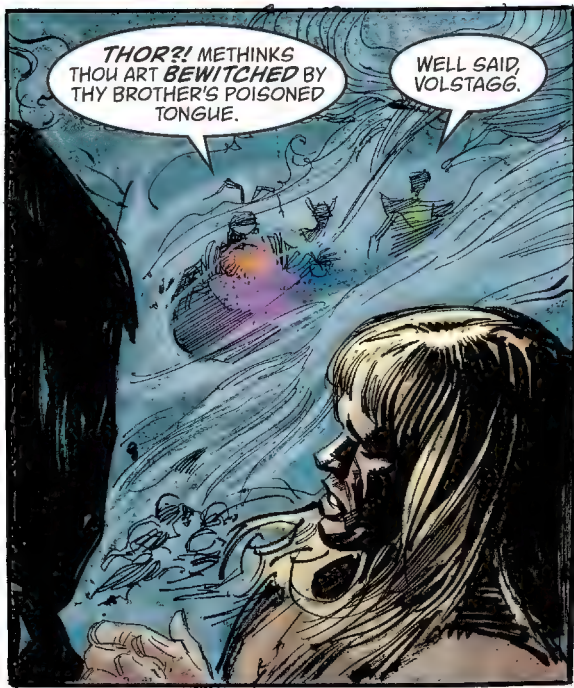


BECAUSE THE
ONLY DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN "US" AND
"THEM" IS THE NAME
BY WHICH ODIN FIRST
CALLED US.

WE ARE
NO BETTER OR
WORSE.



THIS ISN'T
ON OUR HANDS,
THOUGH. IT'S **ODIN'S**
FAULT AND HE IS GOING
TO **PAY THE**
PRICE.



THOR?! METHINKS
THOU ART **BEWITCHED** BY
THY BROTHER'S POISONED
TONGUE.

WE'LL SAID,
VOLSTAGG.



COME! LET
US *DRINK* AND
TOAST THE CHARMS
OF WENCHES USED
AND DISCARDED!



MY FRIENDS...

REMEMBER WHO YOU
ARE. THERE ARE NO *WARRIORS*
THREE APART FROM THE ONES
THAT FIRST LIVED IN ODIN'S
IMAGINATION.

HOLD
YOUR HAMMER...
THIS ONE'S
MINE.



OUT
OF MY WAY,
FATTY!

I DO NOT UNDERSTAND
THIS TERM "*FATTY*," BUT STAND THEE
DOWN, MORTAL OF GIRTH, FOR THINE
OWN VOLUME BE NO MATCH FOR THE
GLORY AND THE ECSTASY OF MY
VOLUMINOUSNESS!

IT HAD COME
DOWN TO
MOUNTAINS
MOVING
MOUNTAINS.

WE HAD COME TO A
HEAVEN WITH MORE
REASONS THAN
RESCUE. LORD SUN-
FIRE HAD TO PROVE
HIMSELF WORTHY OF
LEADING *MEN* WHO
MIGHT HAVE BECOME
GODS.

THOR AND LOKI WERE
ATTEMPTING TO CHANGE
ALL THAT THEY WERE, ONLY
BECAUSE SOMEONE OTHER
THAN THEMSELVES HAD
GIVEN THEM *DEFINITION*.

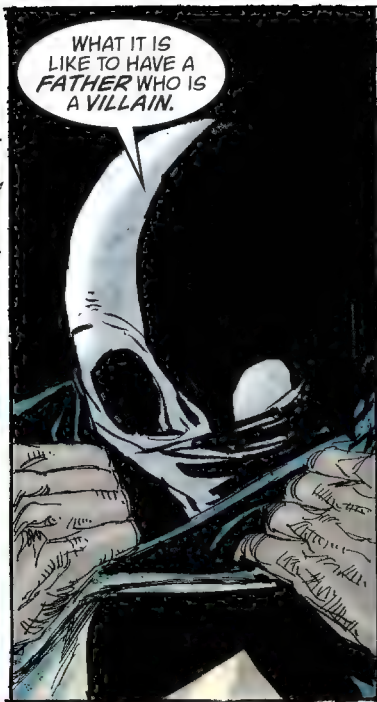
I HAD COME SEEKING TO LOVE
THE WOMAN WHOSE LAST WORDS
AND ACTIONS WERE MOTIVATED BY
A MIX OF *APATHY* AND *HATRED*.

THAT'S WHAT WE WERE UP
AGAINST. THAT'S WHAT WE
WERE, MOUNTAINS UNWILLING
TO BE MOVED IN OUR *PUR-
POSE* AND *RESOLVE*.

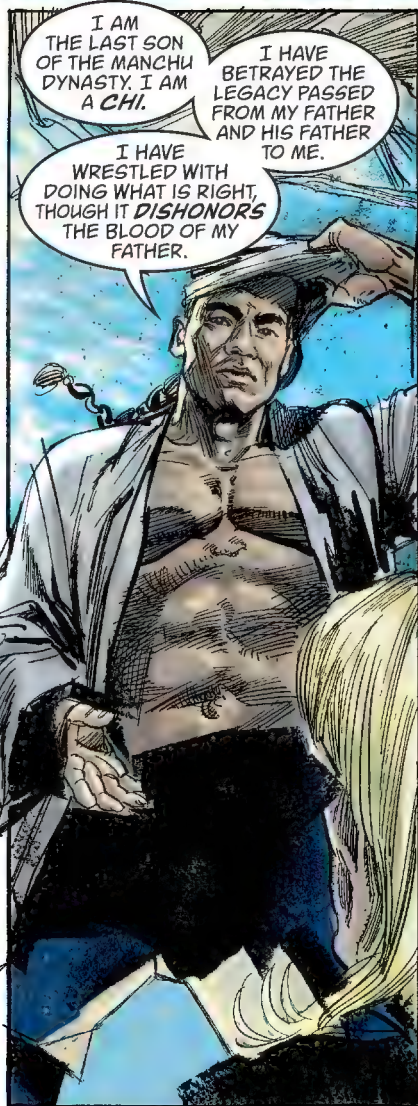


I WANT YOU TO KNOW, THOR, THAT I UNDERSTAND.

I'M SORRY. WHAT DO YOU UNDERSTAND, TAO?



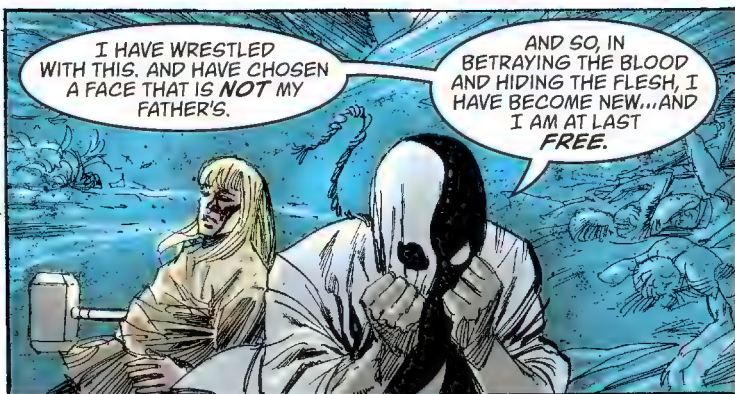
WHAT IT IS LIKE TO HAVE A FATHER WHO IS A VILLAIN.



I AM THE LAST SON OF THE MANCHU DYNASTY. I AM A CHI.

I HAVE BETRAYED THE LEGACY PASSED FROM MY FATHER AND HIS FATHER TO ME.

I HAVE WRESTLED WITH DOING WHAT IS RIGHT, THOUGH IT **DISHONORS** THE BLOOD OF MY FATHER.



I HAVE WRESTLED WITH THIS. AND HAVE CHOSEN A FACE THAT IS **NOT** MY FATHER'S.

AND SO, IN BETRAYING THE BLOOD AND HIDING THE FLESH, I HAVE BECOME NEW...AND I AM AT LAST **FREE**.



I DID NOT... **CHOOSE THE HAMMER.** I DID NOT CHOOSE A **WEAPON OF DESTRUCTION.**

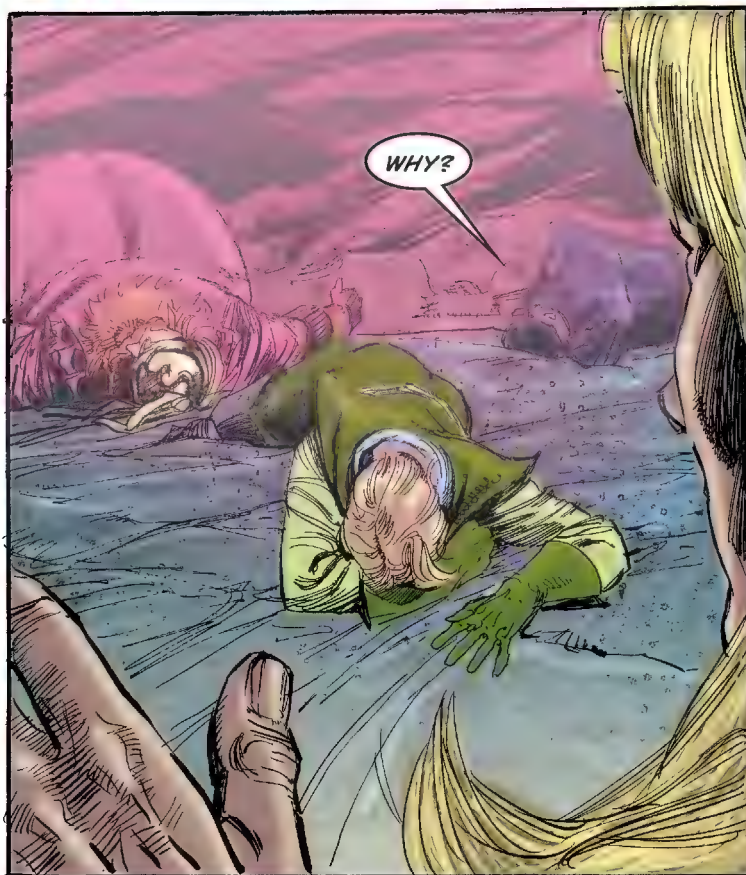
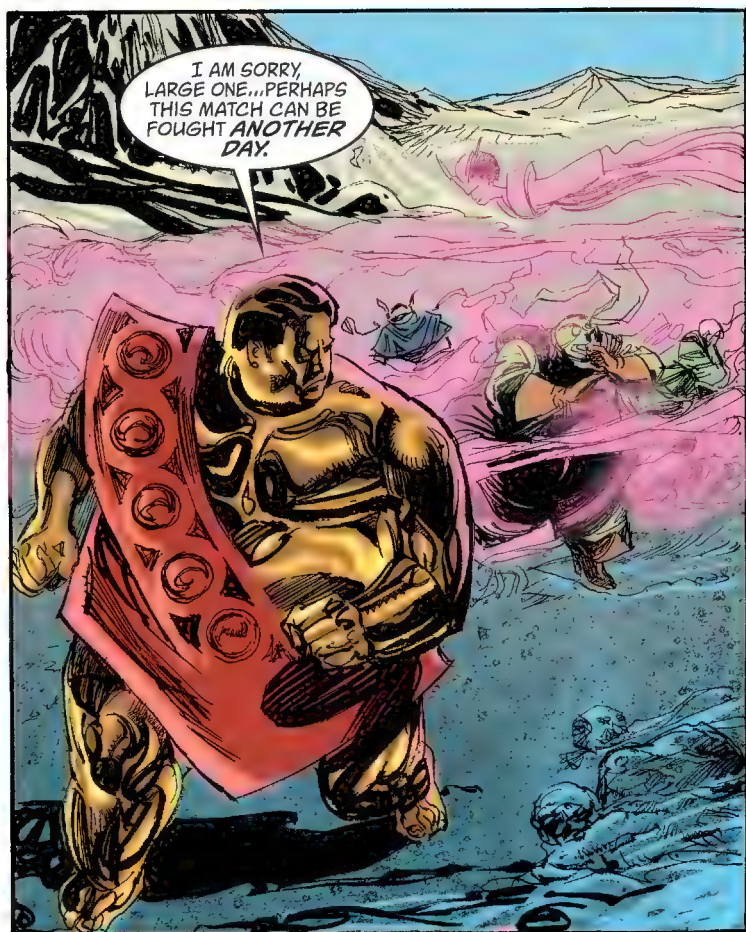


YES, BUT A HAMMER CAN ALSO BE A **TOOL**.

IT CAN **FORGE**.

IT CAN **FORM**.

IT CAN **BUILD**.





VOLSTAGG,
FANDRAL, HOGUN...MY
FRIENDS.

MAY HELA
GRANT THEE THE
FEAST THOU HAST
FOUGHT SO HARD
TO...



THOR,
WHAT ARE YOU
DOING?

STOP TALKING LIKE
THAT. ODIN JUST MOVED THEM
TO HELA'S DOMAIN! NONE OF US
REALLY *DIE*. WE JUST MOVE LIKE
PLAYING PIECES ON ODIN'S
GAME BOARD!

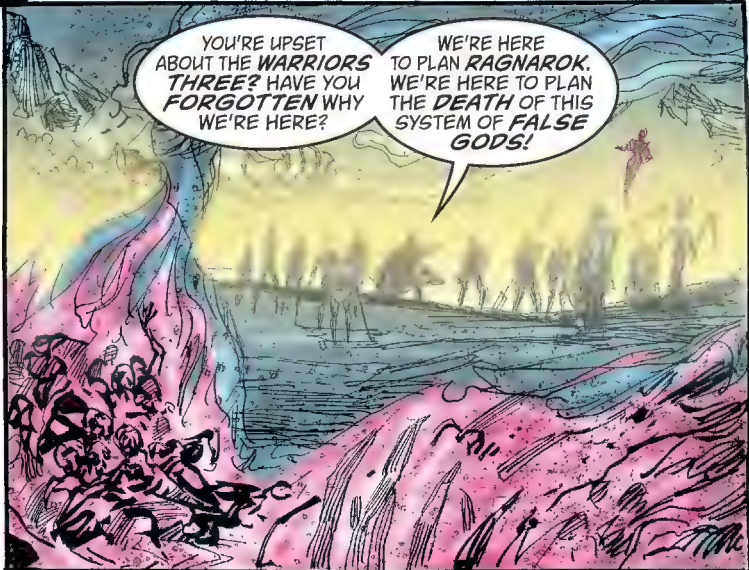


AND YOU'RE PLAYING
RIGHT ALONG. THAT'S WHAT ODIN
WANTS! HE WANTS YOU TO BE *LOST*
IN YOUR *GRIEF*

THIS IS JUST
ANOTHER *TRICK* TO
BRING YOU BACK INTO
HIS PALM.

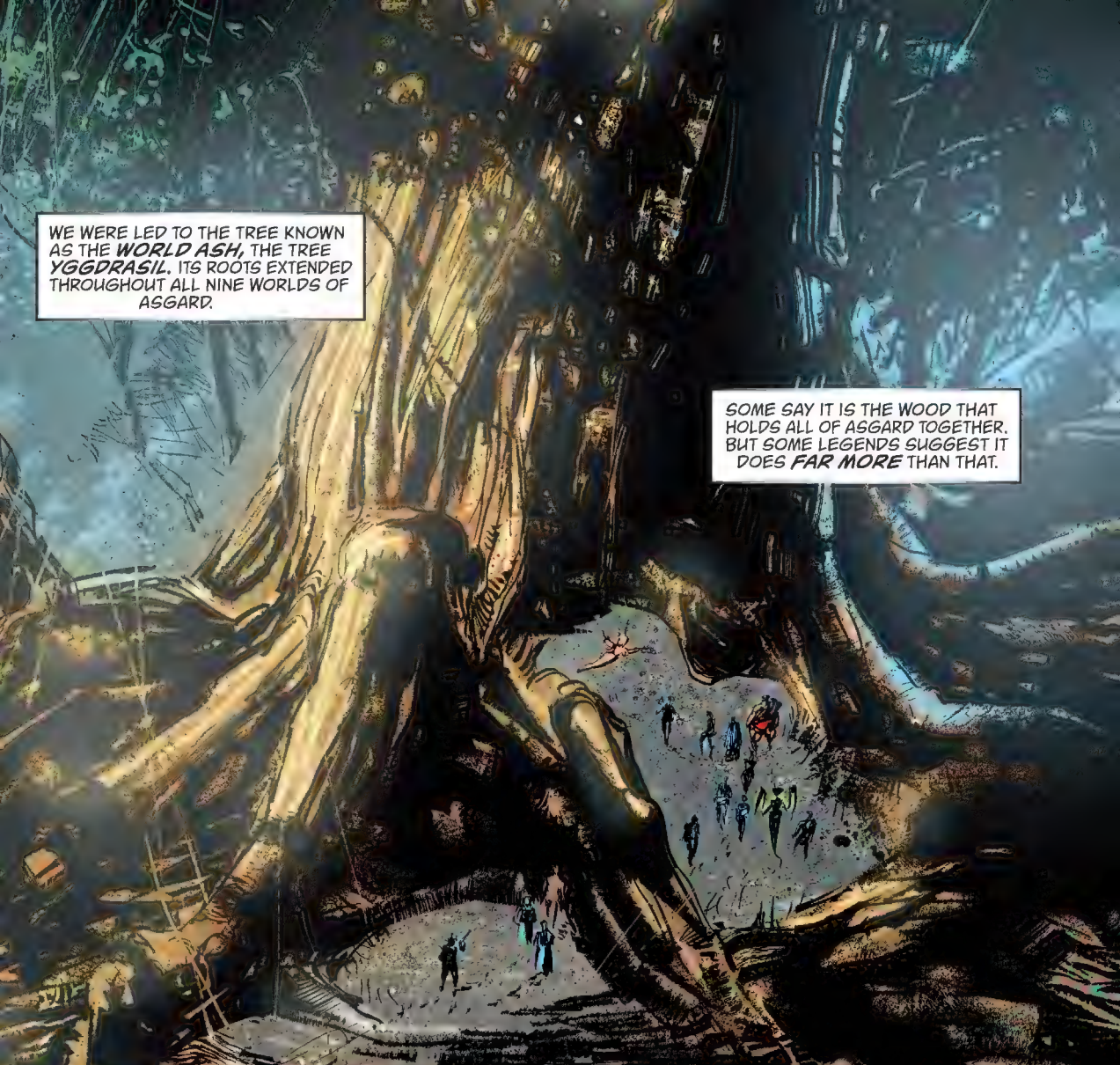


CLEA.
WE'RE HERE FOR
CLEA.



YOU'RE UPSET
ABOUT THE *WARRIORS*
THREE? HAVE YOU
FORGOTTEN WHY
WE'RE HERE?

WE'RE HERE
TO PLAN *RAGNAROK*.
WE'RE HERE TO PLAN
THE *DEATH* OF THIS
SYSTEM OF *FALSE*
GODS!



WE WERE LED TO THE TREE KNOWN AS THE **WORLD ASH**, THE TREE **YGGDRASIL**. ITS ROOTS EXTENDED THROUGHOUT ALL NINE WORLDS OF ASGARD.

SOME SAY IT IS THE WOOD THAT HOLDS ALL OF ASGARD TOGETHER. BUT SOME LEGENDS SUGGEST IT DOES **FAR MORE** THAN THAT.

I SHOULD BE ABLE TO **SENSE** CLEA'S WHEREABOUTS BY TOUCHING THE TREE.

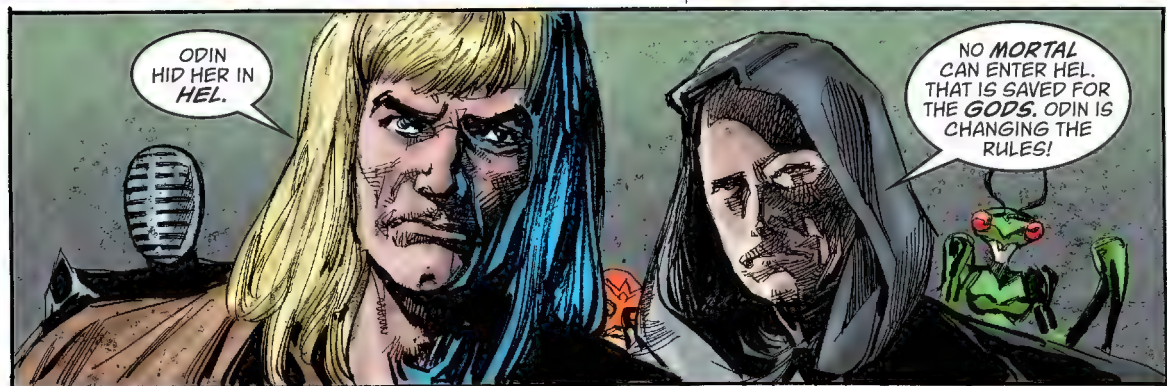
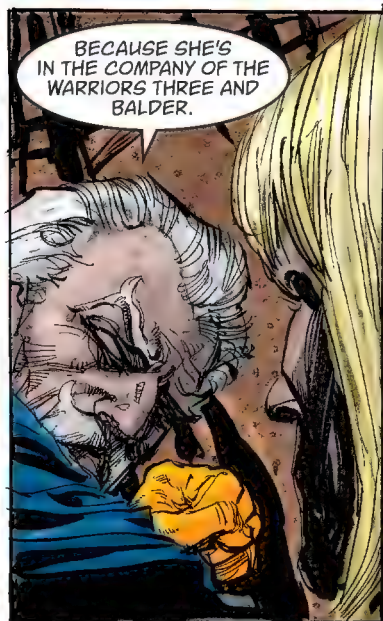
TRACE THESE ROOTS...

...TO WHERE SHE IS.

NOTHING.

I CANNOT FEEL HER. I'D USE MY **ASTRAL FORM**, BUT I CAN'T LIVE LIFE AS A **GHOST**. NOT ANYMORE.

EVERY TIME I LEFT MY BODY, I LEFT **HER**, AS WELL.



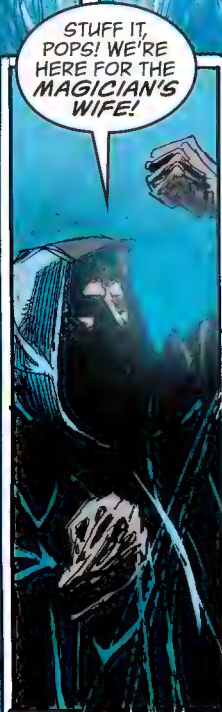


THIS IS
MY REALM, MORTALS!
WHY HAVE THEE RISKED
MY **WRATH?**

ALLOW ME.
I'M MORE OF THE
DIPLOMATIC TYPE.
REMEMBER THE
PLAN.



WHO
ARE **YOU**
TO **SPEAK**
TO ME THIS
WAY?



STUFF IT,
POPS! WE'RE
HERE FOR THE
MAGICIAN'S
WIFE!



WHO
ARE **YOU**
TO PRETEND
TO BE **ODIN?**
THERE **IS**
NO ODIN.



YOU RISK THE
LIVES OF **SO MANY, LOKI.**
I CAN BELIEVE THIS FROM
YOU, BUT NOT FROM **THY**
BROTHER **THOR.**

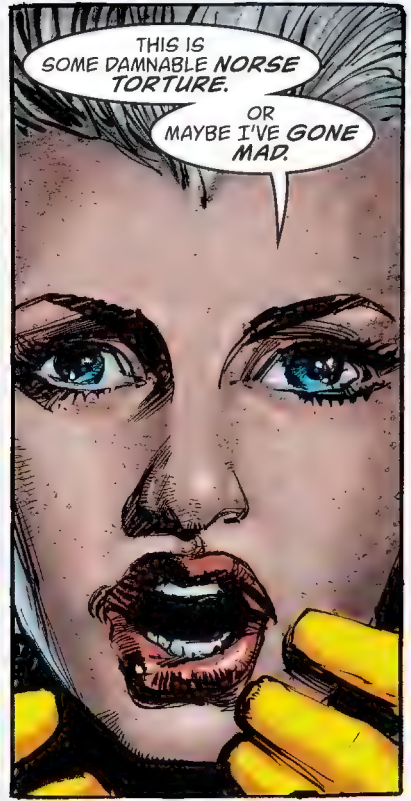






THIS IS AN ILLUSION, ISN'T IT? I'M *IMAGINING* THINGS.

I WAS NEVER A WIFE TO THE *REAL* STEPHEN STRANGE.



THIS IS SOME DAMNABLE *NORSE* TORTURE.

OR MAYBE I'VE GONE *MAD*.



OKAY... I'LL PLAY YOUR GAME.

TELL ME THEN, STRANGE, WHAT MAKES YOU THINK *I'M* YOUR WIFE?

WHY DON'T YOU CALL ME WHAT YOU'VE ALWAYS THOUGHT OF ME *BEFORE*.



ASSISTANT.

ASSOCIATE.

STUDENT.

PET PROJECT.

DISCIPLE.

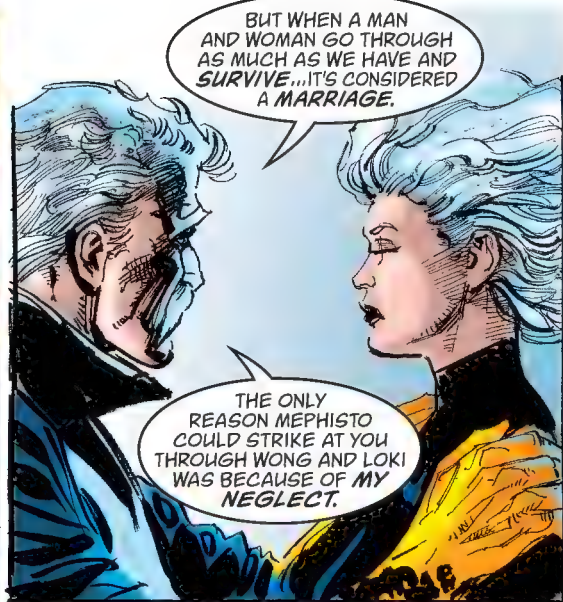


THE *REAL* STEPHEN WOULD HAVE NEVER CALLED ME *WIFE*.



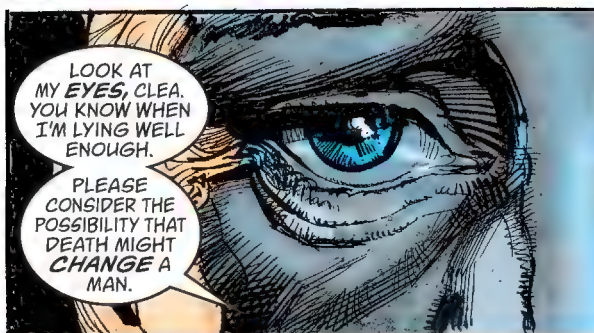
THE REAL
STEPHEN ISN'T EVEN
WORTHY OF THE NAME
HUSBAND.

I DID EVERY-
THING YOU'VE ACCUSED
ME OF AND **MUCH
MORE.**



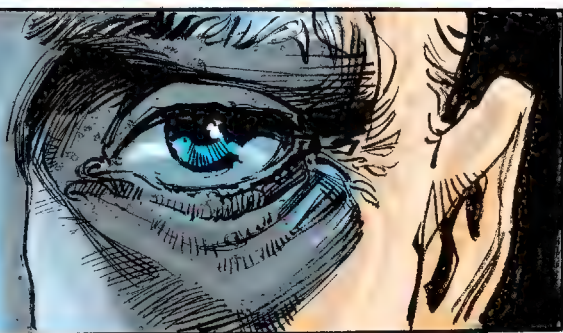
BUT WHEN A MAN
AND WOMAN GO THROUGH
AS MUCH AS WE HAVE AND
SURVIVE... IT'S CONSIDERED
A MARRIAGE.

THE ONLY
REASON MEPHISTO
COULD STRIKE AT YOU
THROUGH WONG AND LOKI
WAS BECAUSE OF MY
NEGLECT.



LOOK AT
MY EYES, CLEA.
YOU KNOW WHEN
I'M LYING WELL
ENOUGH.

PLEASE
CONSIDER THE
POSSIBILITY THAT
DEATH MIGHT
**CHANGE A
MAN.**



I **NEED** YOU.
AND WILL NEVER LEAVE
AGAIN, NOT EVEN THE
SLIGHTEST ASTRAL
PROJECTION. I
PROMISE.



NO.





STOP
GOADING ME,
LOKI. DO YOU
TAKE ME FOR A
FOOL?!

I WOULD
SOONER LEAVE
ASGARD THAN ALLOW
LOKI'S MISCHIEF TO
POISON THE NETHER-
REALMS.

I WANT MY
SON--MY TRUE SON
THOR TO TAKE THE
WENCH'S PLACE.



NO...NOT
THOR. ME! TAKE ME!
THOR'S NOT--



THE PLAN?
DID YOU REALLY
BELIEVE I WAS NOT
AWARE? I, THE
ALL-SEEING
ODIN?

≡CAW≡



NO.

I'M SORRY,
BROTHER...BUT WE
ALL HAVE TO LOSE
SOMETIMES...



NOOOOOO...



...OOOOOOOO!

WE...
WE'RE
BACK ON
EARTH.

WHAT'S
LEFT OF
IT.

HAVING LIVED SO LONG AS AN ASTRAL PROJECTION, I COULD SEE THINGS BOTH *VISIBLE* AND *INVISIBLE*.

I KNEW WHO OUR ENEMY WAS. AND I KNEW HOW TO *DEFEAT* IT. THE SAME WAY I WAS SAVED.

YOUR NATION WILL GATHER TO THANK YOU FOR THIS, LORD SUNFIRE.

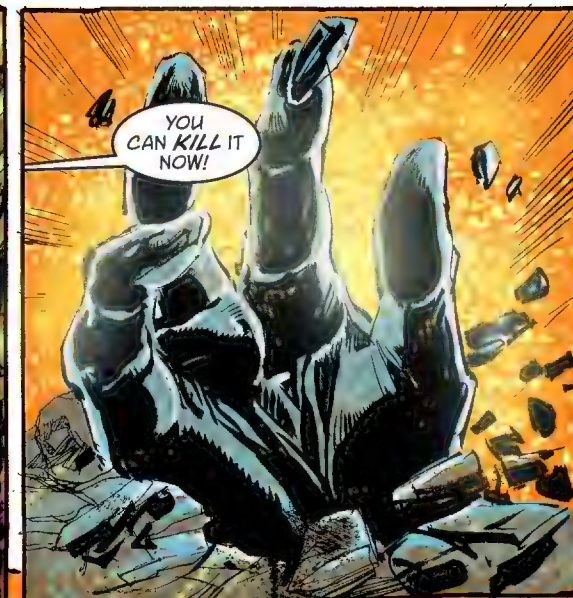
BY THE SPIRIT OF VISHANTI...

WHAT GIVES?

STEPHEN? WHAT HAVE YOU *DONE*?

WHEN I TOLD YOU I WAS TIRED OF LIVING MY LIFE AS A *GHOST*, I MEANT THAT *LITERALLY*, NOT FIGURATIVELY.

EVERY TIME I LEFT MY BODY, I TEMPORARILY *BECAME* A GHOST. THAT'S WHAT GHOSTS ARE--*ASTRAL PROJECTIONS*.



THE BEAST'S
BODY WAS
OLD AND
WEAK.

ITS BONES WERE
ROTTING AND
DECAYED.

ITS FLESH, WHAT WAS
LEFT OF IT, WAS NO
MATCH FOR ANY ONE
MEMBER OF XEN, LET
ALONE ALL OF THEM.

IT DIDN'T LAST LONG.

IN THE END, IT
WASN'T MUCH
OF A VICTORY,
AT ALL.





THIS WAS
YOUR FAULT,
SUNFIRE.

THAT'S
LORD
SUNFIRE.

NOT TO
ME. NOT ANY-
MORE.



LEADING IS
ALMOST AS DIFFICULT
AS BEING A SON. I MY-
SELF NEVER LED.

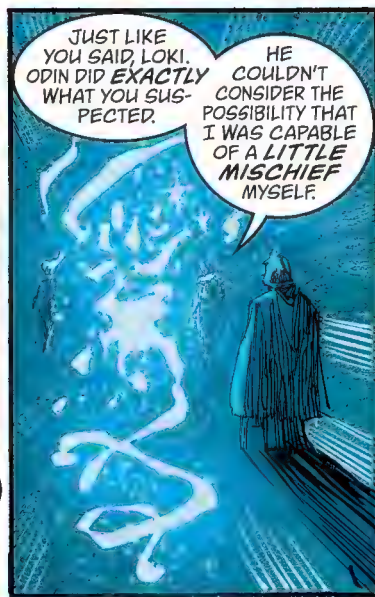
UNTIL A SON
MAKES HIS OWN WAY
IN THE WORLD, WE ARE
ALL JUST GHOSTS OF
OUR FATHERS.



THANK
YOU FOR
YOUR HELP,
CLEA.

I DIDN'T
DO IT FOR YOU,
STEPHEN.

FOR A
SELF-PROCLAIMED
MASTER AND TEACHER,
YOU CAN BE A REAL
IDIOT.



JUST LIKE
YOU SAID, LOKI.
ODIN DID EXACTLY
WHAT YOU SUS-
PECTED.

HE
COULDN'T
CONSIDER THE
POSSIBILITY THAT
I WAS CAPABLE
OF A LITTLE
MISCHIEF
MYSELF.



WHAT
TOOK
YOU SO
LONG?

BALDER
WASN'T WILLING
TO BELIEVE ANYTHING
COULD CHANGE
IN ASSGARD...LET
ALONE HEL.



YOU SHOULD
HAVE SEEN HOW
HAPPY HELA
WAS.



BALDER.

MY LORD
ODIN. I NEVER
HOPED TO LOOK
UPON THY VISAGE
AGAIN.



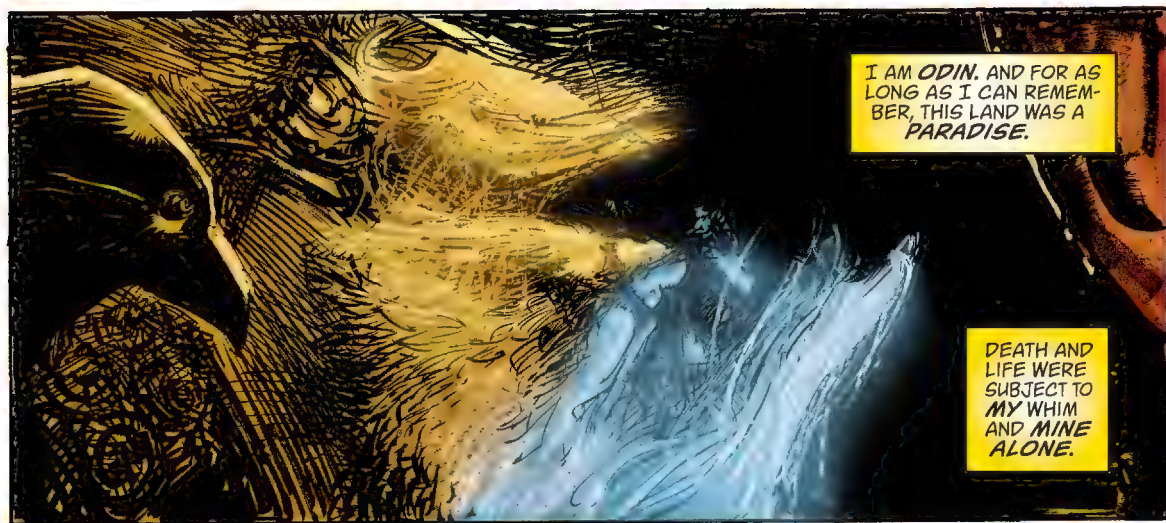
YOUR
SON ENTERED
HEL AND **SET**
US FREE.

THE
WARRORS
THREE, SIF, THE
EXECUTIONER,
LORELEI, HEIMDALL,
TYR, Volla, HODER...
ALL FREE FROM
HELA'S EMBRACE.
EVEN **HELA**
HERSELF.



THIS BETRAYS
THE **FATES** THEMSELVES.
IT STRIKES AT THE ROOT OF
THE VERY **FOUNDATIONS** I
WAS TAUGHT. A **MIRACLE.**
AND MIRACLES ARE NOT
THE HAPPENSTANCE OF
GODS.

HELS
GATES **FELL**
AT THOR'S SPOKEN
WORDS. THY SON
HATH SET THE
CAPTIVES
FREE.



I AM **ODIN.** AND FOR AS
LONG AS I CAN REMEM-
BER, THIS LAND WAS A
PARADISE.

DEATH AND
LIFE WERE
SUBJECT TO
MY WHIM
AND **MINE**
ALONE.

BUT A SERPENT HAS ENTERED
MY PARADISE, MY GOLDEN
REALM...ONE THAT WAS FORE-
TOLD *LONG AGO*.



MARVEL

3

PARADISE



**KRUEGER
BRAITHWAITE
REINHOLD**

“Kyle?”

“Yes, Aaron?”

“You’re in touch with a force, the cosmic consciousness. What’s it like to know everything at once? If I’ve learned anything as this Watchman of Earth, it’s that I don’t want to be like the Watcher before me. I don’t want to assume that I know everything, especially when someone like you already does.”

“It’s not like a book with every page opened at the same time, Aaron. It’s more like knowing what page to read when I need a specific piece of knowledge.”

“So you access *whatever* you want to know *when* you need to know it?”

“Exactly. If I want to see the wedding of Medusa and King Britain here on Earth, I can. If I want to know of the coming attack on Frank Castle’s family in the Realm of the Dead, I merely turn my thoughts there. If I want to know of the new Paradise, and of Mar-Vell’s guardians, it is available with the desire to witness it. But I cannot read more than one page at a time, Aaron. I am still limited and in some ways, even more limited than others.”

“What others? Who?”

“Mr. S, for example. Scott Summers, leader of the X-Men.”

“I know who Scott is, Kyle, but Cyclops has little in the way of knowledge. How is your experience of the expanding metaphysical universe less than his?”

“Because he still shares a psychic rapport with Phoenix, a being older than the universe itself. A being with an agenda that predates Mar-Vell and the Paradise in the heart of the Negative Zone.”

PARADISE X

I S S U E 3

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"WHEN JEAN GREY WITNESSED THE DEATH OF HER BEST FRIEND, HER LATENT TELEPATHIC AND TELEKINETIC ABILITIES WERE AWAKENED, AND HER CELESTIAL DESTINY WAS REALIZED."

"AND IN THAT MOMENT OF MUTANT AWAKENING, SHE WAS OVERWHELMED WITH THE PAIN OF THE ENTIRE WORLD'S POPULATION."

"SHE WAS A LODESTONE FOR **BROKEN HEARTS**, SO TO SPEAK. SHE COULD NOT CONTROL THE INFLOW OF FEELINGS FROM AROUND THE WORLD."

"SHE COULD HEAR THOUGHTS NOW. SENSE FEAR. SADNESS. MISTRUST. SHE WAS A **MUTANT**."

"BUT THOSE SHE ONCE CALLED FRIENDS THOUGHT SHE WAS A **WITCH**."

"JEAN WAS AFRAID SHE WAS GOING TO **DIE**."

"HER CRIES FOR HELP, INAUDIBLE AS THEY WERE, WERE HEARD BY THE MOST POWERFUL TELEPATH ON THE PLANET, A MUTANT KNOWN AS **CHARLES XAVIER**."

"THE FOUNDER OF THE **UNCANNY X-MEN**."

"I KNOW ALL THIS, KYLE. BEFORE EVERYONE ON EARTH WAS MUTATED, THE X-MEN FOUGHT TO PROTECT A WORLD THAT **FEARED AND HATED** THEM. SO WHAT?"

"YES, THEY WERE HATED, AARON...AND PERHAPS THAT IS WHY THEY SO WILLINGLY THREW THEMSELVES AT LOVE."

"WHY SCOTT SUMMERS SO QUICKLY TURNED HIS AFFECTIONS TOWARDS JEAN GREY."

"WHY THEY **FELL** IN LOVE, AARON."

"I WAS BORN OF THE **FIRST FIRE...AND SHALL REMAIN** UNTIL THE LAST CELESTIAL SPARK IS **EXTINGUISHED**."

"JEAN GREY WAS **MARVEL GIRL**, AN X-MAN, A HERO. AND SHE WAS **DYING**... DYING TO SAVE HER FELLOW TEAMMATES, DYING TO SAVE SCOTT SUMMERS."

"SHE CRIED OUT AGAIN, KNOWING THAT CHARLES XAVIER WOULD NOT HEAR HER THIS TIME. BUT **SOMETHING ELSE** DID."

"A FORCE FROM BEFORE THE UNIVERSE EXISTED FOUND ITSELF ATTRACTED TO HER LOVE FOR SCOTT, A LOVE THAT WAS SO WILLING TO **DIE** THAT HE WOULD LIVE."

"THE BEING CAME TO HER AND OFFERED HER A CHANCE TO BE **SAVED**, TO HOLD SCOTT IN HER ARMS AGAIN...AFTER A FASHION."

"AFTER A FASHION?"

"YES. BECAUSE JEAN GREY WAS NO LONGER **JUST** JEAN GREY. SHE WAS A BINARY BEING NOW, LINKED TO A POWER **GREATER** THAN ANY THAT EXISTED UPON EARTH."

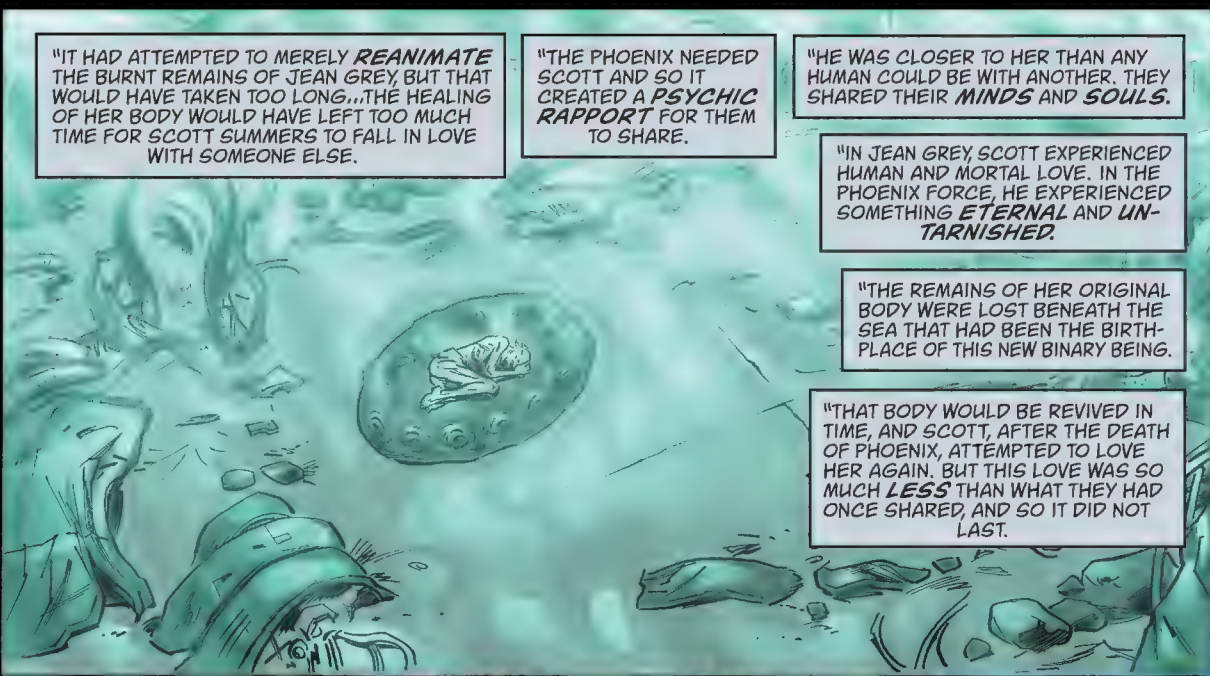
"SHE WAS LIKE A **PHOENIX**, RISING OUT OF THE ASHES OF HER LIFE AS MARVEL GIRL."

"SHE WAS NO LONGER AFRAID TO **DIE**."

"AND DO YOU KNOW WHY, AARON?"

"BECAUSE THE FORCE THAT JOINED ITSELF TO JEAN HAD COME TO EARTH TO **DIE**."

"IT HAD TO BE JOINED TO A **LIVING FORM** TO DIE. THAT IS WHAT IT CAME TO DO."



"IT HAD ATTEMPTED TO MERELY *REANIMATE* THE BURNT REMAINS OF JEAN GREY, BUT THAT WOULD HAVE TAKEN TOO LONG...THE HEALING OF HER BODY WOULD HAVE LEFT TOO MUCH TIME FOR SCOTT SUMMERS TO FALL IN LOVE WITH SOMEONE ELSE.

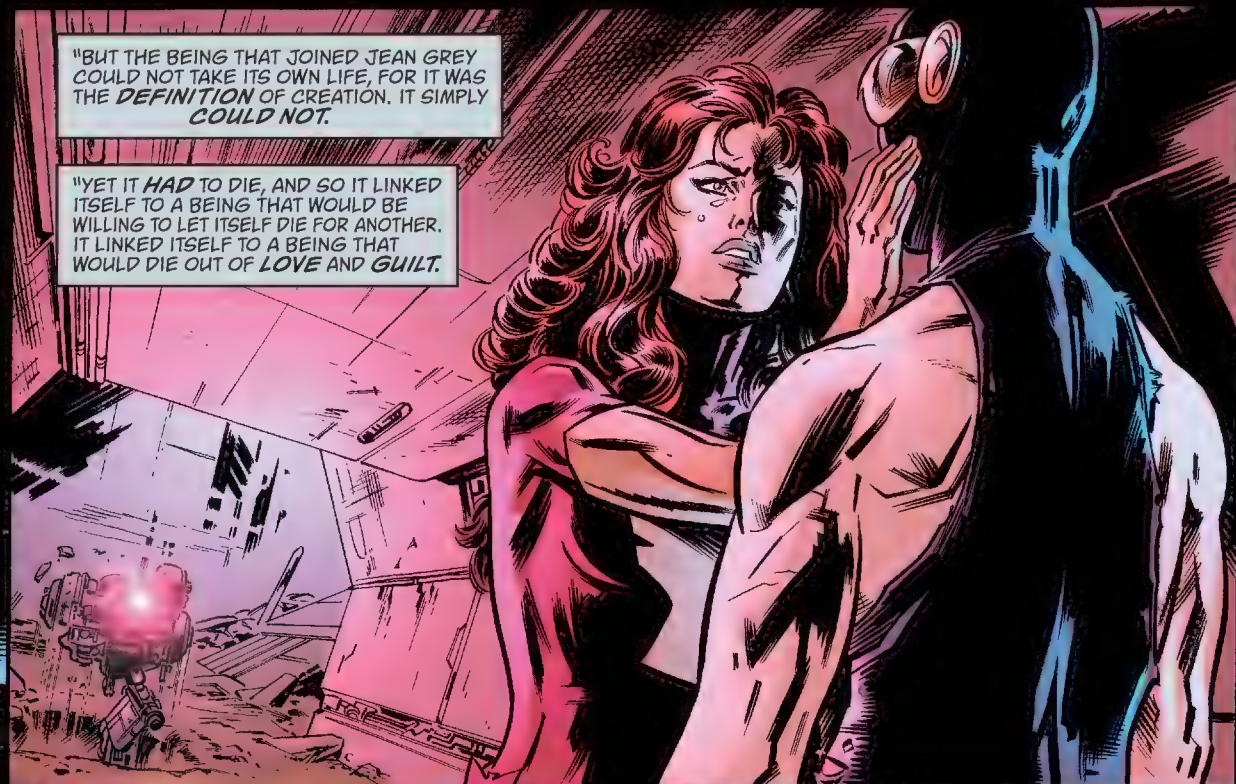
"THE PHOENIX NEEDED SCOTT AND SO IT CREATED A *PSYCHIC RAPPORT* FOR THEM TO SHARE.

"HE WAS CLOSER TO HER THAN ANY HUMAN COULD BE WITH ANOTHER. THEY SHARED THEIR *MINDS* AND *SOULS*.

"IN JEAN GREY, SCOTT EXPERIENCED HUMAN AND MORTAL LOVE. IN THE PHOENIX FORCE, HE EXPERIENCED SOMETHING *ETERNAL* AND *UNTARNISHED*.

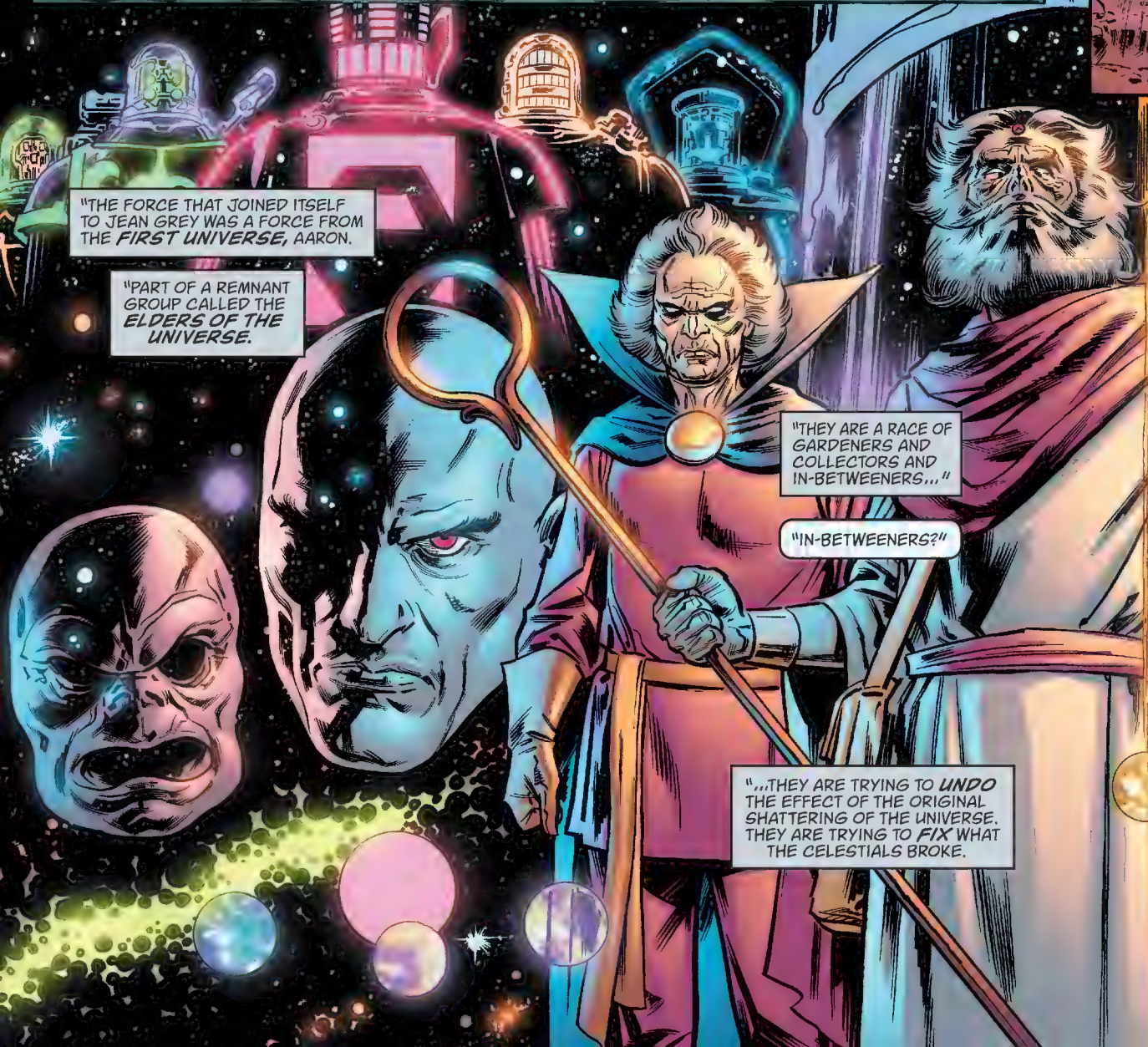
"THE REMAINS OF HER ORIGINAL BODY WERE LOST BENEATH THE SEA THAT HAD BEEN THE BIRTH-PLACE OF THIS NEW BINARY BEING.

"THAT BODY WOULD BE REVIVED IN TIME, AND SCOTT, AFTER THE DEATH OF PHOENIX, ATTEMPTED TO LOVE HER AGAIN. BUT THIS LOVE WAS SO MUCH *LESS* THAN WHAT THEY HAD ONCE SHARED, AND SO IT DID NOT LAST.



"BUT THE BEING THAT JOINED JEAN GREY COULD NOT TAKE ITS OWN LIFE, FOR IT WAS THE *DEFINITION* OF CREATION. IT SIMPLY *COULD NOT*.

"YET IT *HAD* TO DIE, AND SO IT LINKED ITSELF TO A BEING THAT WOULD BE WILLING TO LET ITSELF DIE FOR ANOTHER. IT LINKED ITSELF TO A BEING THAT WOULD DIE OUT OF *LOVE* AND *GUILT*.



"THE FORCE THAT JOINED ITSELF TO JEAN GREY WAS A FORCE FROM THE *FIRST UNIVERSE*, AARON.

"PART OF A REMNANT GROUP CALLED THE *ELDERS OF THE UNIVERSE*.

"THEY ARE A RACE OF GARDENERS AND COLLECTORS AND IN-BETWEENERS..."

"IN-BETWEENERS?"

"...THEY ARE TRYING TO *UNDO* THE EFFECT OF THE ORIGINAL SHATTERING OF THE UNIVERSE. THEY ARE TRYING TO *FIX* WHAT THE CELESTIALS BROKE.

"THE DEATH OF *DEATH* WAS FORESEEN. THAT'S WHY PHOENIX IS THERE IN *DEATH'S* REALM NOW, TO CONTINUE WITH THE COLLECTION OF SOULS."

"I DON'T UNDERSTAND."



"THEY ARE *REBUILDING* THE UNIVERSE, AARON, RECONSTRUCTING WHAT WAS ONCE BROKEN.

"COLLECTING THE SOULS OF THE DEPARTED, PREPARING THEM FOR THE COMING *UNIFICATION*. THAT'S WHY A REALM OF THE DEAD EVEN EXISTS.

"THEY ARE REASSEMBLING THE FIRST WORLDS FROM THE *ASHES* OF THE NEW ONES..."

"...LIKE A *PHOENIX*."

"I KNOW, AARON. IT MAKES WATCHING THE WEDDING OF MEDUSA AND KING BRITAIN A SMALL THING, INDEED."

"OH, I WOULDN'T SAY THAT, KYLE. AFTER ALL, AREN'T THEY DOING THEIR PART FOR REUNIFICATION?"

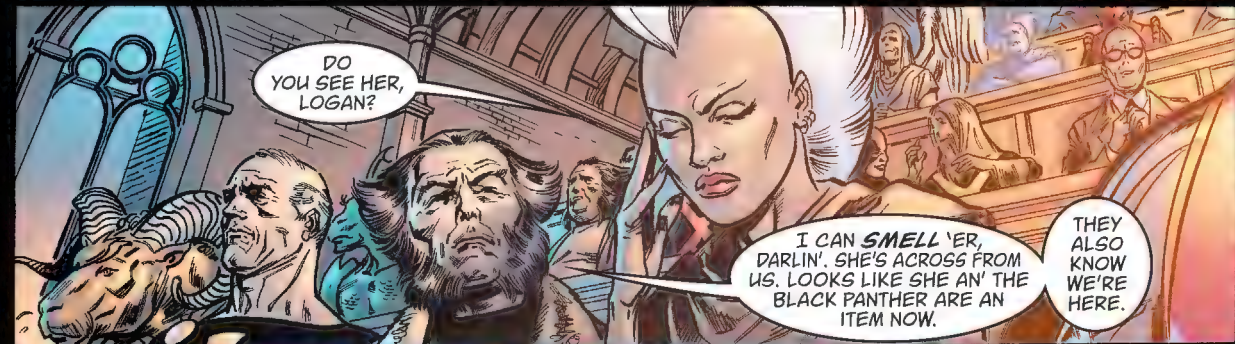
"ISN'T THIS WEDDING AN ATTEMPT TO BRING A DIVERGENT AND WARRING WORLD POPULATION TOGETHER?"

MAY THE EYE OF THE PENDRAGON NEVER TURN FROM YOU...

...MAY ITS FIRE AND BREATH FORGE YOU INTO ONE BEING...

...MAY ALL YOUR SCARS COME FROM ITS TALONS...





DO YOU SEE HER, LOGAN?

I CAN **SMELL** 'ER, DARLIN'. SHE'S ACROSS FROM US. LOOKS LIKE SHE AN' THE BLACK PANTHER ARE AN ITEM NOW.

THEY ALSO KNOW WE'RE HERE.

SHE IS VERY BEAUTIFUL, MY KING. IT'S AS IF SHE HAS NOT AGED AT ALL.

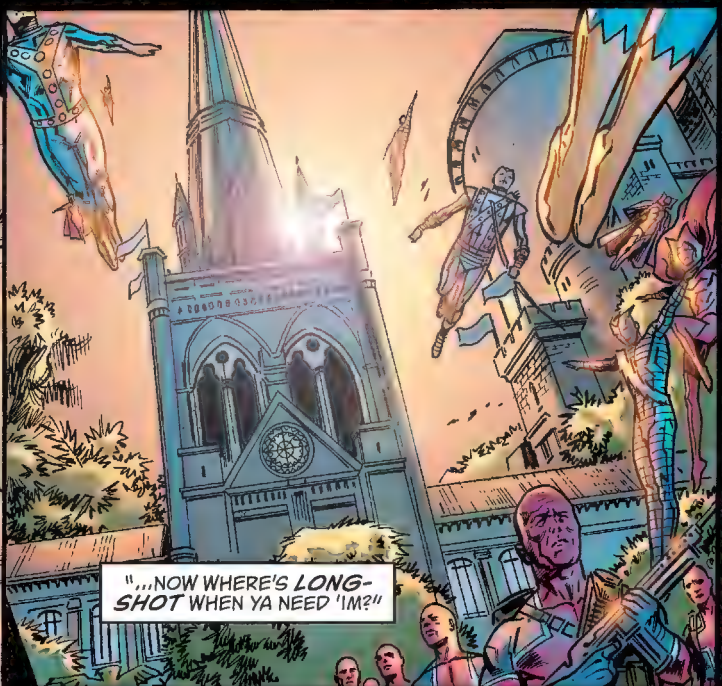
YES, MY BRIDE. BUT HER YOUTH CARRIES A COST THAT SETS HER AGAINST THE **SPIRITS** THEMSELVES.



I CAN'T BELIEVE HOW MANY **X-MEN** ARE HERE. SUMMERS... PETEY... CASSIDY... MCCOY... BOBBY... JUST 'BOUT EVERYBODY I CAN REMEMBER.

DO YOU REALLY THINK A BLOOD TRANSFUSION FROM MY ALTERNATE WILL **CURE** ME?

CAN'T HURT, 'RORO. OUR LUCK'S GOT TO CHANGE SOME DAY...



"...NOW WHERE'S **LONG-SHOT** WHEN YA NEED 'IM?"

"YOU SAID, KYLE, THAT FRANK CASTLE'S FAMILY WAS **UNDER ATTACK** IN THE REALM OF THE DEAD?"

"YES, FROM CRIMINALS WHO DEFINED HIM IN THE REALM OF THE **LIVING**."

"CRIMINALS WHO KNOW THE **SECRET** OF THAT PLACE."

"TO BE HERE IS TO **NOT RE-MEMBER** THAT YOU'VE DIED."

"TO EXIST AMONGST THE DEAD IS TO BE CONVINCED THAT YOU **STILL LIVE**,... AND THOSE THAT INDEED DO STILL LIVE, HAVE INSTEAD DIED THEMSELVES..."

ENJOY IT WHILE YOU **CAN**, CASTLE! YOU'VE ALREADY KILLED US **TWICE!**

YOUR HEAD ISN'T SCREWED ON QUITE RIGHT, JIGSAW!

I'VE ONLY KILLED YOU... ONCE.





THIS WILL BE...
THE SECOND...NO, THE
THIRD TIME...I...
REMEMBER.

I
REMEMBER
IT ALL.



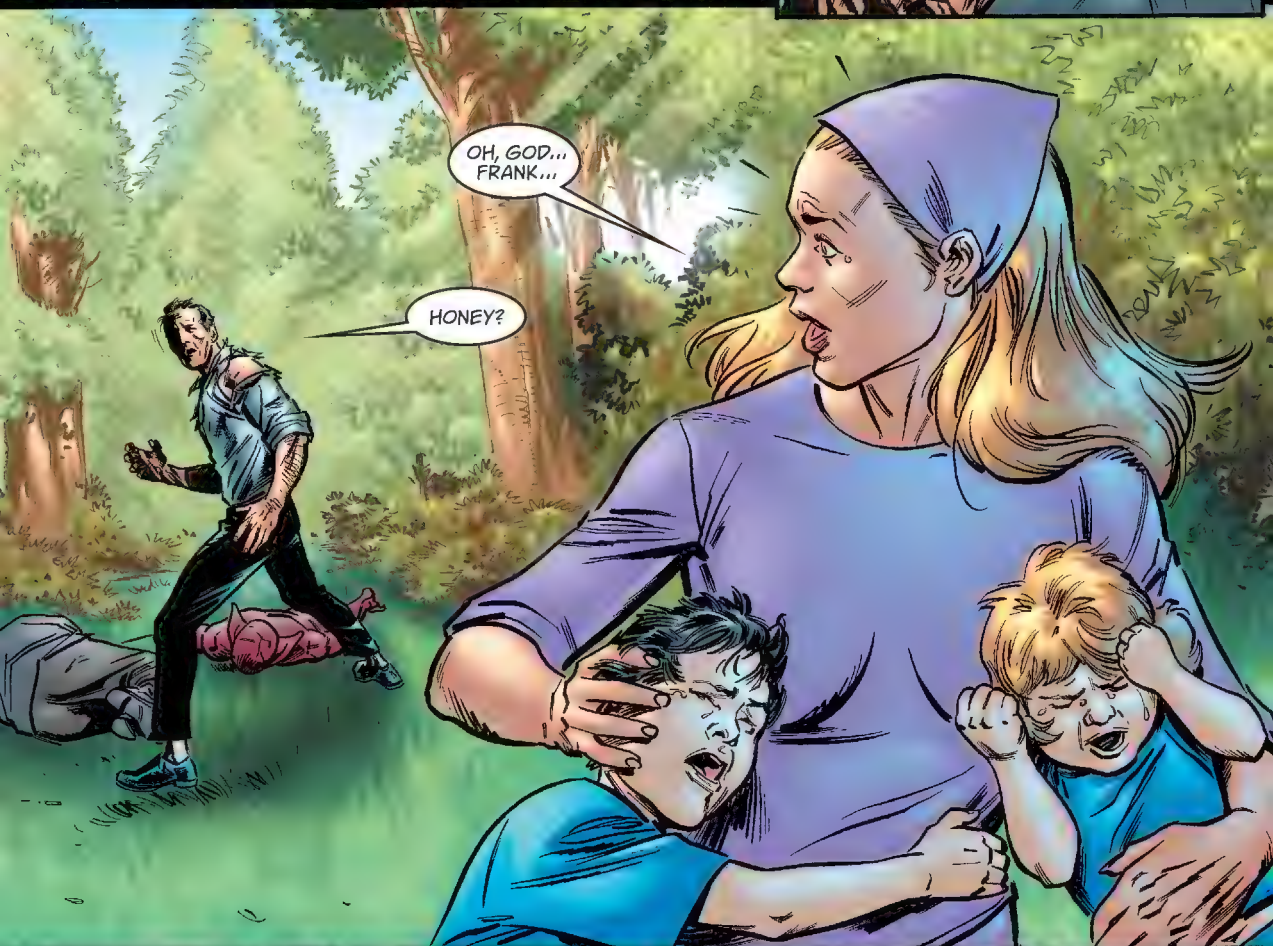
NO
ONE DIES
HERE.

NOT FOR
LONG.



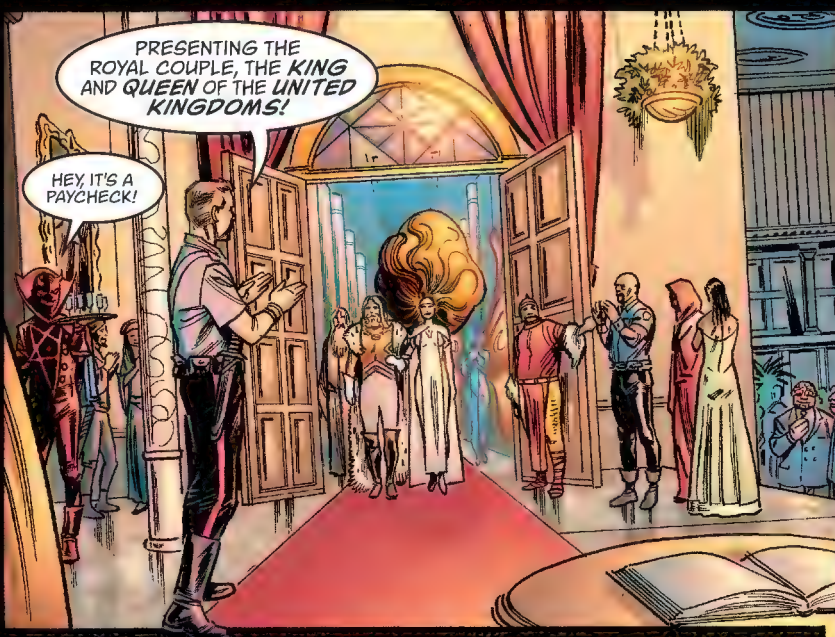
THAT'S
GOOD.

LET THE
PUNISHMENT
BEGIN.



OH, GOD...
FRANK...

HONEY?



PRESENTING THE ROYAL COUPLE, THE KING AND QUEEN OF THE UNITED KINGDOMS!

HEY, IT'S A PAYCHECK!



HEY, SCOTT! I SAW YOU DIE! I CAN'T BELIEVE IT! GOD, THIS IS GREAT!



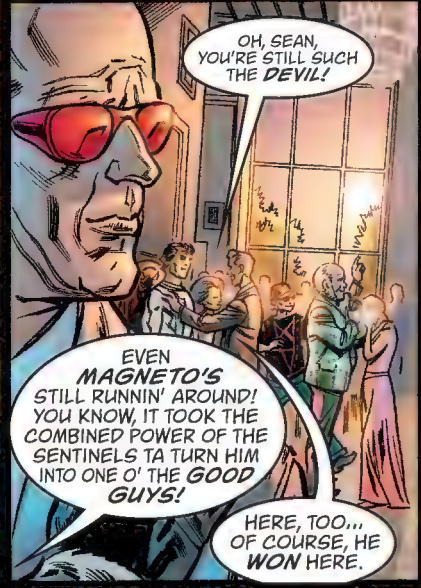
"GOD, THIS IS GREAT?"

YOU'RE NOT THE LOGAN I KNOW...ARE YOU?



THAT DOESN'T MATTER. YER ALIVE. PETEY'S ALIVE. WARREN'S STILL FLYIN'. EVEN THE ELF'S STILL SCARIN' LITTLE GIRLS!

YA GOTTA UNDERSTAND, I COME FROM A REALITY WHERE ALL THE X-MEN WERE KILLED BY THE SENTINELS!



OH, SEAN, YOU'RE STILL SUCH THE DEVIL!

EVEN MAGNETO'S STILL RUNNIN' AROUND! YOU KNOW, IT TOOK THE COMBINED POWER OF THE SENTINELS TA TURN HIM INTO ONE O' THE GOOD GUYS!

HERE, TOO... OF COURSE, HE WON HERE.

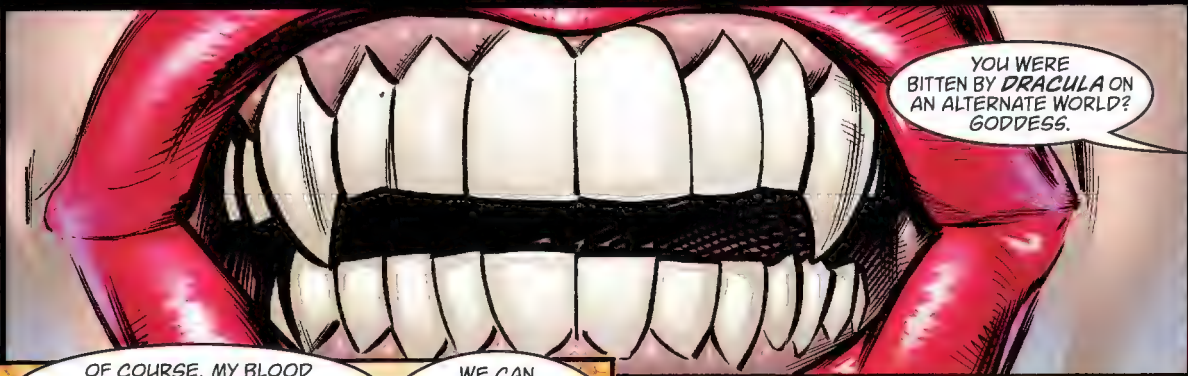


HE DID? THAT'S GREAT. I JUST CAN'T BELIEVE THIS! IT'S LIKE DYIN' AN' GOIN' TA HEAVEN.



...GOING TO HEAVEN?

HAVE YOU SEEN MY HUSBAND?

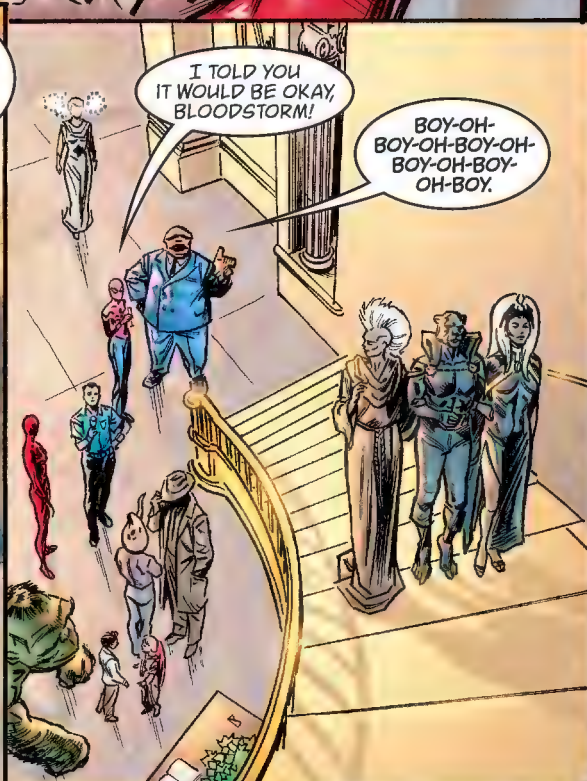


YOU WERE BITTEN BY *DRACULA* ON AN ALTERNATE WORLD? GODDESS.



OF COURSE. MY BLOOD IS *YOURS*. IT MATTERS NOT WHAT ALTERNATE WORLD YOU COME FROM. WE ARE THE *SAME*...

WE CAN ARRANGE FOR A *TRANSFUSION* UPSTAIRS. MY PEOPLE CAN ORCHESTRATE A SPIRIT LIBERATION, AS WELL.

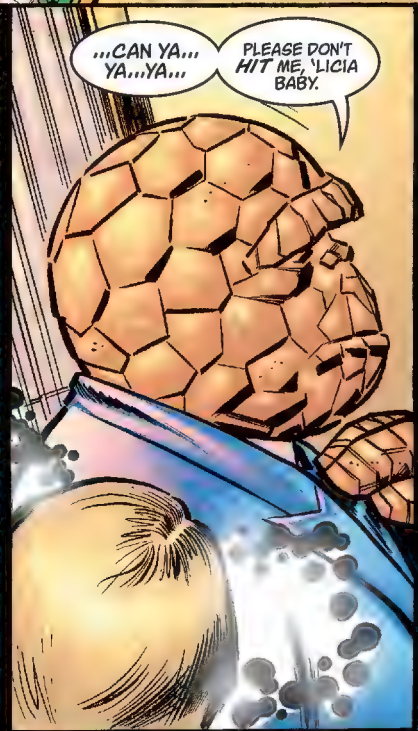
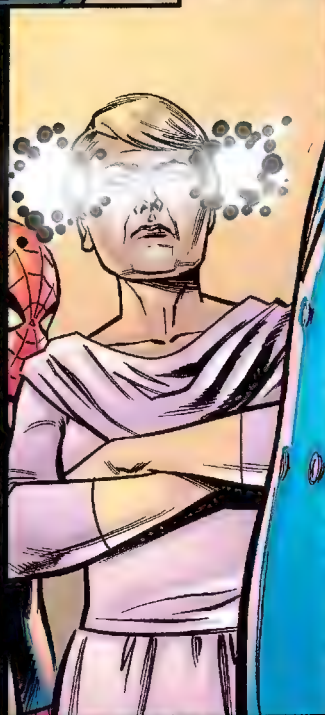


I TOLD YOU IT WOULD BE OKAY, BLOODSTORM!

BOY-OH-BOY-OH-BOY-OH-BOY-OH-BOY.



THAT T'CHALLA SURE IS A *LUCKY GUY*. TWO OF 'EM! CAN YA BELIEVE IT? CAN YA...



...CAN YA... YA...YA...

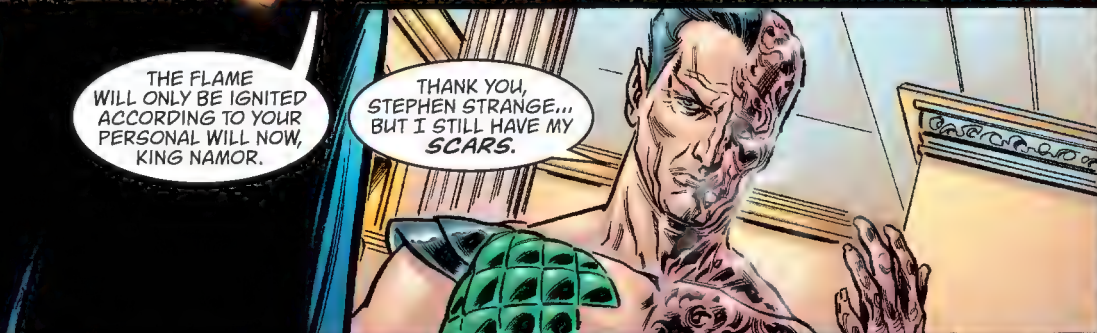
PLEASE DON'T HIT ME, L'ICIA BABY.



I'D HOPED
YOU COULD **UNDO**
THIS CURSE OF FLAMES,
MAGICIAN.

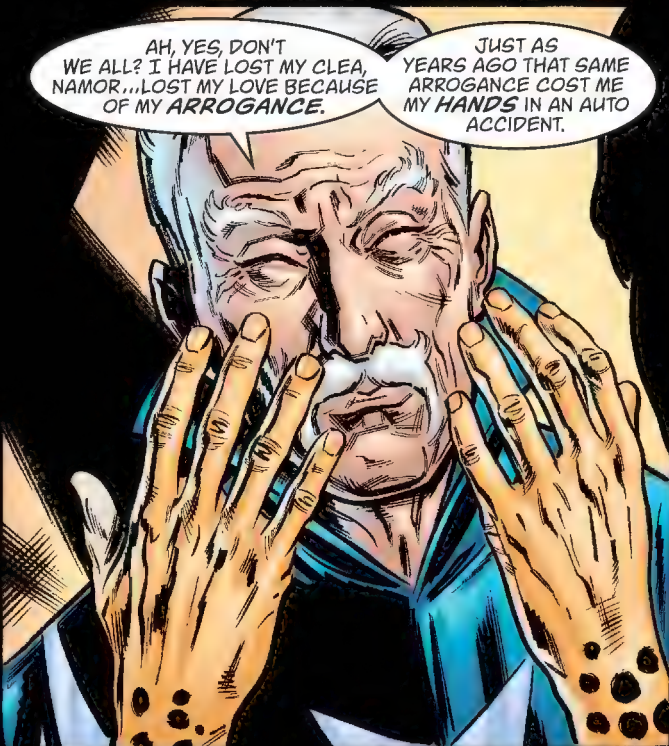


BY THE
ETERNAL WATERS OF
MALGINOR.



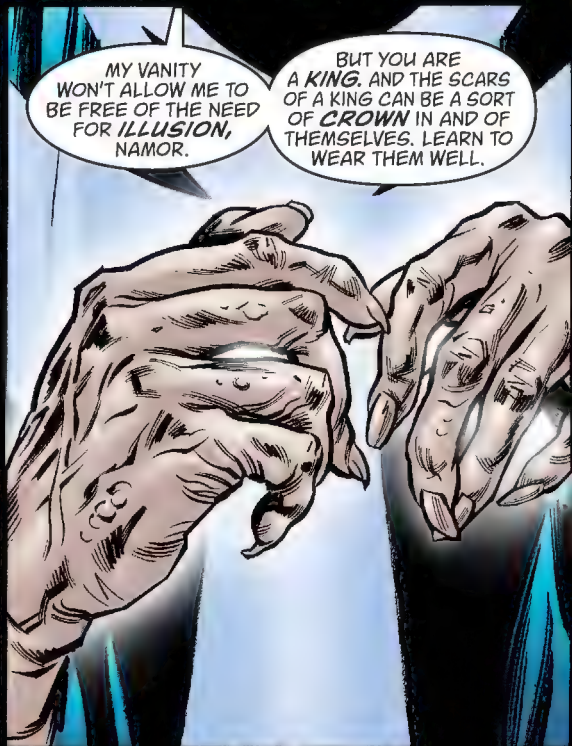
THE FLAME
WILL ONLY BE IGNITED
ACCORDING TO YOUR
PERSONAL WILL NOW,
KING NAMOR.

THANK YOU,
STEPHEN STRANGE...
BUT I STILL HAVE MY
SCARS.



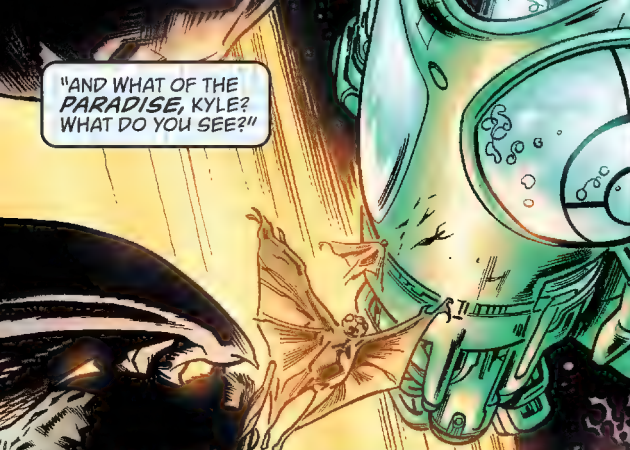
AH, YES, DON'T
WE ALL? I HAVE LOST MY CLEA,
NAMOR... LOST MY LOVE BECAUSE
OF MY **ARROGANCE**.

JUST AS
YEARS AGO THAT SAME
ARROGANCE COST ME
MY **HANDS** IN AN AUTO
ACCIDENT.



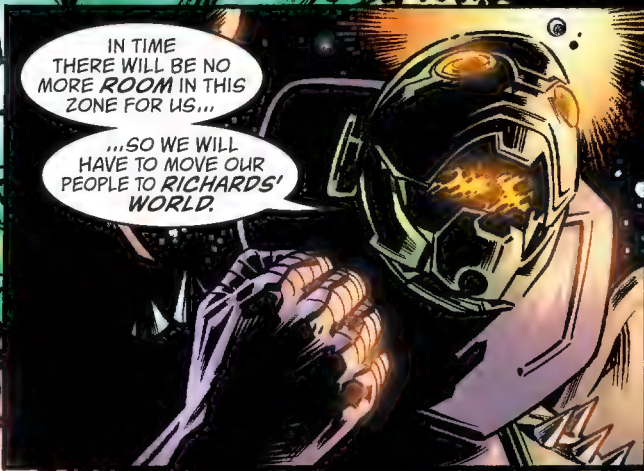
MY VANITY
WON'T ALLOW ME TO
BE FREE OF THE NEED
FOR **ILLUSION**,
NAMOR.

BUT YOU ARE
A **KING**. AND THE SCARS
OF A KING CAN BE A SORT
OF **CROWN** IN AND OF
THEMSELVES. LEARN TO
WEAR THEM WELL.



"AND WHAT OF THE **PARADISE**, KYLE? WHAT DO YOU SEE?"

"ONLY THAT THE **PARADISE** COMES AT A **PRICE**."



IN TIME THERE WILL BE NO MORE **ROOM** IN THIS ZONE FOR US..."

...SO WE WILL HAVE TO MOVE OUR PEOPLE TO **RICHARDS' WORLD**.



AFTER WE EAT HIS EYES.



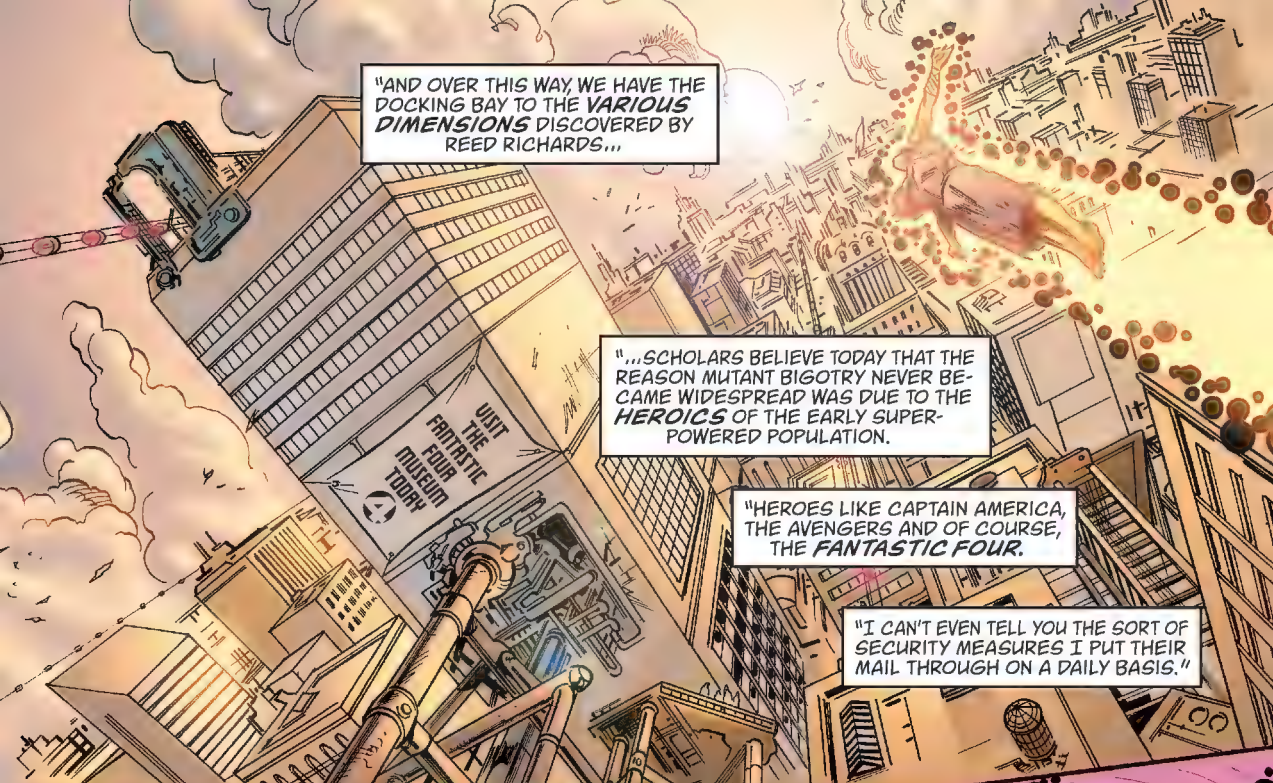
RICHARDS **SWORE** HE WOULD NEVER IMPERIL THE **NEGATIVE ZONE** AGAIN! THAT'S ANOTHER WORLD THIS **ANTI-MATTER CANCER** HAS **CONSUMED!**

HE **LIED**. THIS IS **HIS** DOING! IT **MUST** BE!



YOUR RELIGIOUS PRACTICES ARE OF **NO CONCERN** TO ME, **BLASTAAR**.

ONLY **RICHARDS' DEATH MATTERS!** SOMETHING THAT IN HIS WEAKNESS, **RICHARDS** WAS **MORE** THAN WILLING TO PROVIDE ME THE MEANS TO FULFILL.



"AND OVER THIS WAY, WE HAVE THE DOCKING BAY TO THE **VARIOUS DIMENSIONS** DISCOVERED BY REED RICHARDS..."

"...SCHOLARS BELIEVE TODAY THAT THE REASON MUTANT BIGOTRY NEVER BECAME WIDESPREAD WAS DUE TO THE **HEROICS** OF THE EARLY SUPER-POWERED POPULATION.

"HEROES LIKE CAPTAIN AMERICA, THE AVENGERS AND OF COURSE, THE **FANTASTIC FOUR**."

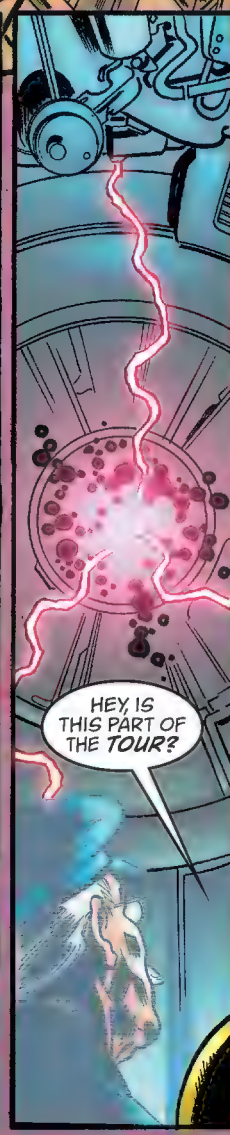
"I CAN'T EVEN TELL YOU THE SORT OF SECURITY MEASURES I PUT THEIR MAIL THROUGH ON A DAILY BASIS."



WHAT'S THAT UP THERE?

THAT WOULD BE THE PORTAL TO THE **NEGATIVE ZONE**. RICHARDS HIMSELF HAD IT SEALED FROM THE INSIDE TO GUARANTEE THAT IT NOT BECOME A **DUMPING GROUND** FOR NUCLEAR WASTE AND DISARMAMENT CAMPAIGNS.

IT CAN ONLY BE OPENED FROM THE **INSIDE**...



HEY, IS THIS PART OF THE TOUR?



WHAT? IS THIS EARTH?



NO!
IT'S A
TRAP!



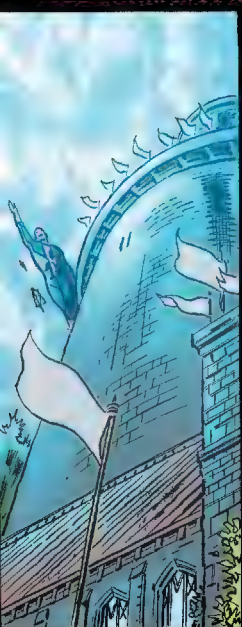
UH...

THIS PLACE
HAS BEEN TURNED
ON ITS SIDE...BUT
WHAT CAUSED
IT?

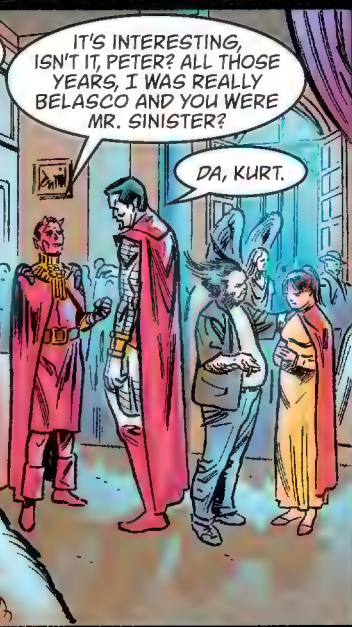


RICHARDS.

I WENT TO THE
BAXTER BUILDING
AND ALL I GOT
WAS THIS LULUSY
T-SHIRT.



WHAT THE
HELL?



IT'S INTERESTING,
ISN'T IT, PETER? ALL THOSE
YEARS, I WAS REALLY
BELASCO AND YOU WERE
MR. SINISTER?

DA, KURT.



WE
BOTH LIVED
AS **ENEMIES**
FOR THE SAKE
OF **FRIENDSHIP**.

I, TOO, LOVED
JEAN...AND BETRAYED
SO MUCH OF THE MAN
I WAS RAISED TO BE
TO HAVE HER BACK.

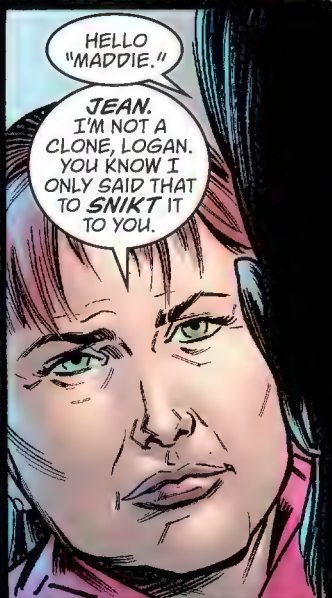
THERE WAS
SOMETHING ABOUT
HER THEN, EVEN FROM A
DISTANCE...SOMETHING
THAT SEEMED LIKE SO MUCH
MORE THAN FRAIL HUMAN LOVE.



THE WORLD
SEEMED SO
MUCH BETTER
WITH HER IN IT...
AND I WAS WILLING
TO DO **ANYTHING**
TO HAVE HER
BACK.

BUT I
SEE NOTHING
OF THAT JEAN
ANYMORE. AND
I WONDER
WHAT I WAS
THINKING.

TIME TRAVEL
AND THE X-MEN.
NOTHING **GOOD**
EVER CAME OF IT,
EH, BUDDY?



HELLO
"MADDIE."

JEAN.
I'M NOT A
CLONE, LOGAN.
YOU KNOW I
ONLY SAID THAT
TO **SHUT** IT
TO YOU.



MY SENSES
AIN'T WHAT THEY
USED TO BE,
DARLIN'. YOU DID
YER JOB A BIT TOO
WELL. I DIDN'T
KNOW.

OH.



WAIT, TELL ME
YER NOT A PSYCHIC AGAIN
AND MESSIN' WITH MY
HEAD.

I DON'T
UNDERSTAND...
WHAT FOR?



YA KNOW, A
HEALIN' FACTOR'S
SUPPOSED TO KEEP
SOMETHIN' LIKE **THIS**
FROM HAPPENING.

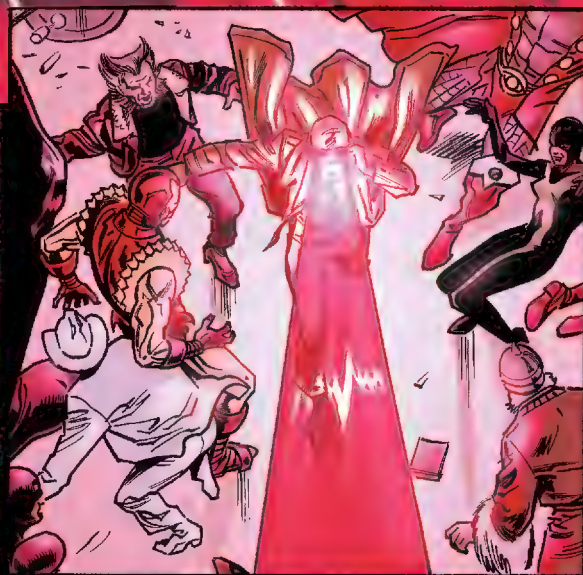
I DON'T
KNOW WHO YOU
ARE, BUT IF I WANTED
INSULTS, I'D MOVE
BACK IN WITH
JEANNIE.

"JEANNIE,"
HUH?



I CAN'T
BELIEVE IT.
NOT HERE. NOT
AGAIN!

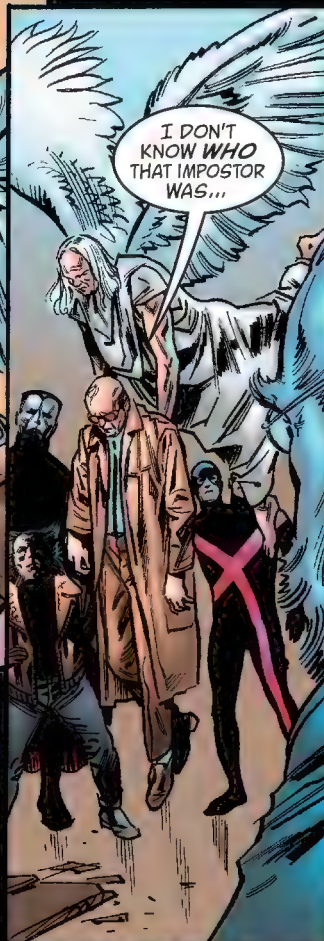
ALTERNATE
WORLD, HUH?
FIGGERS.





SCOTT,
WHAT'S *WRONG*
WITH YOU?

WARREN, YOU
IDIOT--LET ME *GO!* WE HAVE
TO GET DOWN THERE AND
FIND HIM!



I DON'T
KNOW *WHO*
THAT IMPOSTOR
WAS...



...BUT
SEAN
CASSIDY
DIED YEARS
AGO.

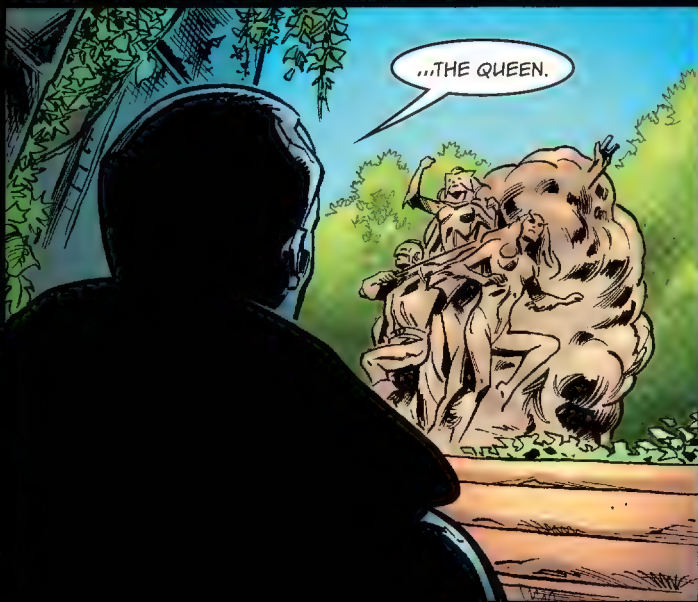


"DON'T ASK ME HOW I KNOW
THIS, BUT *BANSHEE* IS A
DEAD MAN."

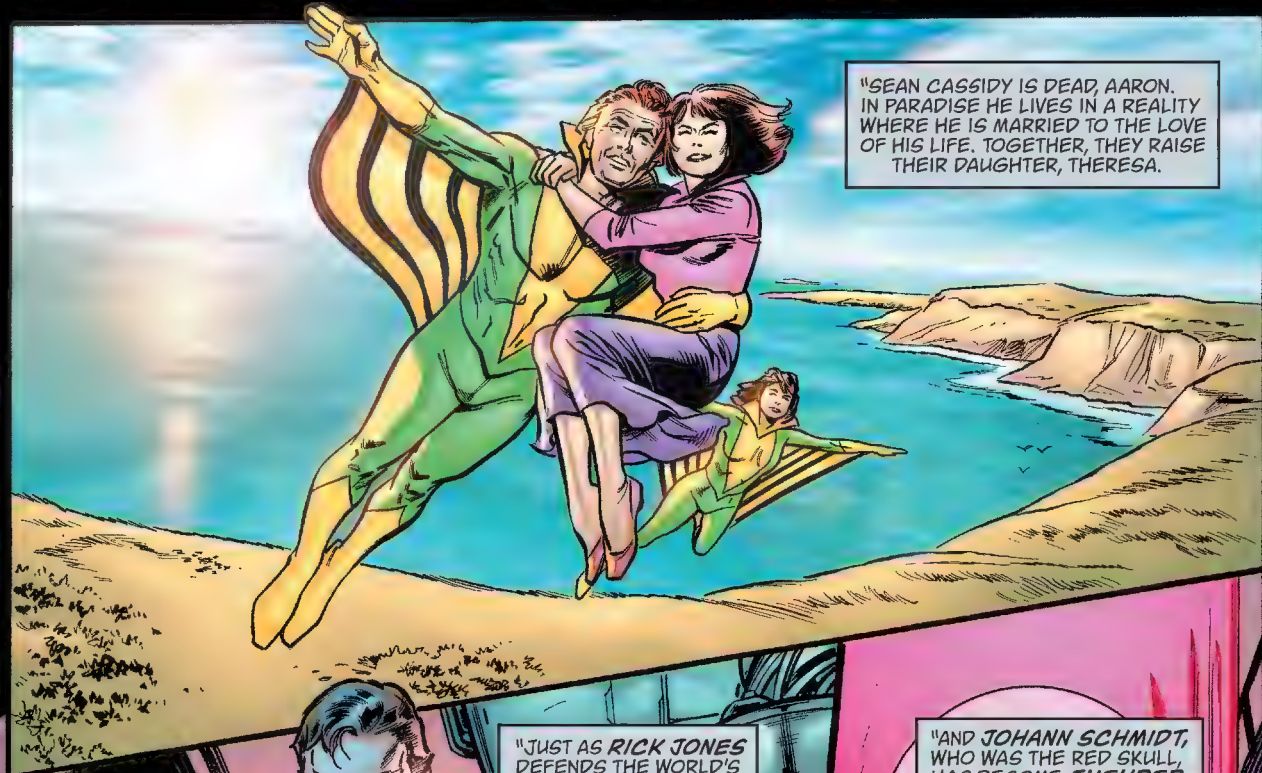


LONG...

...LIVE...



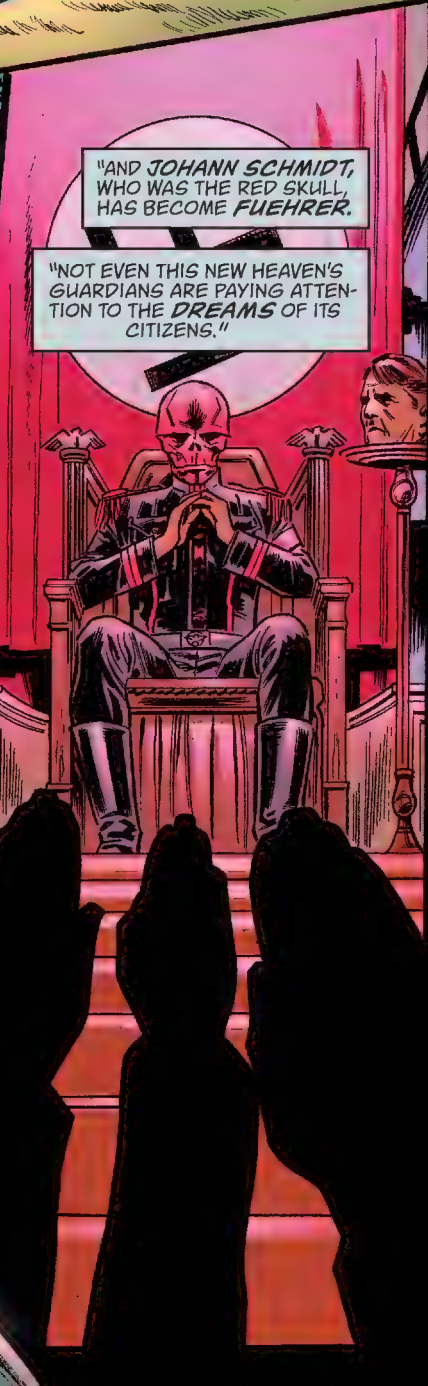
...THE QUEEN.



"SEAN CASSIDY IS DEAD, AARON. IN PARADISE HE LIVES IN A REALITY WHERE HE IS MARRIED TO THE LOVE OF HIS LIFE. TOGETHER, THEY RAISE THEIR DAUGHTER, THERESA.



"JUST AS RICK JONES DEFENDS THE WORLD'S MIGHTIEST HEROES AS CAPTAIN AVENGER.



"AND JOHANN SCHMIDT, WHO WAS THE RED SKULL, HAS BECOME FUEHRER.

"NOT EVEN THIS NEW HEAVEN'S GUARDIANS ARE PAYING ATTENTION TO THE DREAMS OF ITS CITIZENS."



I TOLD
SCOTT ABOUT
BANSHEE,
CAP.

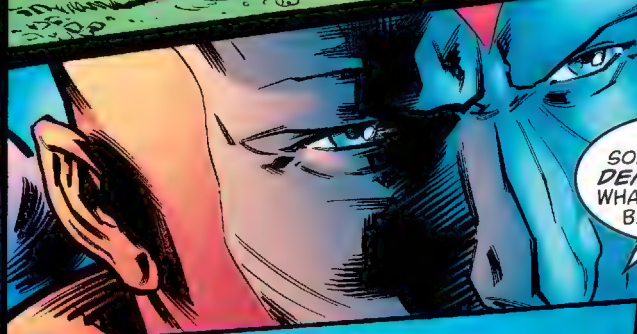
GOOD. WHAT
HAPPENED?

WHATEVER
IT WAS THAT WAS
BANSHEE **ESCAPED**.
I'M LIMITED TO SCOTT'S
SIGHT AND VIEW-
POINT.

I'M CONCERNED.
I'M NOT SEEING MUCH
OF A **DIFFERENCE** BETWEEN
THESE ONE-PERSON REALITIES
AND WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN
THE REALM OF THE DEAD.

WITH THE
EXCEPTION THAT THERE
IS **NO INTERACTION**
WITH OTHER SOULS.

I KNOW
SOMETHING OF
DEMENTIA AND
WHAT IT'S LIKE TO
BE **ALONE**.



I, TOO, KNOW
WHAT IT IS LIKE TO SPEAK
TO **NO ONE**.

THESE
ARE **PLEASURE
DREAMS**. THAT
IS ALL.



SURE, BUT THEY'RE
FREE TO CHOOSE THE WORLD
THEY **WANT**, INSTEAD OF BEING
SHACKLED TO THE ONE
THAT **WAS**.

I DON'T HAVE
TO SEE THESE DREAMS
TO KNOW THAT THEY ARE
BETTER THAN THE WORLD
THEY CAME FROM. THEY
HAVE TO BE. THEY'RE
CHOSEN.

IF ONLY WE
COULD BRING
EVERYONE IN
DEATH'S REALM
HERE.



EVERYONE IN DEATH'S REALM WOULD HAVE TO REALIZE THEY'RE DEAD FOR THAT TO OCCUR.

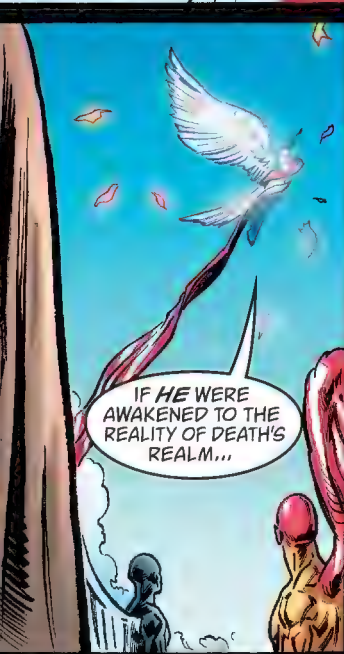
AND SHORT OF A MASS WAVE OF SUICIDE ATTEMPTS... I DON'T SEE THAT HAPPENING.

OF COURSE...



...THE SKULL...

...HIS CONTROL OF THE ARMY.

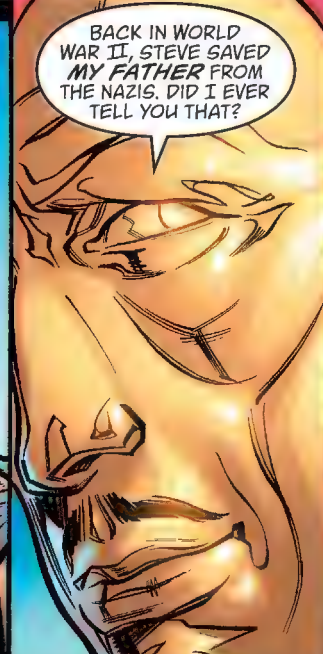


IF HE WERE AWAKENED TO THE REALITY OF DEATH'S REALM...



THIS IS NOT GOOD... I CAN SEE WHAT'S HAPPENING.

CAP'S OKAY. HE IS. HE'S JUST CONCERNED ABOUT HIS PARENTS. HE WANTS THEM HERE. HE WANTS THEM TO BE FREE.



BACK IN WORLD WAR II, STEVE SAVED MY FATHER FROM THE NAZIS. DID I EVER TELL YOU THAT?



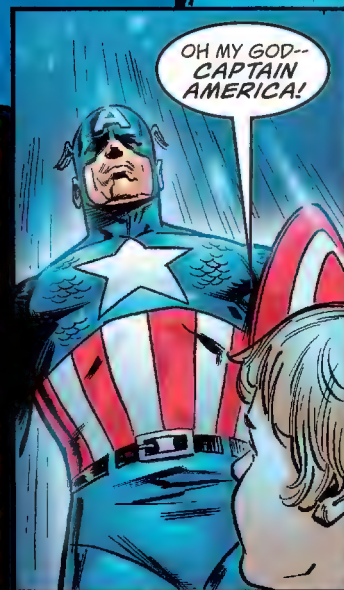
"HE NEVER HAD
A **FAMILY** TO
FIGHT FOR
BEFORE."

THIS
IS **INSANE**,
STEVE. IT'S
WRONG...
BUT...WHAT
ARE YOU
DOING?

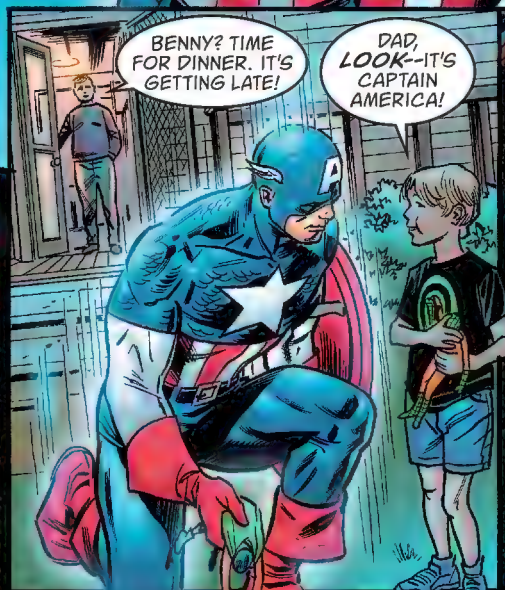
CRASH!

BAM!

SMASH!



OH MY GOD--
**CAPTAIN
AMERICA!**



BENNY? TIME
FOR DINNER. IT'S
GETTING LATE!

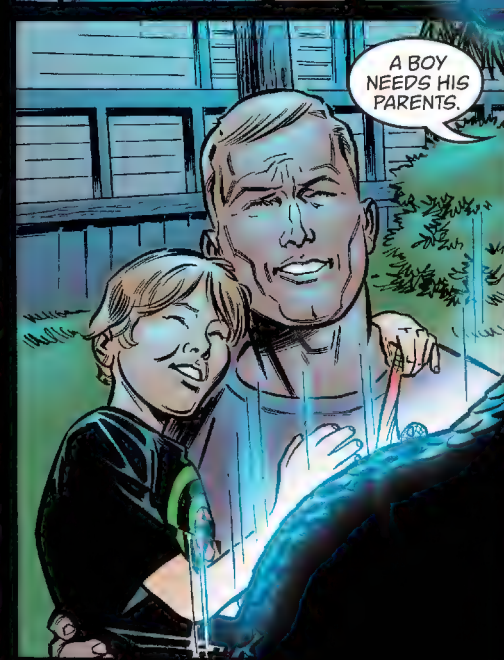
DAD,
LOOK--IT'S
CAPTAIN
AMERICA!



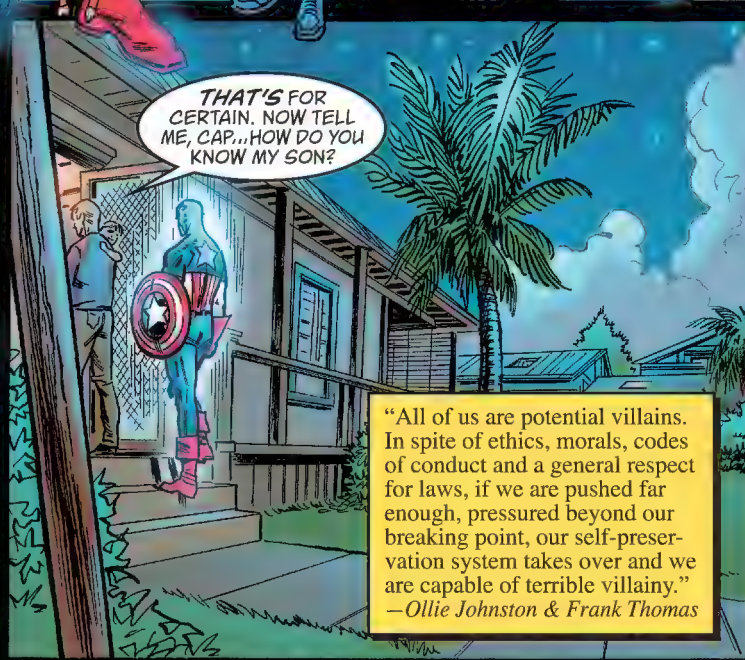
CAPTAIN
AMERICA?
AN **HONOR**,
SIR.

AND
FOR ME, AS
WELL.

IT'S
NICE TO
SEE THAT
YOU PROVIDE
SUCH A GOOD
HOME FOR
BENNY.



A BOY
NEEDS HIS
PARENTS.



**THAT'S FOR
CERTAIN. NOW TELL
ME, CAP...HOW DO YOU
KNOW MY SON?**

"All of us are potential villains. In spite of ethics, morals, codes of conduct and a general respect for laws, if we are pushed far enough, pressured beyond our breaking point, our self-preservation system takes over and we are capable of terrible villainy."

—Ollie Johnston & Frank Thomas

MARVEL

4

PARADISE



KRUEGER
BRAITHWAITE
REINHOLD

"Kyle?"

"Yes, Aaron?"

"What's happening to Uatu? Have you noticed? He moves through this citadel of his as though it were the first time. His being blind should make no difference at all, not for the length of time he's been here. Something is wrong with him."

"Obviously."

"Was it Vance Astro's psychic attack on Uatu when the Guardians of the Galaxy first arrived on the moon?"

"No."

"Then something that the other Watchers did to him when they were here?"

"No."

"Then what? You're supposed to know everything, Kyle. Talking to you is becoming like talking to Uatu."

"You don't know what it's like to know everything, Aaron. You don't know what it's like to recognize the good that comes after an act of evil. You don't know what it's like to wait for something you know will come out of suffering."

"I'm getting tired of waiting for you. What is wrong with Uatu?"

"Shame, Aaron. The Watcher's dying of shame."

PARADISE X

I S S U E 4

JIM KRUEGER
story and script

ALEX ROSS
story, cover and character designs

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pencils

BILL REINHOLD
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PETE PANTAZIS
colors

TODD KLEIN
letters

MIKE RAICHT
assistant editor

MIKE MARTS
editor

JOE QUESADA
editor in chief

BILL JEMAS
president

"LISTEN TO ME, KYLE. I PROMISED **LOGAN** I WOULD USE THE WATCHER'S EQUIPMENT TO FIND WHERE HE COMES FROM.

"BUT WHEN I ACCESS HIS NAME, I COME UPON A SICKLY CHILD NAMED **JAMES HOWLETT**. I UNDERSTAND, OF COURSE, THAT THIS MAY INDEED BE **LOGAN**, BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY.

"I SEE HIM IN A MANSION REFERRED TO AS THE **HOWLETT ESTATE**. HE IS NOT WELL, AND DISEASED.

"HE LIVES UNDER THE HATEFUL EYES OF SOMEONE HE CALLS **GRANDFATHER**, AND A GROUNDSKEEPER NAMED '**LOGAN**,' SURPRISINGLY ENOUGH.

"HIS ONLY FRIENDS ARE A GIRL NAMED **ROSE** AND THE GROUNDSKEEPER'S SON, **DOG**... A BOY JAMES SECRETLY ADMIRES."

"YOUR CONFUSION IS MATCHED BY HIS OWN, AARON. HE HAS **NO MEMORY** OF THE EVENTS YOU DESCRIBE.

"IT WOULD BE EASY TO UNDERSTAND IF HIS LACK OF MEMORY WAS DUE TO THE **TRAUMA** OF WATCHING HIS FATHER KILLED BY THE GROUNDSKEEPER IN A STATE OF DRUNKEN RAGE.

"THAT WOULD BE UNDERSTANDABLE.

"EVEN IN THOSE MINUTES AFTER HIS FATHER'S DEATH, WHEN **BONE CLAWS** TORE FROM HIS HANDS, IT WOULD BE UNDERSTANDABLE WERE THIS TRAUMA TO CAUSE A SORT OF **MEMORY LOSS**."

"BUT THAT ISN'T WHY HE FORGOT ALL THIS, IS IT? HIS MEMORY LOSS IS RELATED TO HIS **HEALING FACTOR**, NEW BRAIN CELLS REGENERATED TO REPLACE OLD MEMORY CELLS, RIGHT?

"THAT'S WHY HE COULDN'T REMEMBER WHO THE **GIRL** WAS SHORTLY AFTER HIS CLAWS FIRST EMERGED."

"WHAT ARE YOU SAYING, AARON? THINK ABOUT IT. WHY DO YOU SUPPOSE HE WAS CONFINED TO A **BED** IN THE **FIRST PLACE**?

"IT WAS A **COVER-UP**. LITERALLY. THIS WAS NOT A TIME WHEN THE WORD '**MUTANT**' HELD ANY DEFINITION.

"WHAT THIS CHILD WAS, WHAT THOSE FEW UNENLIGHTENED IN THAT AGE CONSIDERED HIM, WAS **SICK** OR **ILL**... NOT SEPARATE OR GIFTED.

"AND SO A CHILD WHO NEVER COUGHED A MOMENT IN HIS LIFE, WHO NEVER HAD A CAVITY, WHO NEVER EXPERIENCED A **HUMAN FRAILTY**, WAS CONFINED TO A BED, CAGED WITH BLANKETS AND HELD DOWN BY THE GRAVITY OF FAMILY REPUTATION."

"BUT KYLE, I HAVE WATCHED THIS TIME IN **LOGAN'S** LIFE. HE TRULY APPEARS **SICK**."

"YES, AND THE EXPLANATION FOR THAT WILL BECOME APPARENT SOON."

"BUT WITH THE DEATH OF **JAMES'S FATHER** THERE WOULD BE NO COVER-UP. AND SO **ROSE** AND **JAMES** **RAN**.

"AND **JAMES**, NO LONGER UNDER THE PROTECTION OF THE 'FAMILY NAME,' TOOK ON THE NAME OF **DOG'S FATHER, LOGAN**.

"THE GROUNDSKEEPER KILLED **JAMES'S FATHER**... SO WHY TAKE HIS NAME, WHY NOT GO BY HIS **REAL NAME**?"

"BECAUSE '**JAMES**' WAS **NOT** HIS REAL NAME.

"THIS CHILD HAD BEEN FOUND IN THE **WILDS**, AND WAS SECRETLY MADE **HEIR** TO THE **HOWLETT FORTUNE** WHEN THE TRUE HEIR DIED. THIS WAS DONE TO EASE THE PAIN OF **JOHN HOWLETT'S WIFE**, WHOSE NATURAL CHILD WAS STILLBORN.

"HE CAME FROM THE WILD AND RETURNED TO IT, A **DOG** FEELING MORE AT EASE IN THE COMPANY OF **WOLVES** THAN IN THE CIRCLES OF MAN."

"BUT THE TRAGEDY OF LOSING THE ONLY FRIEND HE EVER HAD SOON BECAME JUST ANOTHER **FORGOTTEN MEMORY**...AND LOGAN BEGAN TO DRIFT FROM PLACE TO PLACE, JOB TO JOB.

"HE MET ANOTHER MAN, **SABRETOOTH**, WHOSE SCENT AND ACTIONS MADE HIM AN INSTANT ENEMY.

"SABRETOOTH WAS LOGAN'S BETTER IN ALMOST EVERY WAY. LOGAN **BARELY SURVIVED** THEIR FIRST MEETING.

"LOGAN, WHOSE BRAWLING AND SUBSEQUENT HEALING FACTOR WAS LEGENDARY, WAS TARGETED BY A COVERT GOVERNMENT PROGRAM, AND HIS SKELETON WAS LACED WITH A MALLEABLE BUT INDESTRUCTIBLE METAL KNOWN AS **ADAMANTIUM**."

"LOGAN'S HEALING FACTOR WAS NECESSARY TO MAKE THE GRAFT SUCCESSFUL. THE OPERATION WOULD HAVE EASILY **KILLED** ANY NORMAL HUMAN BEING."

"**NORMAL HUMAN BEING?**"

"LISTEN. THOUGH LOGAN THOUGHT HE'D **ESCAPED** THE WEAPON X PROGRAM, HE DID NOT. HE ONLY FOUND HIMSELF AFFILIATED WITH A DIFFERENT **SUBSECTION** OF IT."

"**ALPHA FLIGHT.**"

"ALPHA FLIGHT WAS LED BY **JAMES MACDONALD HUDSON**, WHO HAD FOUND LOGAN WANDERING IN THE CANADIAN WILDS. LOGAN, NOW CODE-NAMED **WOLVERINE**, MET OTHER SUPER-POWERED AGENTS OF THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT WITHIN ALPHA FLIGHT.

"HE MET DR. WALTER LANGKOWSKI..."

"...WHOSE OWN MUTATION INTO THE HERO **SASQUATCH** CAME AS A RESULT OF EXPERIMENTS IN SELF-RADIATION.

"BUT I THOUGHT SASQUATCH'S MUTATION WAS **SELF-INDUCED?**"

"IT WAS...BUT WHAT LANGKOWSKI WAS ABLE TO ACHIEVE THROUGH **ARTIFICIAL MEANS** WAS ALTOGETHER **NATURAL** TO LOGAN."

"ANOTHER LIKE LOGAN."

"I DON'T UNDERSTAND."

"THEN THINK ABOUT WOLVERINE'S FIRST MISSION AGAINST THE **HULK** AND **WENDIGO**."

"THE WENDIGO TRANSFORMATION IS A MUTATION TRIGGERED BY AN ACT OF **CANNIBALISM**."

"YET **ANOTHER** REVERSION."

"REVERSION? DON'T YOU MEAN **MUTATION?**"

"THIS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH **MUTANTS**, AARON. NOTHING TO DO WITH THE **X-MEN**, AT ALL."

"DO YOU STILL BELIEVE LOGAN WAS ASKED TO JOIN THE X-MEN BECAUSE HE WAS A **MUTANT?**"

"BUT PROFESSOR X ASKED LOGAN TO... HE...OH MY GOD, KYLE. LOGAN'S NOT A MUTANT, AT ALL."

"THE **CELESTIALS**. THEY DIDN'T... THAT'S WHY HE...OF COURSE."

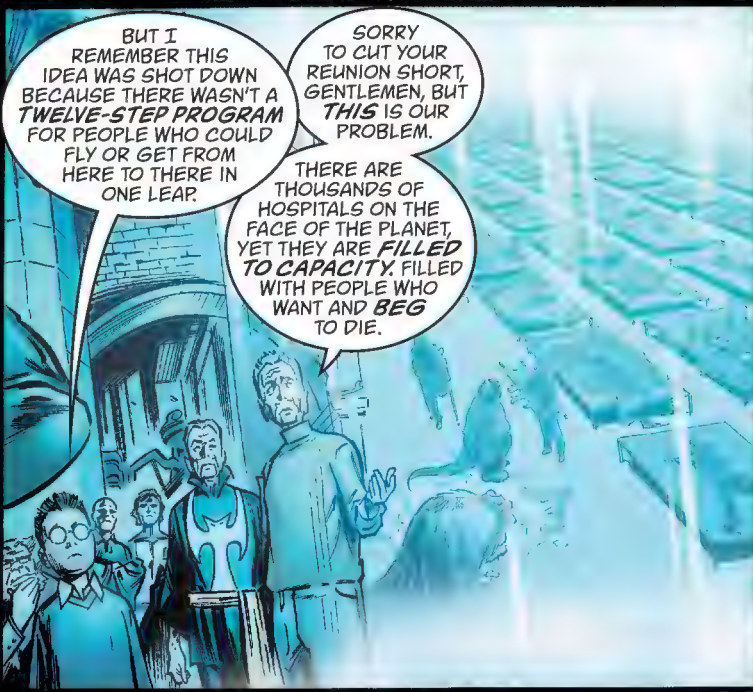
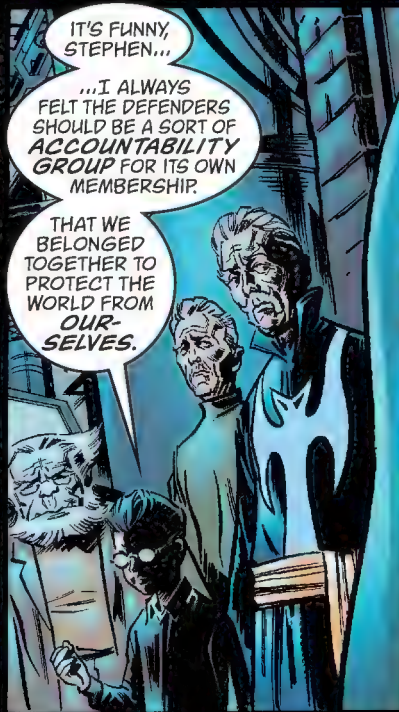
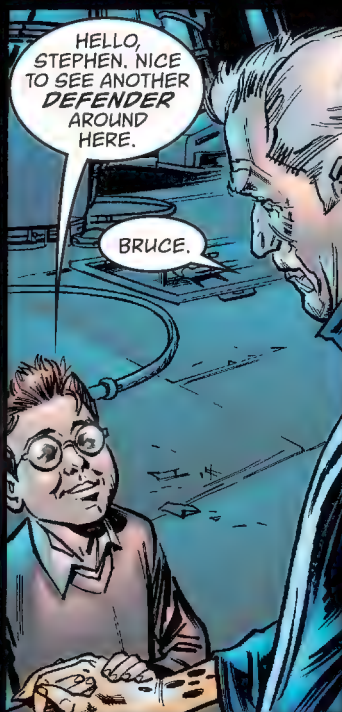
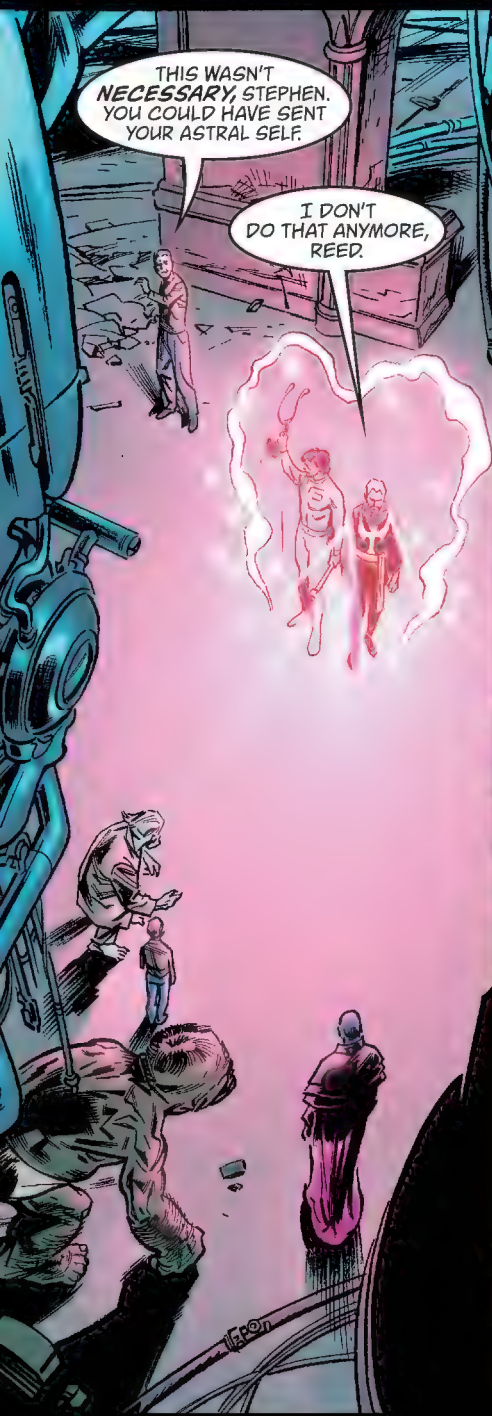
"AND THAT'S WHY HE BECAME ILL WHEN CONFINED TO A BED...HE..."

"...I HAVE TO **LEAVE**, KYLE. I HAVE TO TELL LOGAN WHAT I'VE LEARNED."

"I **PROMISED HIM.**"

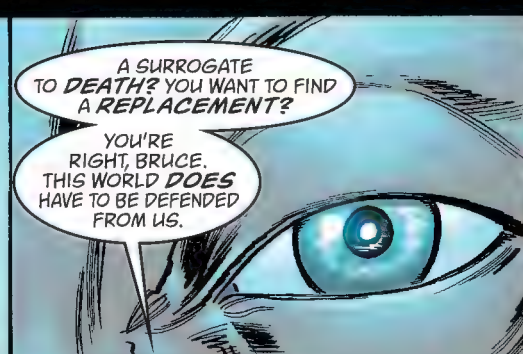
"BEFORE YOU GO, AARON, YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT REED RICHARDS HAS SOUGHT OUT THE AID OF **DR. STRANGE** TO FIND A CURE FOR THE SUFFERING OF THOSE WHO **SHOULD BE DEAD, BUT ARE NOT.**"

"THE NUMBER OF GATHERING MINDS **GROWS** IN LATVERIA. BANNER IS THERE, AS IS MCCOY. THEY JOIN RICHARDS, IMMORTUS AND OTHERS."





ARE WE IN AGREEMENT THEN, GENTLEMEN...THAT A **SURROGATE** WILL BE NECESSARY?



A SURROGATE TO DEATH? YOU WANT TO FIND A REPLACEMENT?

YOU'RE RIGHT, BRUCE. THIS WORLD **DOES** HAVE TO BE DEFENDED FROM US.



NO, STEPHEN. WE ARE ONLY TRYING TO RESTORE A **BALANCE**, A NATURAL BALANCE TO MANKIND.

SO SAYS THE SLAYER OF THE CELESTIAL EMBRYO.



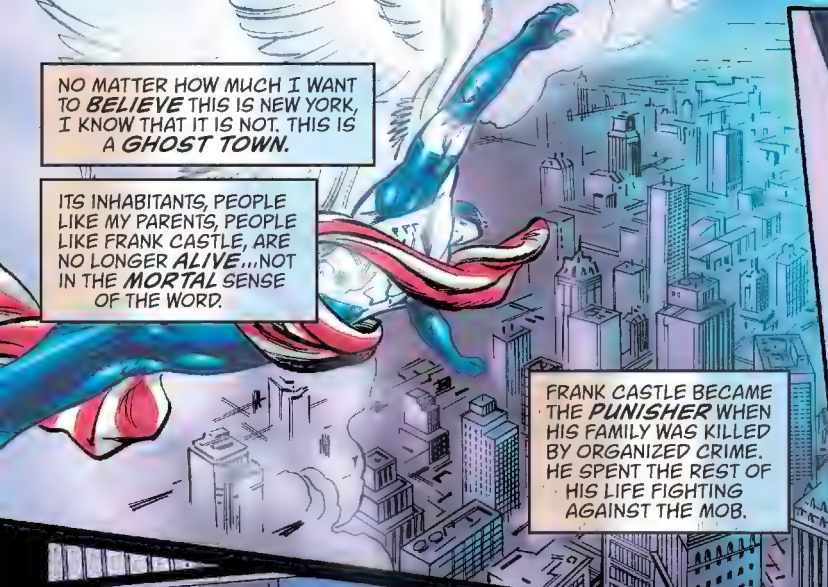
YOU'RE BEING **UNFAIR**, MAGICIAN. YOU--



REED? WHAT IS IT?

THE **BAXTER BUILDING**. OUR OLD HEADQUARTERS... SOMETHING'S WRONG.

THIS WILL HAVE TO WAIT, GENTLEMEN. I'M NEEDED IN NEW YORK.



NO MATTER HOW MUCH I WANT
TO **BELIEVE** THIS IS NEW YORK,
I KNOW THAT IT IS NOT. THIS IS
A **GHOST TOWN**.

ITS INHABITANTS, PEOPLE
LIKE MY PARENTS, PEOPLE
LIKE FRANK CASTLE, ARE
NO LONGER **ALIVE**...NOT
IN THE **MORTAL** SENSE
OF THE WORD.

FRANK CASTLE BECAME
THE **PUNISHER** WHEN
HIS FAMILY WAS KILLED
BY ORGANIZED CRIME.
HE SPENT THE REST OF
HIS LIFE FIGHTING
AGAINST THE MOB.



AND NOW THAT HE IS DEAD,
HE HAS HIS **FAMILY** AGAIN.



AM I REALLY PREPARED TO TAKE
THAT ALL **AWAY** FROM HIM?

AM I READY TO USE **POWER**
IN WAYS I NEVER HAVE BEFORE?
AM I READY TO PLAY THE
TYRANT FOR THE SAKE OF
UNIVERSAL LIBERATION?



I AM, AS EVER, A **SLAVE**
TO FREEDOM.



HOW MANY
TIMES DO I HAVE
TO **KILL YOU** TO MAKE
IT **REAL**?

LEAVE ME
AND MY FAMILY
ALONE!



STEVE?

FAMILY
IS SACRED, YOU
SCUM.

AS IS
LIFE...



...HOW **DARE** YOU PRETEND TO BE SOMETHING YOU ARE NOT!



THAT'S ONE FOR MY JOURNAL.



HONEY? DID YOU...? HONEY?

KEEP AWAY FROM US!

YOU'RE A **MONSTER**, FRANK!



NO...I WAS **PROTECTING** MY FAMILY.

THAT'S WHAT GOOD HUSBANDS DO. THEY KEEP **BAD THINGS** FROM HAPPENING.

I **SAVED** YOU FROM THE MONSTERS...



GET AWAY FROM US! HANDS THAT CAN DO WHAT I SAW YOU DO WILL **NEVER** HOLD ME OR MY CHILDREN AGAIN. **NEVER!**

BUT THEY KEPT **COMING BACK**... HOW **COULD** I STOP--?

SHUT UP, FRANK! OH GOD, JUST **SHUT UP!**



I AM WHAT I AM **BECAUSE** OF YOU. BECAUSE OF WHAT HAPPENED TO THE **CHILDREN**. CAN'T YOU **SEE** THAT?

I DID WHAT I DID BECAUSE OF WHAT THEY **DID TO YOU**. AND I'LL DO IT **AGAIN**. AS MANY TIMES AS I HAVE TO.

WHAT DID THEY DO TO US, FRANK?



THEY **KILLED** YOU, HONEY. YOU AND THE CHILDREN.

YOU'RE **DEAD**.



LET ME UNDERSTAND THIS... YOU **FREED** EVERYONE FROM **HEL**?

I EVER TELL YOU WHAT A **NICE** PLACE YOU HAVE HERE, SURTUR... WHEREVER HERE IS?

STOP IT, LOKI. LET'S SAVE ANY MOCKING FOR THE HUMAN **PRETENDING** TO BE OUR FATHER.

"WE ACCOMPANIED STEPHEN STRANGE AND THE XEN WARRIORS TO **ASGARD** ON A MISSION TO RESCUE STRANGE'S FORMER DISCIPLE CLEA FROM THE STRONGHOLD WHERE I MYSELF HAD **IMPRISONED** HER.

"I'VE LEARNED SO MUCH SINCE THEN. I'VE BEEN **SO WRONG** ABOUT **SO MUCH**."



DON'T BE SO **HARD** ON YOURSELF, BROTHER.

IT'S ALL A **LIE**, I'M NOT YOUR **BROTHER**, LOKI.



I BEG TO DIFFER, THOR. WE'RE BROTHERS **NOW** MORE THAN **EVER** BEFORE.



ISN'T THAT RIGHT, **BROTHER** SURTUR?



"LOKI ATTEMPTED TO **BARTER** HIS LIFE FOR CLEA'S.

"ODIN KNEW BETTER THAN TO TRUST THE TRICKSTER GOD, AND SO HE CHOSE **ME**, INSTEAD, TO BE HER **SUBSTITUTE** IN HELA'S REALM."

"WHAT ODIN DID NOT KNOW WAS HOW MUCH ABOUT **MYSELF** AND THE NATURE OF **ASGARD** I DISCOVERED.

"THE THOR THAT ODIN KNEW, THE THOR HE **MOLDED** ME INTO BEING, WOULD NOT BE CAPABLE OF FALSEHOOD. THE THOR HE COULD MANIPULATE WOULD NEVER RESORT TO **DECEPTION** OF ANY KIND.

"NOR WOULD HE EXPECT ME TO USE THE TRUTH AND TWIST IT THE WAY **LOKI** WAS CAPABLE OF."

LISTEN TO ME, MY FRIENDS!

THE HEROES OF MIDGARD HAVE DEFEATED THE PERSONALITY OF **DEATH** IN A REALM LARGER THAN THIS ONE!

I, TOO, FOUGHT FOR THIS NOBLE CAUSE. AND WE WERE THE **VICTORS!** YOU ARE FREE TO **LEAVE** THIS PLACE! FREE TO CELEBRATE AND SING AND DRINK OF THIS, OH **HAPPIEST** OF DAYS!

DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT THIS **MEANS**, HELA, QUEEN OF THE DAMNED?

YOUR IMPRISONMENT IS **OVER**. YOU'VE BEEN HERE LONGER THAN ANYONE...YOU'RE **FREE**.

YOUR LIPS CAN TASTE OF **LIFE** AGAIN, AND NOT OF DEATH.

AND THAT WAS IT. EVERYONE WALKED OUT OF HEL BECAUSE THEY THOUGHT THEY COULD.

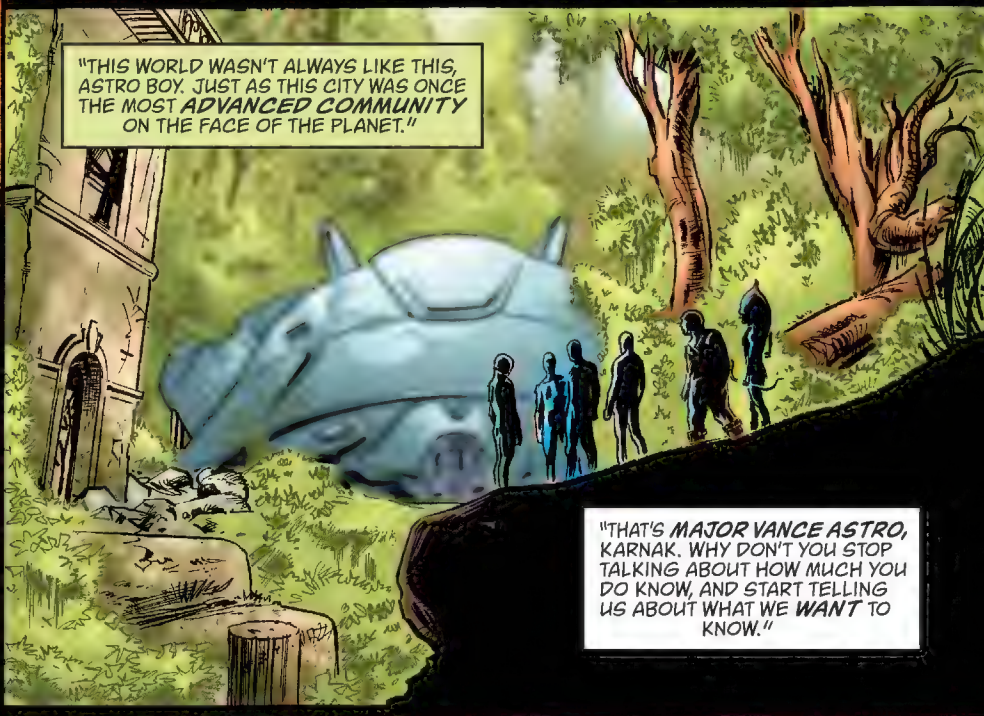
BUT ODIN WAS **WRONG**. **LOKI** **TRICKED** HIM INTO CHOOSING ME TO TAKE **CLEA'S** PLACE.

IF **LOKI** HAD SHOWN UP IN HELA'S REALM CLAIMING THEY WEREN'T DEAD, THEY'D **LAUGH** AT HIM. HE TRIED THAT BEFORE, BACK WHEN GALACTUS FOUGHT THE CELESTIALS.

BUT ME...WHO WOULD DOUBT THE WORD OF THE **ODINSON** HIMSELF?

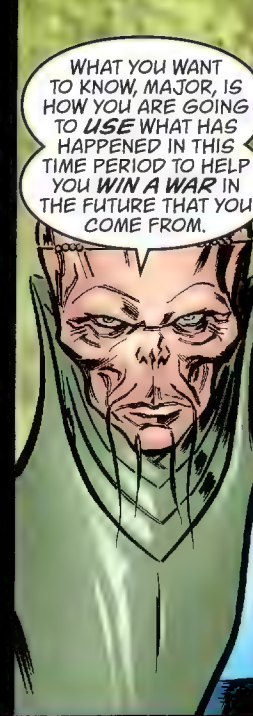


AIN'T I A STINKER?

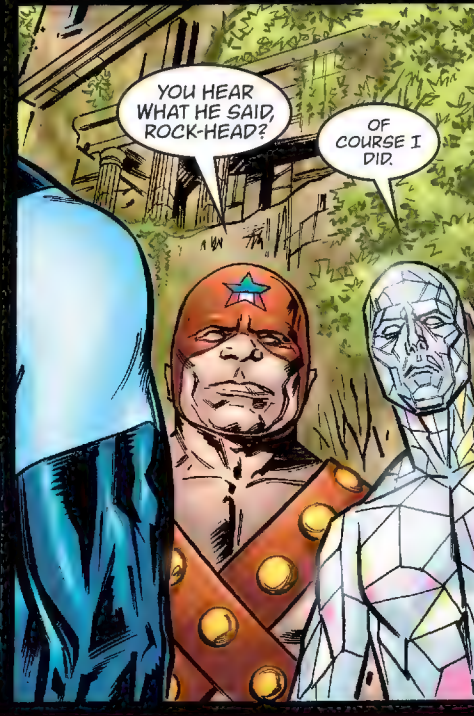


"THIS WORLD WASN'T ALWAYS LIKE THIS, ASTRO BOY. JUST AS THIS CITY WAS ONCE THE MOST **ADVANCED COMMUNITY** ON THE FACE OF THE PLANET."

"THAT'S **MAJOR VANCE ASTRO**, KARNAK. WHY DON'T YOU STOP TALKING ABOUT HOW MUCH YOU DO KNOW, AND START TELLING US ABOUT WHAT WE **WANT** TO KNOW."

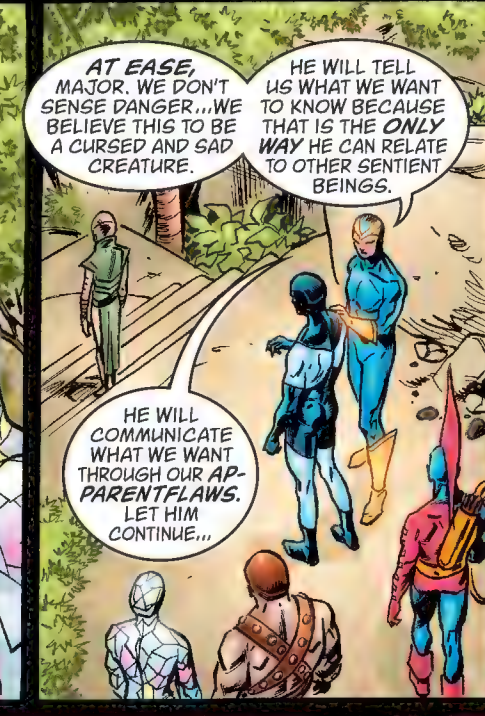


WHAT YOU WANT TO KNOW, MAJOR, IS HOW YOU ARE GOING TO **USE** WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN THIS TIME PERIOD TO HELP YOU **WIN A WAR** IN THE FUTURE THAT YOU COME FROM.



YOU HEAR WHAT HE SAID, ROCK-HEAD?

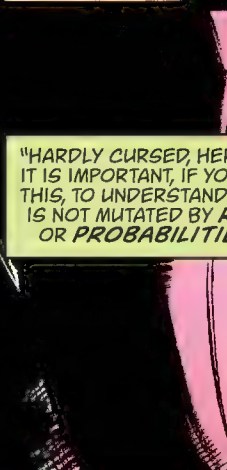
OF COURSE I DID.



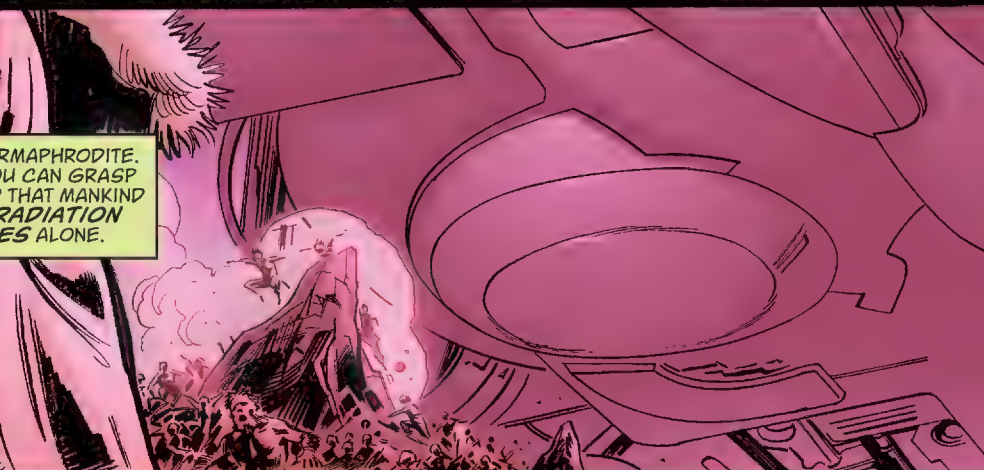
AT EASE, MAJOR. WE DON'T SENSE DANGER...WE BELIEVE THIS TO BE A CURSED AND SAD CREATURE.

HE WILL TELL US WHAT WE WANT TO KNOW BECAUSE THAT IS THE **ONLY WAY** HE CAN RELATE TO OTHER SENTIENT BEINGS.

HE WILL COMMUNICATE WHAT WE WANT THROUGH OUR **APPARENT FLAWS**. LET HIM CONTINUE...

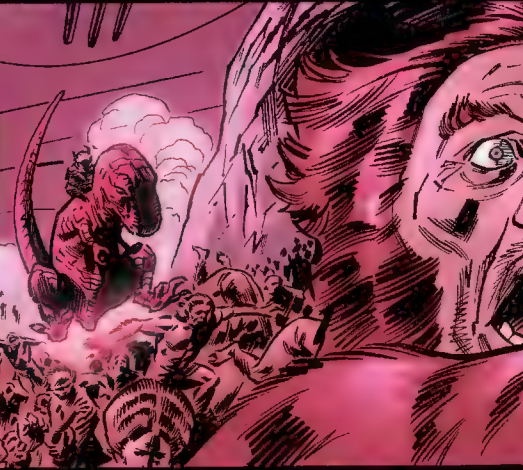


"HARDLY CURSED, HERMAPHRODITE. IT IS IMPORTANT, IF YOU CAN GRASP THIS, TO UNDERSTAND THAT MANKIND IS NOT MUTATED BY **RADIATION** OR **PROBABILITIES** ALONE.



"WHEN PRIMITIVE MANKIND WALKED THE EARTH, THE BEINGS KNOWN AS THE **CELESTIALS** CAME TO THIS PLANET WITH THE INTENT OF **PROPAGATION**.

"THEY MANIPULATED PRIMITIVE HUMANITY, AND THROUGH THEIR **ADVANCED SCIENCES**, LACED THE HUMAN GENE WITH A **MUTABLE SEED**, A CHROMOSOME WHICH, WHEN TRIGGERED, WOULD LEAD TO THE POWERS AND MUTATIONS YOU COVET."



THE INHUMAN NATION RESULTED WHEN ANOTHER ALIEN RACE, THE **KREE**, CAME TO EARTH AND USED THE **TERRIGEN MISTS** TO TRIGGER THOSE DORMANT SEEDS AND MUTATE A PORTION OF MANKIND INTO A RACE OF SOLDIERS.



WE **NEED** THESE TERRIGEN MISTS, KARNAK. WE NEED THEM--



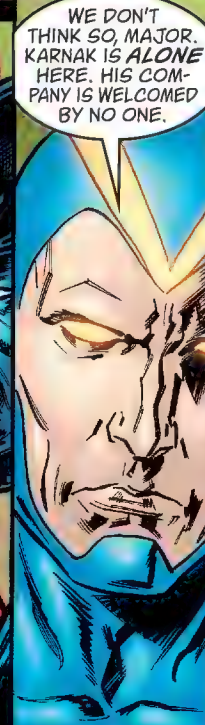
TO MUTATE FUTURE HUMANITY TO **DEFEND THEMSELVES** FROM THE INVADING ALIEN BADOON. I KNOW.

JUST AS I ALSO KNOW THERE ARE **NO MORE TRACES** OF THE TERRIGEN MISTS TO BE FOUND ON THE PLANET. THEY ARE NOW PART OF THE ATMOSPHERE, AND **IMPOSSIBLE** TO EXTRACT.

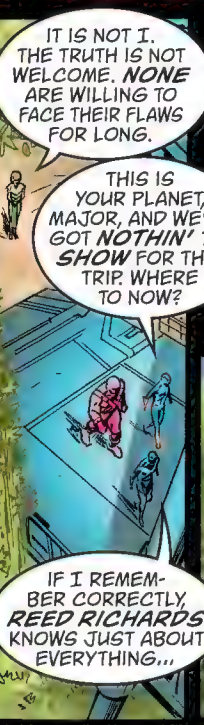


THEN YOU'RE OF **NO USE** TO US. SHOULD I KILL HIM, MAJOR?

STAR-HAWK?



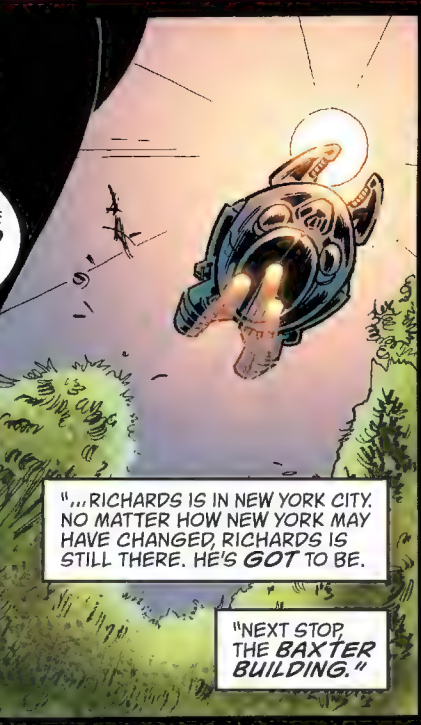
WE DON'T THINK SO, MAJOR. KARNAK IS **ALONE** HERE. HIS COMPANY IS WELCOMED BY NO ONE.



IT IS NOT I. THE TRUTH IS NOT WELCOME. **NONE** ARE WILLING TO FACE THEIR FLAWS FOR LONG.

THIS IS YOUR PLANET, MAJOR, AND WE'VE GOT **NOTHIN'** TO SHOW FOR THIS TRIP WHERE TO NOW?

IF I REMEMBER CORRECTLY, **REED RICHARDS** KNOWS JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING...



"...RICHARDS IS IN NEW YORK CITY. NO MATTER HOW NEW YORK MAY HAVE CHANGED, RICHARDS IS STILL THERE. HE'S **GOT** TO BE.

"NEXT STOP THE **BAXTER BUILDING**."



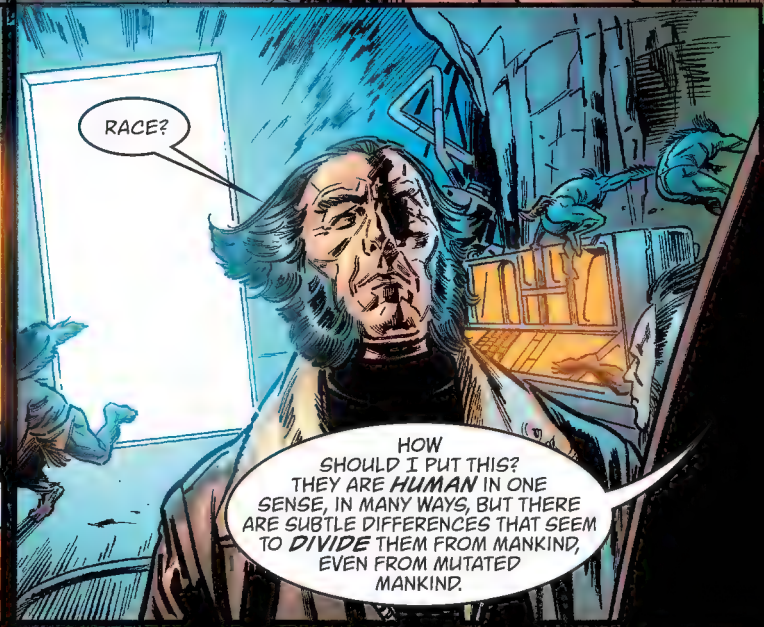
ARE YOU TELLIN' ME, WALTER, THAT THERE'S A **RACE** O' ME LIVIN' UP HERE IN CANADA?

WHAT ARE THEY, MY LITTER?



NOT EXACTLY, LOGAN. I BELIEVE THEY ARE YOUR... **PACK**. OR TRIBE, IF YOU MUST HUMANIZE THEM. IN TIME, EVIDENCE EVEN SHOWS THAT I MAY BE PART OF THIS **PACK**, AS WELL.

I'M CONSIDERING CALLING THEM YOUR "**RACE**."



RACE?

HOW SHOULD I PUT THIS? THEY ARE **HUMAN** IN ONE SENSE, IN MANY WAYS, BUT THERE ARE SUBTLE DIFFERENCES THAT SEEM TO **DIVIDE** THEM FROM MANKIND, EVEN FROM MUTATED MANKIND.



I KNOW WHO YOU ARE, LOGAN. I KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENED.

I WAS WONDERIN' WHEN YA'D **SHOW UP**. AN' I WAS WONDERIN' WHEN YA'D DIG UP THE **SECRETS** OF MY PAST.

REMARKABLE. AND WHAT-OR WHO ARE YOU?

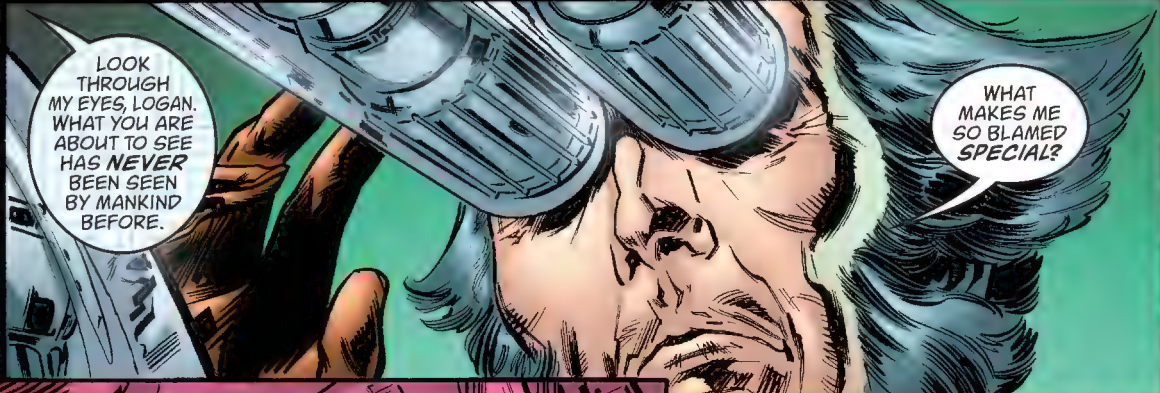


DR. LANGKOWSKI. WE HAVE MET BEFORE. I AM **AARON STACK**. WHEN WE MET... WHEN WE FOUGHT EACH OTHER, I WAS KNOWN AS **MACHINE MAN**.



REMARKABLE.

ALL RIGHT, AARON, SPILL IT. WHO AM I?



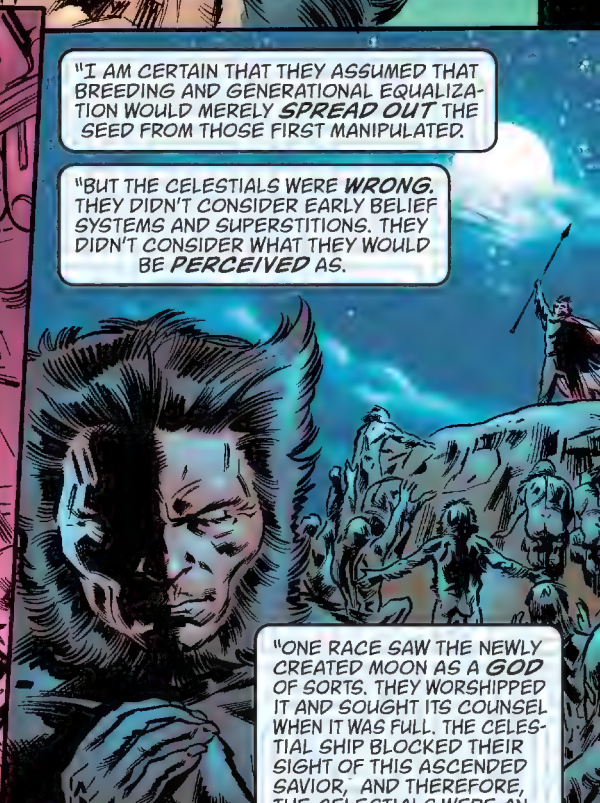
LOOK
THROUGH
MY EYES, LOGAN.
WHAT YOU ARE
ABOUT TO SEE
HAS **NEVER**
BEEN SEEN
BY MANKIND
BEFORE.

WHAT
MAKES ME
SO BLAMED
SPECIAL?



"I AM ABOUT TO TELL YOU. I TOLD YOU ABOUT
THE **CELESTIALS** AND THE **MUTABLE
SEED** PLACED IN EARLY MAN, LOGAN.

"WHAT I MYSELF JUST LEARNED, AND SHOULD
HAVE NEVER ASSUMED, WAS THAT NOT **ALL** OF
MANKIND WAS MANIPULATED BY THE CELESTIALS.

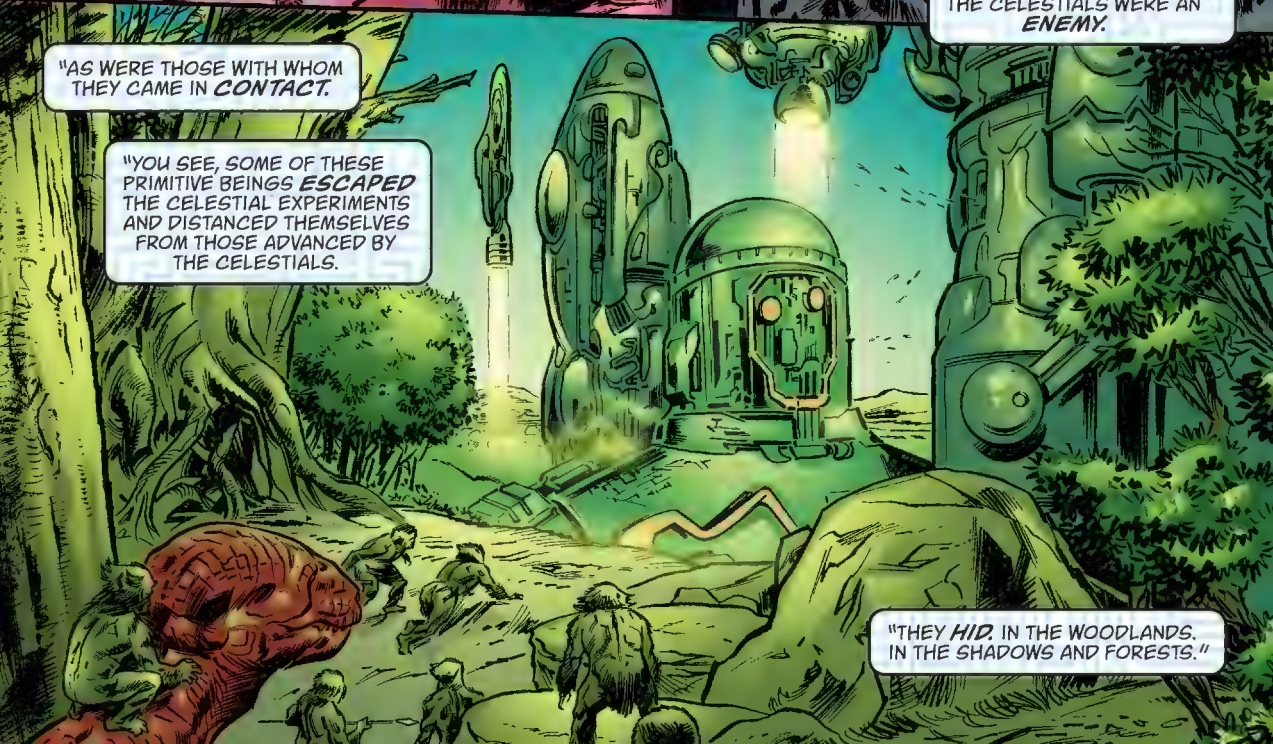


"I AM CERTAIN THAT THEY ASSUMED THAT
BREEDING AND GENERATIONAL EQUALIZA-
TION WOULD MERELY **SPREAD OUT** THE
SEED FROM THOSE FIRST MANIPULATED.

"BUT THE CELESTIALS WERE **WRONG**.
THEY DIDN'T CONSIDER EARLY BELIEF
SYSTEMS AND SUPERSTITIONS. THEY
DIDN'T CONSIDER WHAT THEY WOULD
BE **PERCEIVED** AS.



"ONE RACE SAW THE NEWLY
CREATED MOON AS A **GOD**
OF SORTS. THEY WORSHIPPED
IT AND SOUGHT ITS COUNSEL
WHEN IT WAS FULL. THE CELESTIAL
SHIP BLOCKED THEIR
SIGHT OF THIS ASCENDED
SAVIOR, AND THEREFORE,
THE CELESTIALS WERE AN
ENEMY.



"AS WERE THOSE WITH WHOM
THEY CAME IN **CONTACT**.

"YOU SEE, SOME OF THESE
PRIMITIVE BEINGS **ESCAPED**
THE CELESTIAL EXPERIMENTS
AND DISTANCED THEMSELVES
FROM THOSE ADVANCED BY
THE CELESTIALS.

"THEY **HID**. IN THE WOODLANDS.
IN THE SHADOWS AND FORESTS."



"BUT SINCE THESE MOON-WORSHIPPERS WERE NOT **'CHOSEN'** OF THE GODS, WERE NOT STAMPED WITH **DIVINE RIGHT**, THEY WERE SEEN AS **LESS** THAN HUMAN.

"AND SO THEY BECAME THE **HUNTER**, AND **PREJUDICE** WAS BORN UPON THE EARTH.

"IN AN AGE WHEN THOSE WITH THE **MUTANT SEED** WITHIN THEM **STRUCK** AT THOSE WITHOUT.

"THE MOON-BEASTS WERE NOT LIKE THOSE MARKED BY THE CELESTIALS.

"THE SEED, THOUGH DORMANT, ADDED TO THE **AGGRESSION** OF THE EARLY EXPERIMENTAL HUMANS. THEY TENDED TO BE MORE **SICKLY**, TO HAVE A SHORTER LIFE-SPAN.

"PERHAPS THIS, MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE, **ADDED** TO THE PREJUDICE AFFLICTED UPON THE MOON TRIBE.

"THIS WENT ON FOR HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF YEARS. THOSE BORN TO THE TRIBE OF THE MOON REMAINED IN THE WILDERNESS, AND **ADAPTED** TO A WORLD THAT BECAME MORE AND MORE AGGRESSIVE TOWARDS THEM.

"THEY NEVER LEARNED ENGLISH BECAUSE IT WAS NOT REQUIRED, WAS NOT **NECESSARY** FOR THEIR CONTINUED ADAPTATION.

"AND SOMETIMES, AS IN THE CASE OF YOU, LOGAN, THEY TAKE THE PLACE OF **SURROGATE CHILDREN**.

"ADOPTED CHILDREN THAT OFTEN BREED **ANGER** AND **RESENTMENT** DUE TO THEIR SUPERIOR HEALTH AND ABILITIES.

"IN YOUR CASE, LOGAN, THE FAMILY YOU WERE BROUGHT INTO **RESENTED** YOUR PRESENCE **SO MUCH** THAT THEY CONFINED YOU TO A **BED** AND TRIED TO CONVINCE YOU THAT YOU WERE **SICKLY** YOURSELF.

"THE MOON-TRIBE, LOGAN, WAS NOT THE ONLY TRIBE, EITHER. THERE ARE OTHERS. THE TRIBE SABRETOOTH CAME FROM WAS PART OF A **BEAR CLAN**.

"ONCE IN A WHILE, THEY'D BE FOUND BY GYPSIES AND MADE TO LIVE THE LIFE OF **FREAKS**. MADE TO TRAVEL AND PERFORM BEHIND MIRRORS AND WINDOWS.

"BUT TRANSPLANTED INTO A NEW ENVIRONMENT, YOU WERE NEVER QUITE **PREPARED** FOR THEIR ACTIONS."

YOU DID BECOME SICKLY, UNTIL THE DAY YOUR HERITAGE **RIPPED FREE** FROM THE PERSON YOU WERE SUDDENLY BEING RAISED TO BE.

SOMETIMES, WHEN THE MUTANT SEED WAS TRIGGERED, WHETHER IT BE THROUGH RADIATION, PUBERTY, SOME STRANGE MINERAL, OR AS A RESULT OF CANNIBALISM...

...THE MUTATION WOULD TAKE THE FORM OF A **REVERSION** TO WHAT MANKIND WAS BEFORE THE CELESTIAL GENETIC TAMPERING.

LYCANTHROPY AND THE **CURSE OF THE WENDIGO** ARE EVIDENCE OF THAT.



DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND, LOGAN?

YOU ARE THE **GENETIC STEP** BETWEEN PRIMITIVE MANKIND AND MODERN MUTANITY. YOU ARE WHAT MANKIND WOULD HAVE BECOME.

THAT'S IT? I'M SOME SORTA BLAMED **MISSIN' LINK**? WE'RE THE REAL HUMANS AN' EVERY-ONE ELSE AIN'T?

FIGGERS IT'D BE SOMETHIN' LIKE THAT.

REMARKABLE.



FOR GOD'S SAKE, WALTER, IS THAT ALL YOU CAN SAY ANYMORE?

SO MY HEALIN' **FACTOR** AIN'T EVEN A MUTANT POWER AT ALL! CHARLIE **LIED** TA ME WHEN HE ASKED ME TA JOIN THE X-MEN AN' SAID I WAS A **MUTANT**.

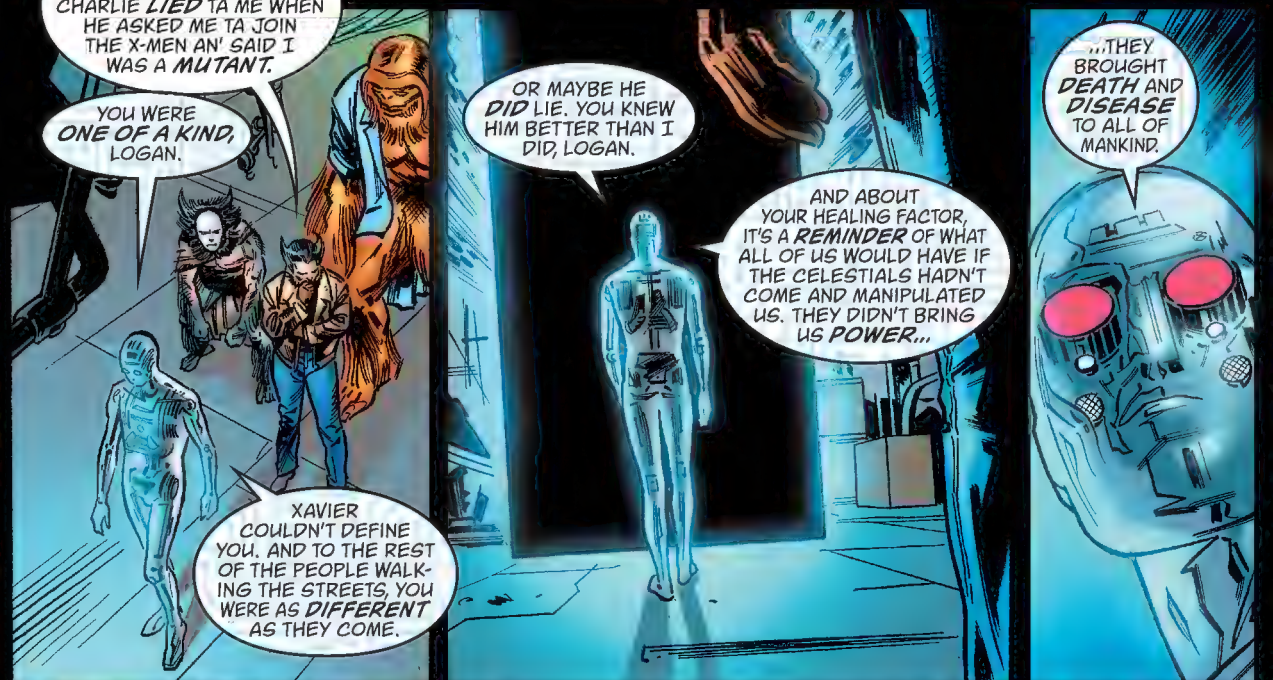
YOU WERE ONE OF A KIND, LOGAN.

OR MAYBE HE **DID** LIE. YOU KNEW HIM BETTER THAN I DID, LOGAN.

...THEY BROUGHT **DEATH AND DISEASE** TO ALL OF MANKIND.

AND ABOUT YOUR HEALING **FACTOR**, IT'S A **REMINDER** OF WHAT ALL OF US WOULD HAVE IF THE CELESTIALS HADN'T COME AND MANIPULATED US. THEY DIDN'T BRING US **POWER**...

XAVIER COULDN'T DEFINE YOU, AND TO THE REST OF THE PEOPLE WALKING THE STREETS, YOU WERE AS **DIFFERENT** AS THEY COME.



GOODBYE, BOLT, GOODBYE.
YOU ARE **DEAD**, MY KING,
AND LIFE GOES ON.

I AM YOUR QUEEN **NO
LONGER**. THE WORLD
HAS CHANGED. MY
DUTIES HAVE CHANGED.
IT IS A **WORLD** OF
INHUMANS, NOT A CITY.

I AM NOW THE
**QUEEN OF
ENGLAND**.

THE WIFE OF BRIAN
BRADDOCK, KING
BRITAIN.

MEDUSA...?

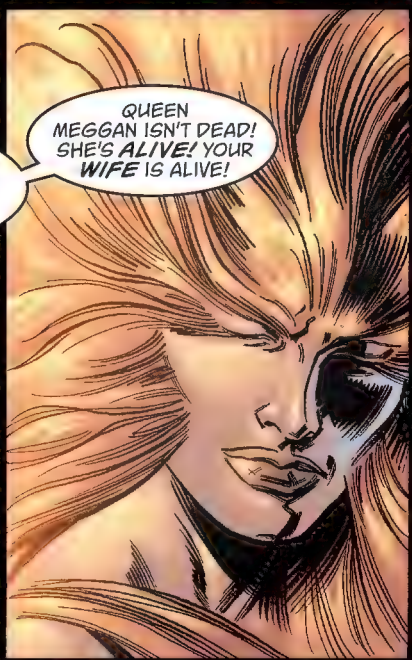
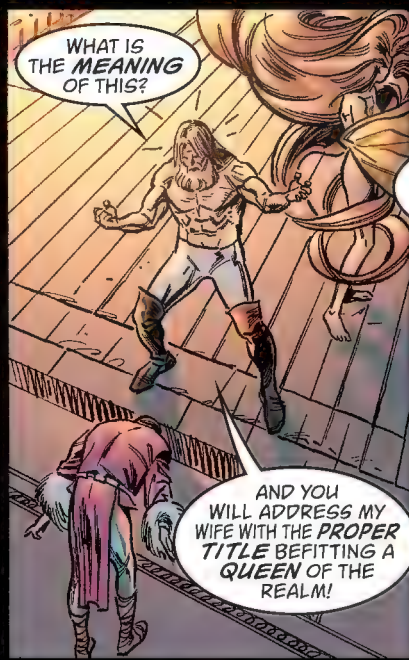
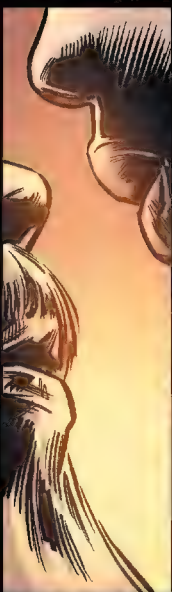
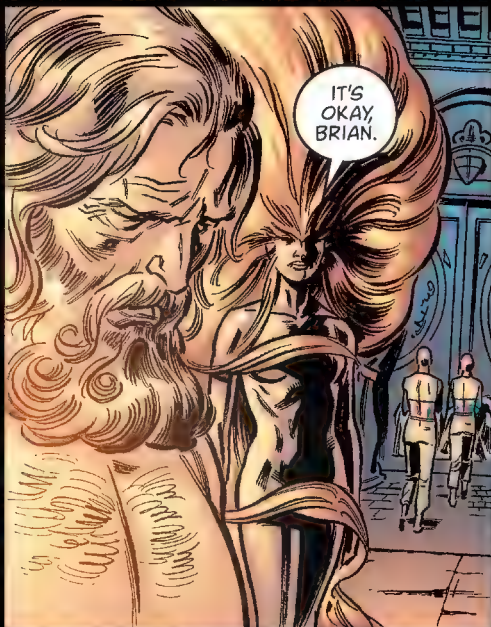
WE DON'T...I
MEAN, I HAVEN'T SINCE
MEGGAN...I'M NOT EX-
PECTING YOU TO...

BRIAN,
YOU RAISED MY
SON.

AND YOU
MARRIED ME TO
BETTER CARE FOR
MY PEOPLE.

THE **LEAST**
I CAN DO IS CARE FOR
YOU AND SEE TO YOUR NEEDS.
THIS ISN'T OUT OF DUTY, BRIAN,
BUT **GRATITUDE**.

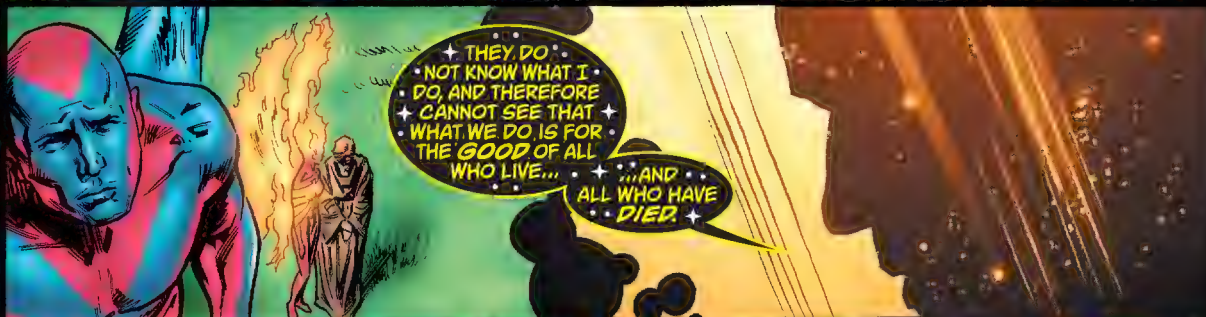
I...





• LISTEN •
• TO ME, MY •
• GUARDIANS •

• OUR •
• PARADISE IS •
• THE SUBJECT OF •
• CONFUSION AND •
• MISUNDERSTANDING •
• TO THOSE *OUT* •
• *SIDE* OF ITS •
• REACH •



• THEY DO •
• NOT KNOW WHAT I •
• DO, AND THEREFORE •
• CANNOT SEE THAT •
• WHAT WE DO IS FOR •
• THE *GOOD* OF ALL •
• WHO LIVE... •

• ...AND •
• ALL WHO HAVE •
• *DIED* •



• I FEAR •
• THAT YOU, TOO, •
• HAVE BEGUN TO •
• *DOUBT* ME •

• GO BEYOND •
• THE BORDERS OF THE •
• PARADISE, AND *SEE* THE •
• GOOD WE ARE DOING. GO •
• AND SEE. KNOW FOR •
• *YOURSELF* THAT •
• ALL IS WELL •



MATTHEW...WHILE
I WAS IN THE REALM OF THE
DEAD HELPING FRANK CASTLE,
I SAW THE *WILSON FISK*
BUILDING.

THE
KINGPIN
ESCAPED
TO THE REALM
OF THE DEAD,
AS WELL.



SOME
PEOPLE *NEVER*
LEARN, STEVE.

WHERE
DID YOU PUT
THE JACKAL AND
JIGSAW?



I LEFT THEM IN THE BONEYARD OF DEATH'S REALM, WHERE WE FOUGHT THE FINAL BATTLE. I HOPED THAT SOME TIME ALONE THERE WOULD TEACH THEM THE **IMPORTANCE OF LIFE.**

ALONE? YOU LEFT THEM ALONE?



JUST LIKE THOSE WE HAVE LED HERE.

LET'S FLY.



MY NAME WAS ONCE **MATTHEW MURDOCK.** A MAN WITHOUT FEAR.

BUT I AM **VERY AFRAID NOW.**

WE FLY BY ALL THOSE NOW TASTING OF PARADISE IN A REALITY WE HELPED CREATE. IN A HEAVEN WE ARE ALL **RESPONSIBLE FOR.**

EACH OF THEM, HEROES AND CRIMINALS ALIKE, IS TASTING OF THEIR GREATEST APPETITES AND WANTS, EXPERIENCING THE DESIRES AND HOPES THEY'VE ALWAYS **DREAMED OF.**

WHEN THE KINGPIN OF CRIME WAS ALIVE, HE **FED APPETITES** UNTIL THEY BECAME **ADDICTIONS.** HE **FED PLEASURES** UNTIL THEY GREW TO BECOME **PAINFUL.**

I AM AFRAID THE SAME WILL HAPPEN **HERE,** IN THE DREAM REALM OF **UNLIMITED WANT.**

I AM TERRIFIED THAT GIVEN TIME, OUR HEAVEN WILL BECOME **HELL.**

WE'RE ALMOST OUTSIDE.

WE EMERGE FROM THE PARADISE AND ENTER THE **NEGATIVE ZONE**, A REALM FIRST DISCOVERED IN THE LAND OF THE LIVING BY THE LEADER OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR, REED RICHARDS.

A REALM THAT RICHARDS, ON BEHALF OF HUMANITY, **SWORE** TO NEVER CORRUPT AGAIN.

THIS IS A LITTLE **BEYOND** THAT.

MR. MURDOCK? THIS **HARDLY** SEEMS TO BE CONCLUSIVE PROOF OF THE GOOD WE ARE DOING...

MAR-VELL SAID WE'D SEE THE **GOOD** WE WERE DOING HERE... DOESN'T HE SEE...?

I KNOW NOTHING OF FEAR, VICTOR, BUT I KNOW SOMETHING OF **BLINDNESS**.

THEY CAN'T SEE US. THEY'RE **ATTACKING** THE PARADISE.

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO **DO** ABOUT THESE BEINGS?

UNLESS HE CAN'T SEE **OUTSIDE** THE PARADISE.

I KNOW WHAT IT IS LIKE TO BE **FEARED**... THEY ARE **AFRAID** OF US.

THAT'S NOT THE QUESTION, STARK.

THE QUESTION IS, WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO ABOUT **MAR-VELL**?

"And he that strives to touch the stars, oft stumbles at a straw."
— Edmund Spenser

MARVEL

5

TM

PARADISE



**KRUEGER
BRAITHWAITE
REINHOLD**

“Aaron?”

“Yes, Kyle?”

“The Baxter Building in New York City is about to become a focal point to a great number of beings from various worlds and times. The likelihood of so many arriving in one moment is like a comedy of errors.”

“Coincidence?”

“Perhaps...but what is coincidence except evidence of the sloth of those not willing to seek a greater design? It is a voluntary blindness, a decision of haste.”

“Then what? And why the Fantastic Four’s old headquarters? I know that Annihilus, Blastaar and another of the inhabitants of the Negative Zone have triggered a number of alarms there. Their return to Earth is prompted by the growing mass at the heart of the Negative Zone, a mass that will envelop them all if it goes unchecked. Reed Richards will be going to the Baxter Building to heed the alarms’ warnings. Is this what you are talking about?”

“Reed Richards is too involved in the search for a new Death to go to the Baxter Building. He will send a surrogate ambassador of his own.”

“Who?”

“Who would you send? If he were still alive, I would send Victor Von Doom.”

“Why Doom?”

“Because Victor Von Doom would be incapable of failure.”

PARADISE X

I S S U E 5

JIM KRUEGER
story and script

ALEX ROSS
story, cover and character designs

DOUGIE BRAITHWAITE
pencils

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colors

TODD KLEIN
letters

MIKE RAICHT
assistant editor

MIKE MARTS
editor

JOE QUESADA
editor in chief

BILL JEMAS
president

"DOOM'S MOTHER WAS A **WITCH**. A **GYPSY** BORN TO RAGS AND PARLOR TRICKS.

"SHE DIED SHORTLY AFTER COMPLETING A RITUAL DEALING WITH **SATAN**, HER SOUL AND BLOOD BECOMING HIS **FOREVER**.



"VICTOR'S FATHER DIED OF EXPOSURE TO THE COLD A FEW YEARS LATER, AND THE **HATRED** FOR THE LOSS OF HIS PARENTS WOULD BECOME THE SINGLE MOTIVATING FACTOR IN VICTOR'S REACH FOR ADULTHOOD."

"WAIT--BUT **WHY**, KYLE? WHY WOULD DOOM'S MOTHER SELL HER SOUL TO THE **DEVIL**? WHAT DID SHE WANT?"



"YES...THAT IS WHAT **VICTOR** WANT-ED TO KNOW AS WELL, AARON.

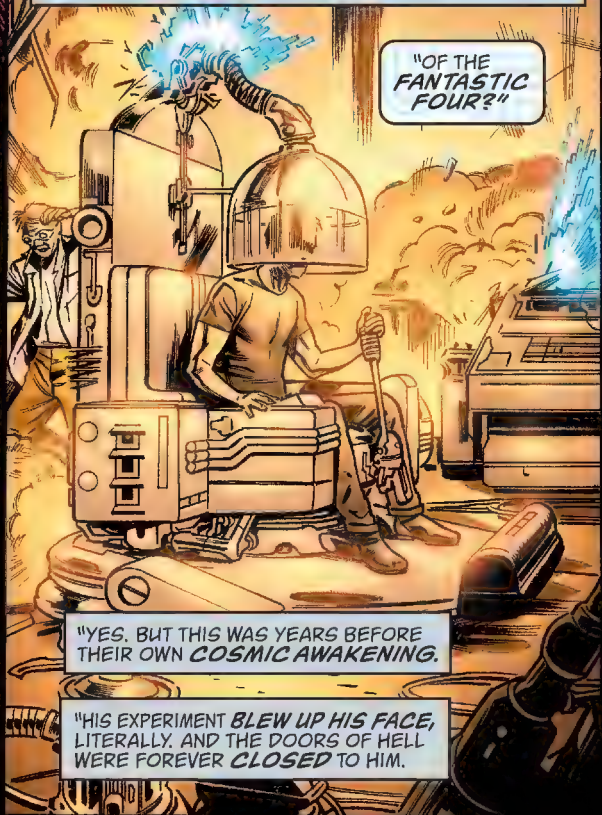
"LONG BEFORE HE MET AND BECAME FRIENDS WITH REED RICHARDS, HE DISCOVERED HIS MOTHER'S **HUNGER** FOR THE OCCULT..."



"...AND SPENT HIS **WAKING HOURS** STUDYING BOTH THE SCIENCES AND THE ARCAINE REMNANTS OF HIS MOTHER'S DALLIANCES WITH THE UNDER-WORLD.

"HE CREATED MACHINES OF SCIENCE THAT HE HOPED WOULD ALLOW HIM TO REACH HIS **MOTHER'S SPIRIT** IN THE INFERNO. HE ATTEMPTED TO USE THESE CREATIONS DESPITE THE WARNINGS OF REED RICHARDS..."

"OF THE **FANTASTIC FOUR**?"



"YES. BUT THIS WAS YEARS BEFORE THEIR OWN **COSMIC AWAKENING**.

"HIS EXPERIMENT **BLEW UP HIS FACE**, LITERALLY. AND THE DOORS OF HELL WERE FOREVER **CLOSED** TO HIM.

"RUMORS OF HIS **SCARS** SPREAD THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

"SOME SAID HIS FACE WAS SEARED **BEYOND RECOGNITION.**

"OTHERS WHISPERED THAT IT WAS MERELY A THIN SCAR RUNNING DOWN HIS CHEEK THAT SENT HIM TO **TIBET** TO BECOME THE ARMORED **DOCTOR DOOM.**"

"BUT WHEN I LOOK AT HIM THROUGH THE WATCHER'S EQUIPMENT, I DON'T SEE ANY SCAR AT ALL, KYLE."

"NONE SAVE THAT LEFT BY THE **FAILURE** TO SAVE HIS **MOTHER.**

"VICTOR CHOSE TO **NEVER SHOW** HIS FACE TO THE WORLD AGAIN. AND SO HE RETURNED TO HIS STUDY OF **MAGIC** NOW THAT SCIENCE HAD FAILED HIM.

"AFTER BECOMING A **MASTER** OF SORCERY AND WITCHCRAFT, DOOM RETURNED TO EUROPE AND OVERTHREW THE KING OF A SMALL BALKAN NATION KNOWN AS **LATVERIA.**

"THE PEOPLE OF THIS NATION CHEERED HIM FOR THE **PROSPERITY** HE BROUGHT THEIR COUNTRY..."

"...DESPITE THE FACT THAT THEY HAD TRADED THEIR **CITIZENSHIP** FOR A TYPE OF **SLAVERY.**

"DOOM WOULD HAVE BEEN SATISFIED TO BE A **KING**...EVEN THE WORLD MARVELED AT HIS RISE TO POWER.

"BUT AT LAST, HE DISCOVERED **WHY** AND FOR **WHAT PURPOSE** HIS MOTHER SOLD HER BODY AND SOUL TO THE DEVIL.

"AND HE KNEW HE WOULD **NEVER** BE SATISFIED **AGAIN.**"

"AND SO DOOM MADE A DEAL OF HIS OWN WITH **MEPHISTO**, ONE WHICH GARNERED HIM THE SECRET OF **TIME TRAVEL**..."

"...A DEAL, WHICH WE'VE SEEN, PROMOTED **MEPHISTO'S OWN AGENDA** MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE."

"DOOM KNEW THERE WOULD BE AN ADDITIONAL '**CATCH**' TO ANY OFFER THE DEVIL MADE TO HIM."

"ALL FOR THE PURPOSE OF **CHANGING** THE MOMENT WHEN DOOM'S MOTHER SOLD HER SOUL TO THE DEVIL. ALL IN FAVOR OF **UNDOING** WHAT SHE HAD DONE."

"BUT OF COURSE HE HAD **NO IDEA** THAT EVERY TRIP THROUGH TIME WAS MERELY CREATING YET **ANOTHER UNIVERSE** FOR **MEPHISTO** TO ESCAPE INTO."

"DOOM SUSPECTED AS MUCH AND ACTUALLY LOOKED FOR **NEW ALLIES** TO HELP IN HIS RESCUE OF HER."

"BUT THE **CURSE** REMAINED."

"WHAT CURSE, KYLE? I THOUGHT YOU SAID DOOM'S MOTHER HAD BEEN **FREED**?"

"SHE WAS, AARON, BUT THIS WAS THE CURSE UPON **DOOM**, THE VERY THING SHE SOLD HER SOUL FOR."

"HE NEEDED A **SACRIFICE**, AND PLANNED ON USING HIS OLD ENEMY **REED RICHARDS** AS THE SCAPEGOAT."

"BUT HIS MISSION OF REVENGE **FAILED** AND BOTH HE AND SUSAN RICHARDS **LOST THEIR LIVES** THAT DAY."

"RICHARDS IN TURN TOOK ON **DOOM'S ROLE** IN THE CASTLE OF LATVERIA, AND **EXILED** HIMSELF TO GRIEVE IN DOOM'S OWN ARMOR...UNTIL THE **RESURRECTION** OF SUSAN RICHARDS."

"BUT WHAT WAS THE CURSE ON DOOM? WHAT DID HIS MOTHER BARTER FOR IN EXCHANGE FOR HER SOUL?"

"ISN'T IT **OBVIOUS**, AARON? SHE WAS BORN TO POVERTY. SHE WAS BORN TO RIDICULE. SHE WAS TREATED LITTLE BETTER THAN A **DOG**."

"SHE SOLD HER SOUL SO THAT HER SON WOULD BE **SOMEONE**. SOMEONE **IMPORTANT**."

"THAT'S WHY DOOM GREW TO **HATE** RICHARDS SO. HIS SUCCESS CAME FROM HIS **COMMITMENT** TO KNOWLEDGE AND HARD WORK."

"DOOM'S SUCCESS CAME FROM A CURSE TO **SUCCEED**. HE HAD NO CHOICE..."

"HE USED THE TIME MACHINE TO SEND HEROES LIKE **REED RICHARDS** AND THE REST OF THE **FANTASTIC FOUR** THROUGHOUT HISTORY, LEARNING HOW TO USE THE MACHINE TO **PINPOINT** MOMENTS IN HISTORY."

"THE **FUTURE** AND THE **PAST**."

"DOOM AND THE MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS, **DR. STRANGE**, RESCUED HER SOUL IN THE END, BY TRICKING HER INTO **SACRIFICING** HERSELF ONCE AGAIN WITHIN HELL'S BORDERS."

"THE PROCESS REDEEMED HER, THOUGH IT MEANT DOOM WOULD NEVER **SEE HER** AGAIN, NOR BE ABLE TO TELL HER HOW MUCH HE **CARED** FOR HER."

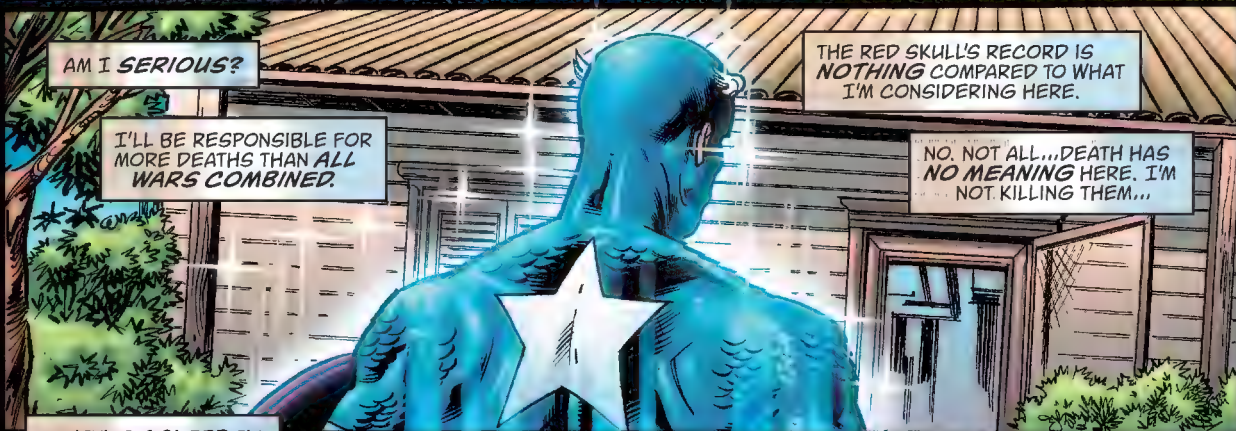
"BUT HE KNEW...HE KNEW WHAT SHE HAD DONE FOR HIM AND THAT WAS **ENOUGH**."

"...HE NEVER HAD THE **LUXURY** OF GIVING UP."



I HAVE NO CHOICE.

I HAVE NO **FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT** HERE IN THE REALM OF THE DEAD. WHAT I DO NOW, I **MUST**. I'M CAPTAIN AMERICA.



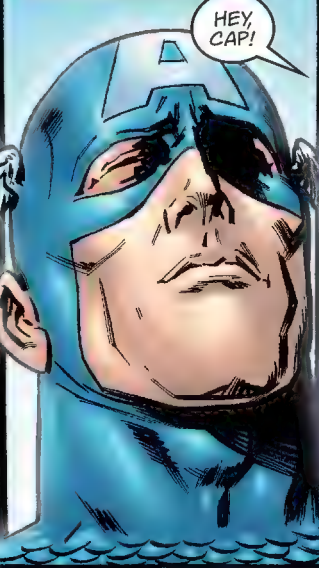
AM I **SERIOUS?**

I'LL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR MORE DEATHS THAN **ALL WARS COMBINED**.

THE RED SKULL'S RECORD IS **NOTHING** COMPARED TO WHAT I'M CONSIDERING HERE.

NO. NOT ALL...DEATH HAS **NO MEANING** HERE. I'M NOT KILLING THEM...

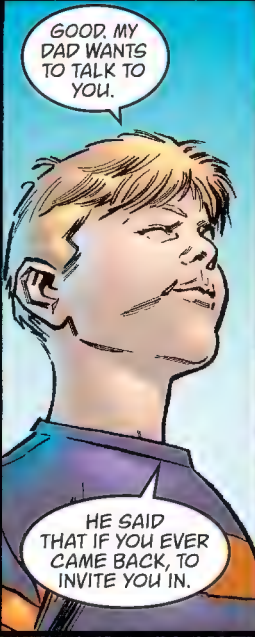
...THEY'RE **ASLEEP** I'M NOT SUGGESTING ANYTHING BUT ONE GIANT **WAKE-UP CALL**.



HEY, CAP!

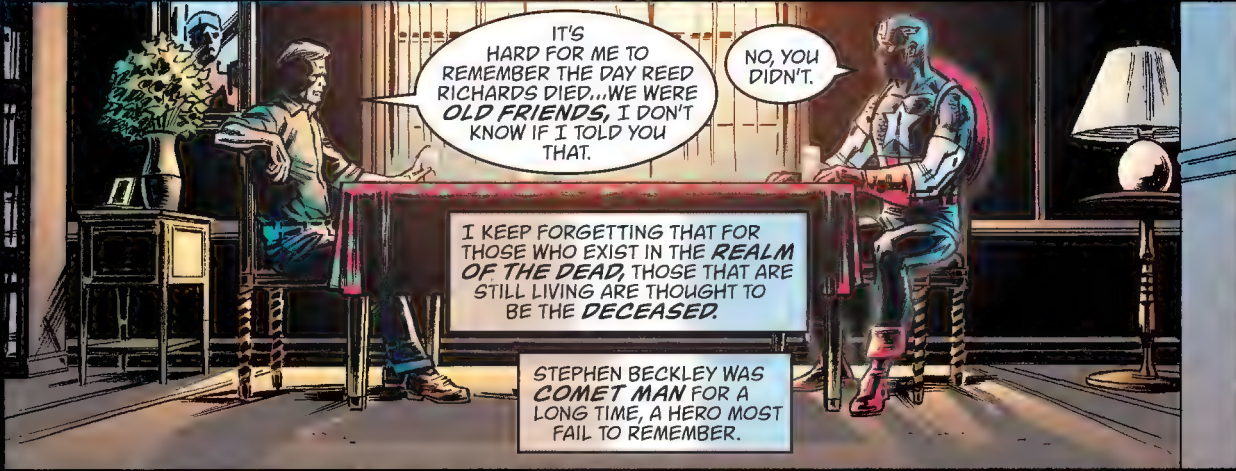


HI, BENNY. HOW ARE YOU?



GOOD. MY DAD WANTS TO TALK TO YOU.

HE SAID THAT IF YOU EVER CAME BACK, TO INVITE YOU IN.



IT'S HARD FOR ME TO REMEMBER THE DAY REED RICHARDS DIED...WE WERE **OLD FRIENDS**, I DON'T KNOW IF I TOLD YOU THAT.

NO, YOU DIDN'T.

I KEEP FORGETTING THAT FOR THOSE WHO EXIST IN THE **REALM OF THE DEAD**, THOSE THAT ARE STILL LIVING ARE THOUGHT TO BE THE **DECEASED**.

STEPHEN BECKLEY WAS **COMET MAN** FOR A LONG TIME, A HERO MOST FAIL TO REMEMBER.



I ADMIRE YOU, CAPTAIN. YOU... REED...

I WISH I COULD AFFORD TO STILL BE COMET MAN, USE THE POWERS I GOT FROM THE ALIEN RACE THAT PATROLS THE GALAXY DISGUISED AS HALLEY'S COMET...

...BUT IT'S TAKEN SO LONG FOR BENNY TO **FORGET** WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM...

...WHAT WAS DONE TO HIM BY THE GOVERNMENT IN AN ATTEMPT TO **REPLICATE** MY POWERS.

I WASN'T AROUND TO PROTECT HIM THEN...BUT **I AM NOW.**



WELL, MR. BECKLEY--

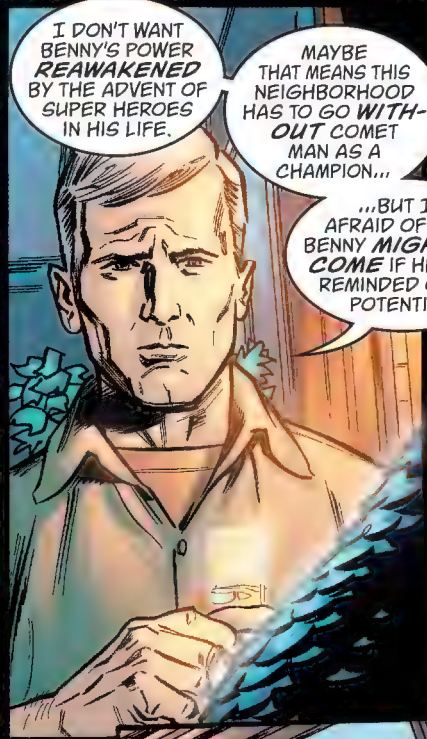
STEPHEN.

STEPHEN...



...I NEVER HAD A SON. BEING A SOLDIER, YOU GET USED TO TAKING LIFE **OUT** OF THE WORLD, NOT **BRINGING** IT IN.

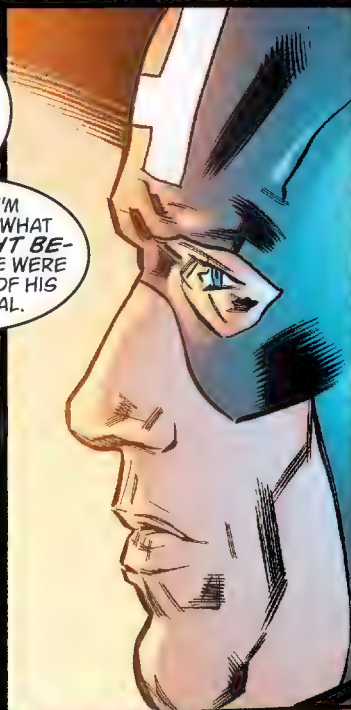
THE THING IS, CAP, I **DON'T WANT** YOU HERE.



I DON'T WANT BENNY'S POWER **REAWAKENED** BY THE ADVENT OF SUPER HEROES IN HIS LIFE.

MAYBE THAT MEANS THIS NEIGHBORHOOD HAS TO GO **WITH-OUT** COMET MAN AS A CHAMPION...

...BUT I'M AFRAID OF WHAT BENNY **MIGHT BE-COME** IF HE WERE REMINDED OF HIS POTENTIAL.

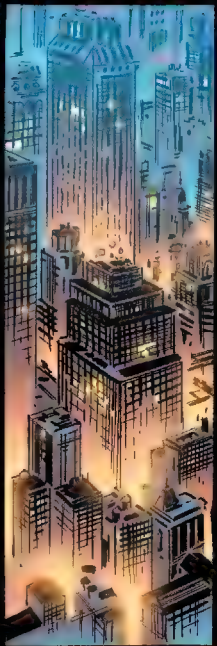


HE'S A **SPECIAL BOY**, STEPHEN. I DON'T WANT HIM TO BE HARMED.



DON'T GET ME WRONG, CAP. KNOWING YOU'RE HERE MAKES A FAMILY **FEEL SAFE.**

BUT I'M SURE YOU HAVE MORE **IMPORTANT** THINGS TO DO THAN TALKING TO RETIRED SUPER HEROES.



MORE IMPORTANT THINGS
TAKE ME TO ANOTHER PART
OF *DEATH'S* REALM.

TO ANOTHER OLD *MAINSTAY*
OF THE SUPER HUMAN COM-
MUNITY FOR WHOM *HERO* WAS
A MORE AMBIGUOUS TERM.



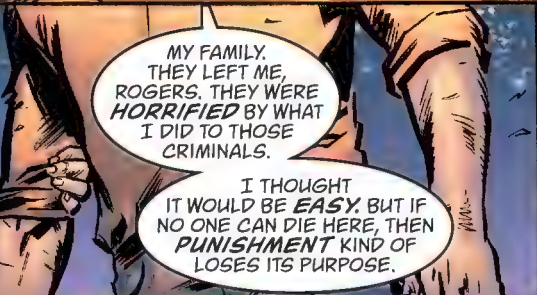
CASTLE?



THEY
WEREN'T IN
THERE, IF THAT'S
WHAT YOU'RE
THINKING.



WHO?



MY FAMILY.
THEY LEFT ME,
ROGERS. THEY WERE
HORRIFIED BY WHAT
I DID TO THOSE
CRIMINALS.

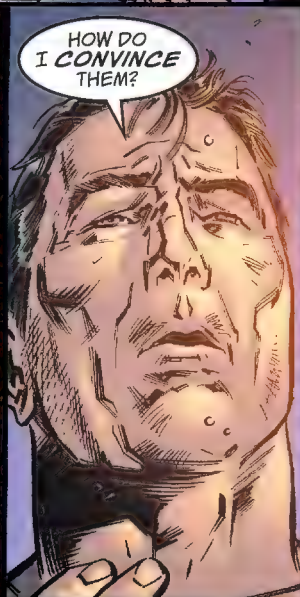
I THOUGHT
IT WOULD BE **EASY**, BUT IF
NO ONE CAN DIE HERE, THEN
PUNISHMENT KIND OF
LOSES ITS PURPOSE.



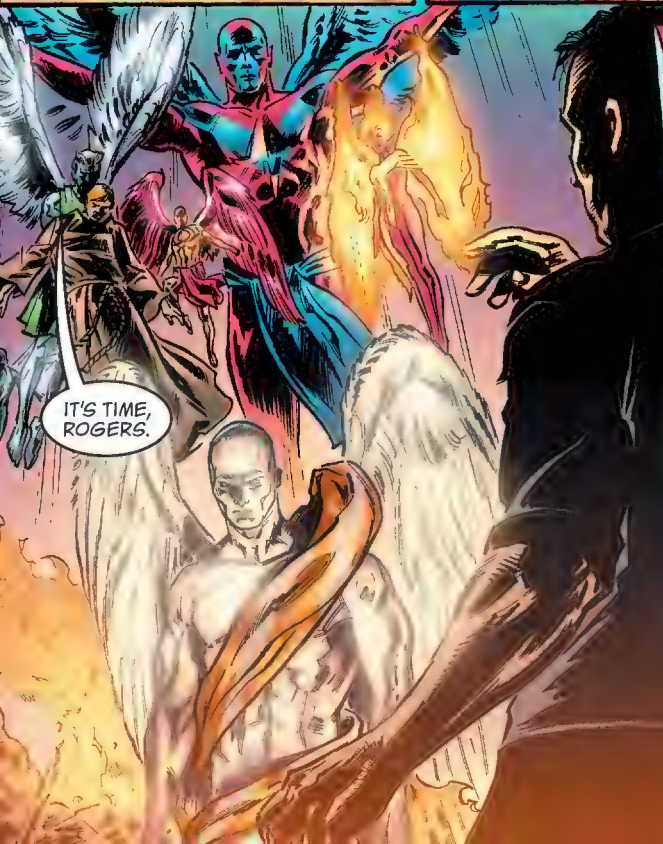
FRANK, YOU
DON'T HAVE TO PUNISH
ANYONE ANYMORE. YOU
NOW FULLY ACCEPT THE
FACT THAT YOU'RE **DEAD**.
I CAN TAKE YOU TO THE
NEW PARADISE
NOW.



NOT
WITHOUT MY
FAMILY...



HOW DO
I **CONVINCE**
THEM?



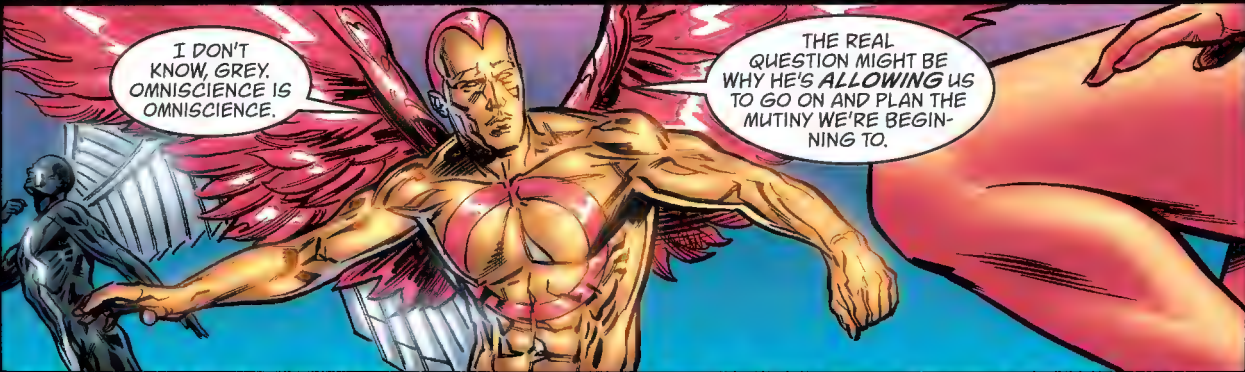


THEN WE ARE
AGREED... MAR-VELL'S
OMNISCIENCE IS NOT
OMNISCIENCE AT
ALL.

THERE ARE *PLACES...*
POCKETS OF REALITY LIKE HERE
IN DEATH'S REALM, LIKE THE NEGATIVE
ZONE, WHERE HE CANNOT SENSE
OUR THOUGHTS.



OR PERHAPS,
LIKE IN THE CASE OF KYLE
RICHMOND, WHO NOW CALLS
HIMSELF THE **4D MAN**, HIS
KNOWLEDGE ONLY EXTENDS
TO THOSE SUBJECTS HE
FOCUSES UPON.



I DON'T
KNOW, GREY.
OMNISCIENCE IS
OMNISCIENCE.

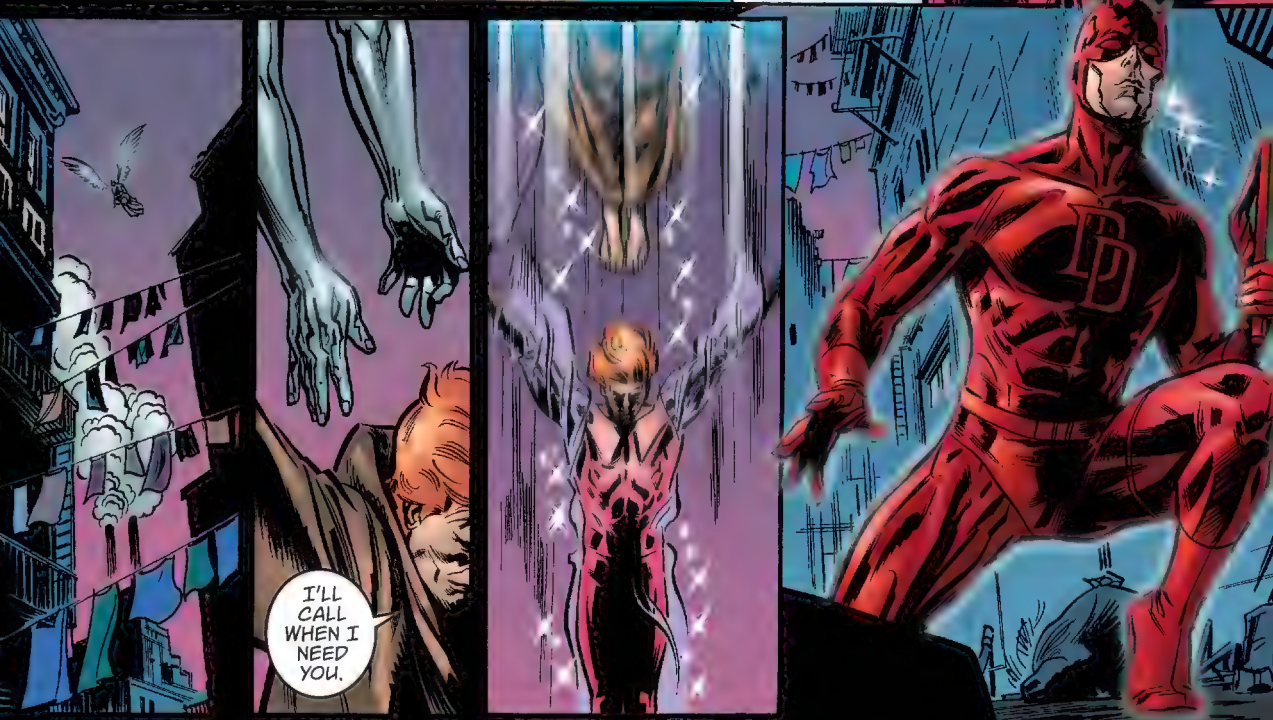
THE REAL
QUESTION MIGHT BE
WHY HE'S *ALLOWING* US
TO GO ON AND PLAN THE
MUTINY WE'RE BEGIN-
NING TO.



THAT *IS*
WHAT WE'RE
DOING, ISN'T
IT?



YES,
STARK. THAT
IS WHAT WE'RE
DOING.





WHEN I LIVED, MY NAME WAS **MATT MURDOCK**. WHEN I WAS A CHILD HERE IN HELL'S KITCHEN I WAS IN A **TERRIBLE ACCIDENT**.

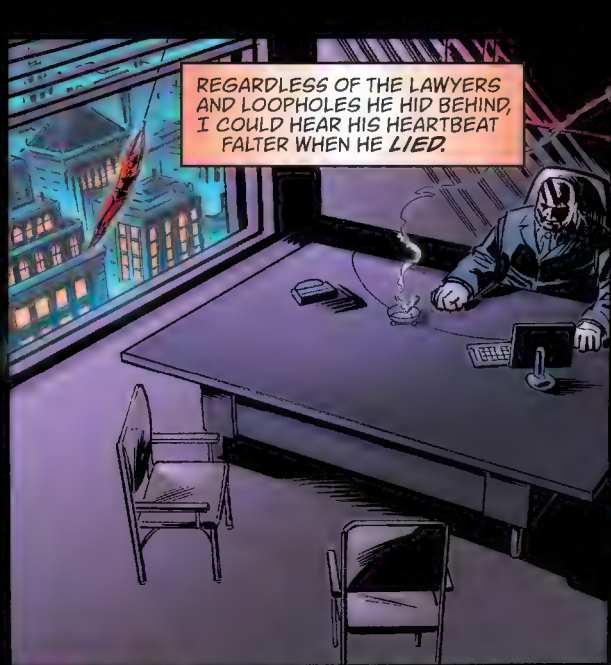
AND WHILE THE ACCIDENT TOOK MY **SIGHT** AWAY, IT ALSO AMPLIFIED MY **OTHER SENSES**. I COULD HEAR, SMELL AND TASTE BETTER THAN **ANYONE** ON EARTH.

WHICH MAY HAVE BEEN WHY **WILSON FISK** HATED ME SO MUCH.

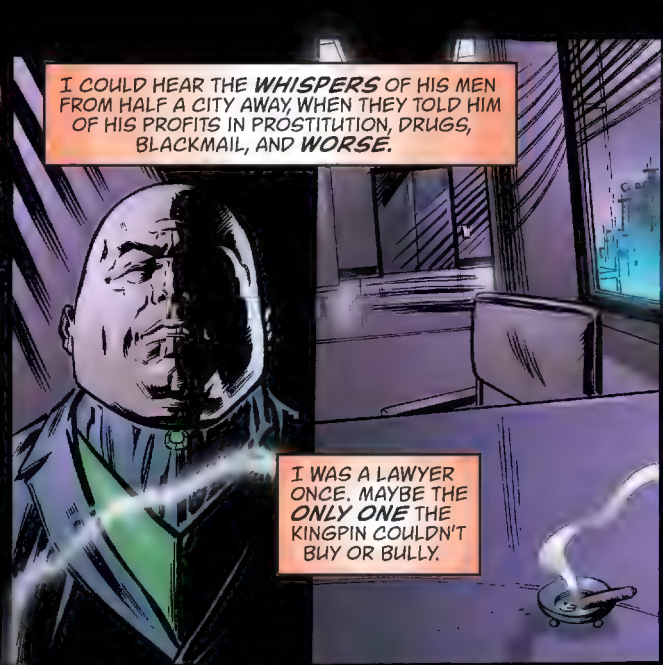


ON PAPER, FISK WAS WITHOUT BLEMISH...A CASEBOOK EXAMPLE OF THE **AMERICAN ENTREPRENEUR**. A TOWER IN THE COMMUNITY.

BUT OFF PAPER, HE WAS A **DIFFERENT** KIND OF CASEBOOK ALTOGETHER.



REGARDLESS OF THE LAWYERS
AND LOOPHOLES HE HID BEHIND,
I COULD HEAR HIS HEARTBEAT
FALTER WHEN HE **LIED**.



I COULD HEAR THE **WHISPERS** OF HIS MEN
FROM HALF A CITY AWAY WHEN THEY TOLD HIM
OF HIS PROFITS IN PROSTITUTION, DRUGS,
BLACKMAIL, AND **WORSE**.

I WAS A LAWYER
ONCE. MAYBE THE
ONLY ONE THE
KINGPIN COULDN'T
BUY OR BULLY.



NO MATTER **HOW**
MANY OF HIS MEN
HE SENT AFTER ME.

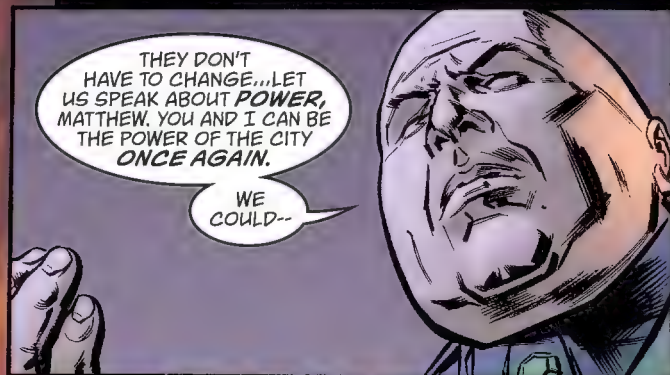


HELLO,
MATTHEW.

EVEN IN DEATH
YOU HAVE AN ALMOST
SINGULAR TALENT
TO **IRRITATE**.



THINGS
HAVE **CHANGED**,
KINGPIN.



THEY DON'T
HAVE TO CHANGE...LET
US SPEAK ABOUT **POWER**,
MATTHEW. YOU AND I CAN BE
THE **POWER** OF THE CITY
ONCE AGAIN.

WE
COULD--

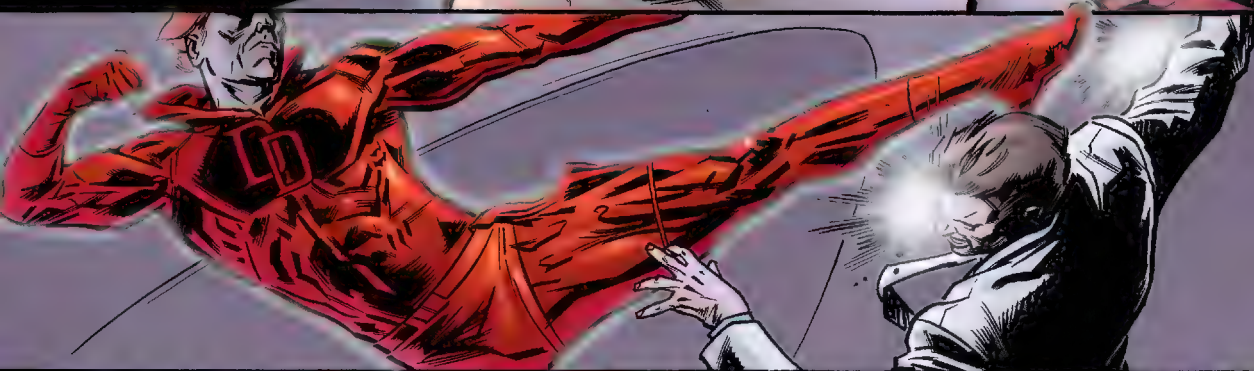


YOU DON'T
UNDERSTAND, KINGPIN.
YOU CAN'T **USE THE LAW**
THE WAY YOU ONCE DID.
NOT HERE.

THERE WILL BE
NO MORE BATTLES IN
THE COURTS.



I'M NOT
A **LAWYER**
ANYMORE.



THEN
WHAT ARE
YOU?



YOUR
JUDGE.

"IS THE KINGPIN GOING
TO **SHOOT MURDOCK**
IN THE BACK?"

"HE'S NOT EVEN GOING
TO TRY, AARON. HE
KNOWS BETTER."

YOU SAID
BEFORE THAT REED
RICHARDS WOULD STAY
IN LATVERIA, THAT HE
WOULD BE WORKING
TOWARDS A **SOLU-**
TION FOR MANKIND'S
SUFFERING...

DO YOU
EVER GET **TIRED**
OF JUST COLLECTING
INFORMATION FROM THE
MOON, AARON...TOTALLY
CUT OFF FROM THE
PEOPLE YOU
WATCH?

BEING
LITTLE MORE
THAN A **GLORI-**
FIED LIBRARIAN
OF HUMAN
EVENTS?

"**EVENT**" IS A
DIFFICULT WORD TO
DEFINE, KYLE. I DON'T
HAVE TO TELL YOU THIS,
KNOWING EVERYTHING
YOU DO ABOUT THE
WORLD.

MY COLLECTION
OF INFORMATION HAS ALREADY
SERVED MANKIND AGAINST THE
CELESTIALS.

SO
WHY ARE YOU
GOADING
ME?

WHAT
ARE YOU
GETTING
AT, KYLE?

UATU IS **DYING**,
AARON. AND I WANT TO
KNOW WHAT **YOU** WILL DO
WHEN YOU ARE NO
LONGER ABLE TO
WATCH.

THAT'S
WHY HE'S
DYING?

HE HAS NO
PURPOSE, NO
REASON...NO
VISION.

HOW
COULD
ANYONE
SURVIVE
THAT?



IT'S
WONDERFUL TO
SEE YOU AGAIN, WYATT.
YOU SHOULD COME AND
STAY WITH US HERE AT
THE CASTLE...
EVERYONE ELSE
DOES.



THANK
YOU,
SUSAN.

SEEING YOU
ALIVE AGAIN, AFTER
EVERYTHING... STEVE...
JENNIFER... WELL, IT
SORT OF PUTS THINGS
IN A **NEW PERSPECTIVE**.
MAKES ME THINK
IT'S NEVER QUITE
OVER, YOU
KNOW?

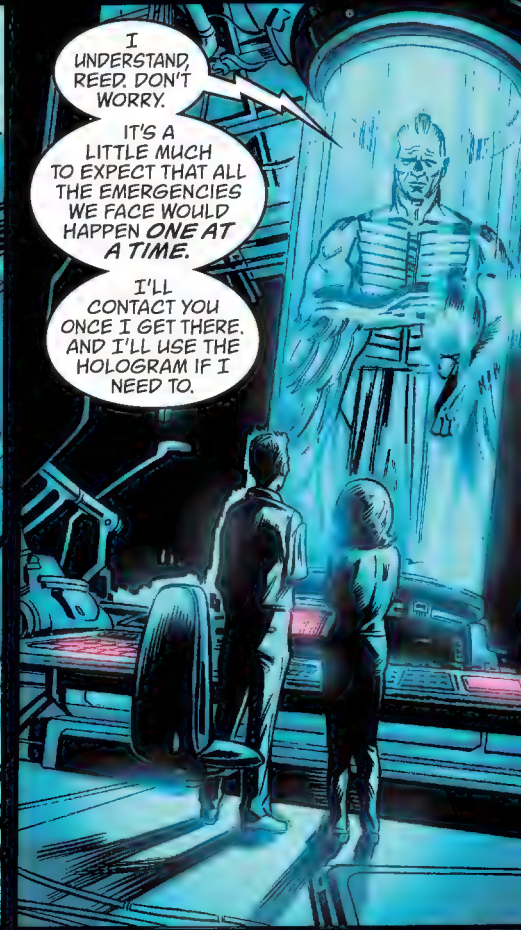


I NEED
YOU TO GO TO
NEW YORK TO
CHECK OUT THE
BAXTER BUILDING,
WYATT.

SOMETHING
TRIGGERED THE
ALARMS IN OUR OLD
HEADQUARTERS...
SOMETHING WHOSE
ORIGIN COMES FROM
THE **NEGATIVE ZONE**.



I'M SORRY,
WYATT. I SHOULD
BE THE ONE ACTUALLY
GOING, BUT THERE'S
SOMETHING I'M
NEEDED FOR
HERE...



I
UNDERSTAND,
REED. DON'T
WORRY.

IT'S A
LITTLE MUCH
TO EXPECT THAT ALL
THE EMERGENCIES
WE FACE WOULD
HAPPEN **ONE AT
A TIME**.

I'LL
CONTACT YOU
ONCE I GET THERE.
AND I'LL USE THE
HOLOGRAM IF I
NEED TO.



IS HE HERE YET?

HE JUST
ARRIVED.

THE ANT-MEN
DIDN'T WANT TO BRING
HIM IN. I THINK THEY'RE
HAVING A HARD TIME
FORGETTING HE ONCE
TRIED TO **KILL**
THEM.

THAT MAY
GO FOR **ALL**
OF US.



OLD HOSTILITIES
ARE **UNIMPORTANT**...
I WOULD HAVE EXPECTED
ALL OF YOU TO RECOG-
NIZE THAT.



THAT'S THE LEAST
OF IT, REED. IN THE END,
YOU WILL ALL BE CONSIDERED
THE **SECRET SOCIETY**
OF **SUPER-VILLAINS**
AS IT IS.

YOU
KNOW
THAT, DON'T
YOU?



LET'S
GO MEET
SMITHERS.



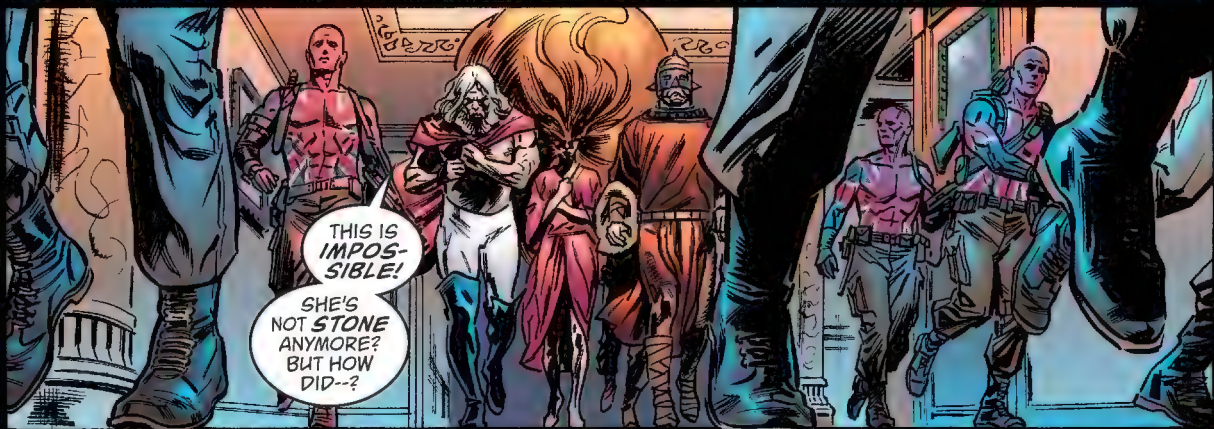
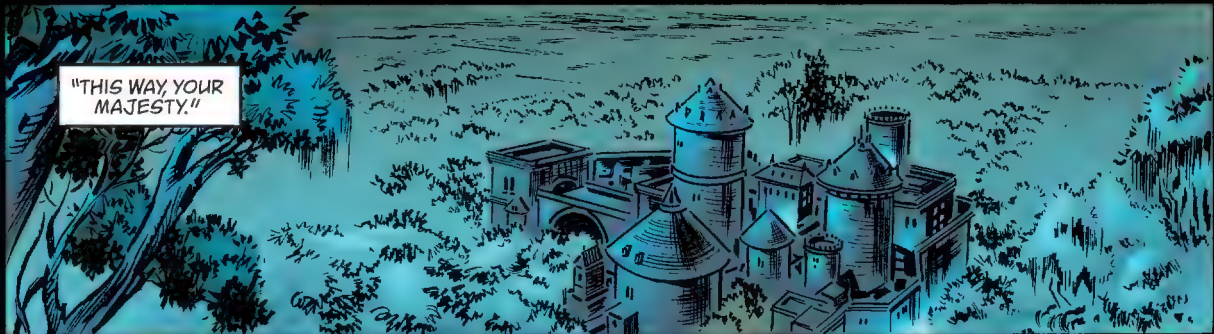
I CAME,
RICHARDS!

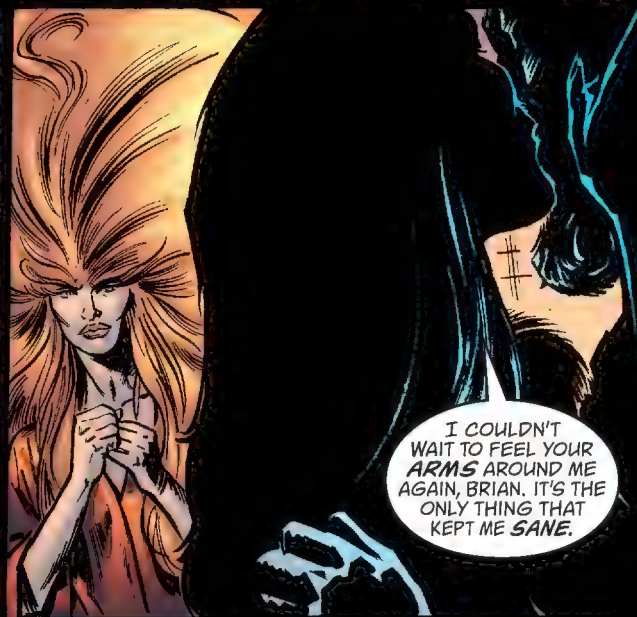
QUITE THE
ASSEMBLY YOU HAVE
HERE! YOU...**IMMORTUS**...
MCCOY...**BANNER**...
ME.

YOU
PRETTY MUCH
GOT THE **BEST**
MINDS IN THE
WORLD
HERE.



WE WILL
HAVE, ONCE **BEN**
GRIMM GETS
HERE.







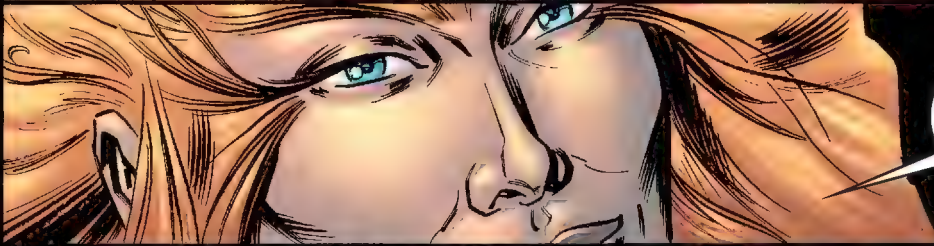
QUEEN
MEDUSA?

AM I?



OF
COURSE YOU
ARE!

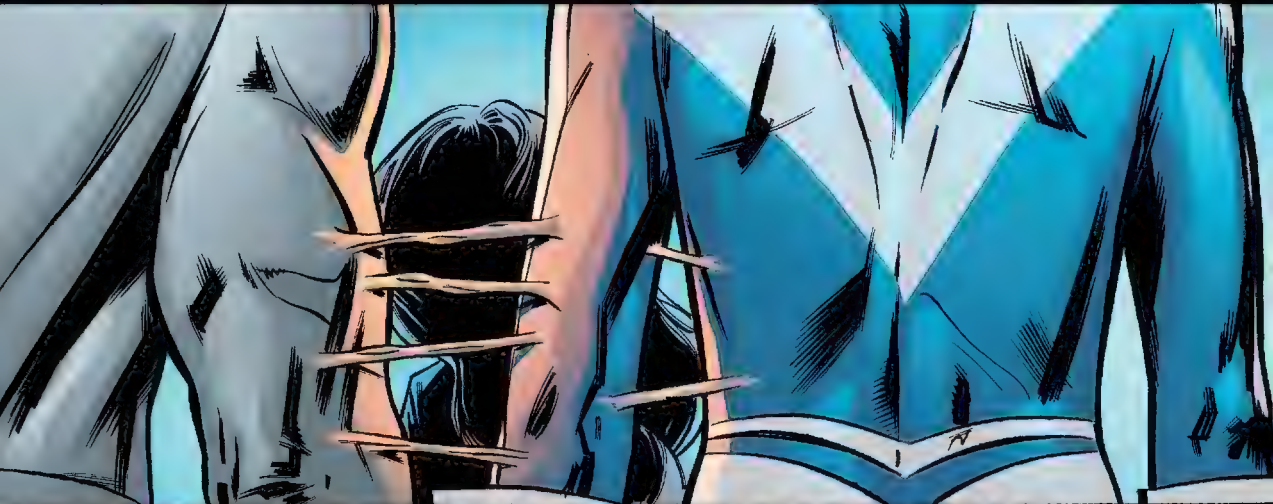
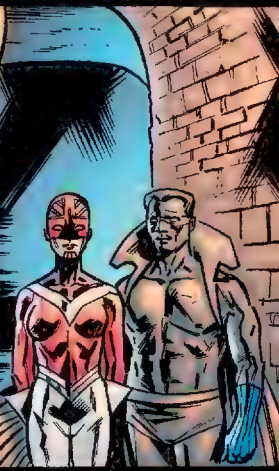
I AM
SORRY FOR
YOUR PAIN, YOUR
MAJESTY. I KNOW
YOU WERE JUST
MARRIED TO THE
KING, AND THEN
WE ARRIVED.



WHO AM
I TO VALUE
MY MARRIAGE
ABOVE THE LIVES
OF THREE
PEOPLE?



OR THE
HAPPINESS
OF BRIAN?





YOU-YOU'RE MARRIED?



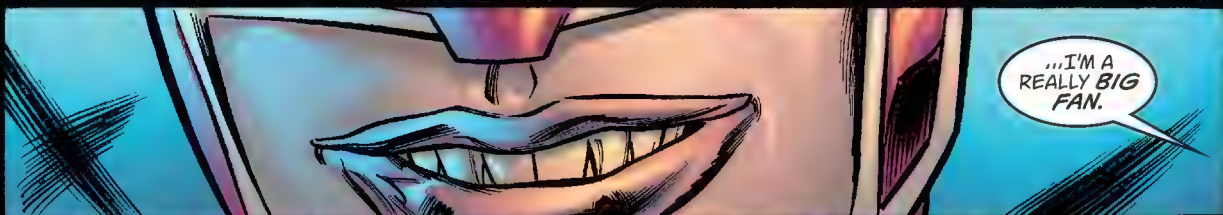
WE'LL SEE WHAT OUR SURGEONS CAN DO ABOUT THIS ARM, MR. WAGNER.

I'M NOT WHAT I WAS THEN. IT CAN'T COME BACK TOGETHER.

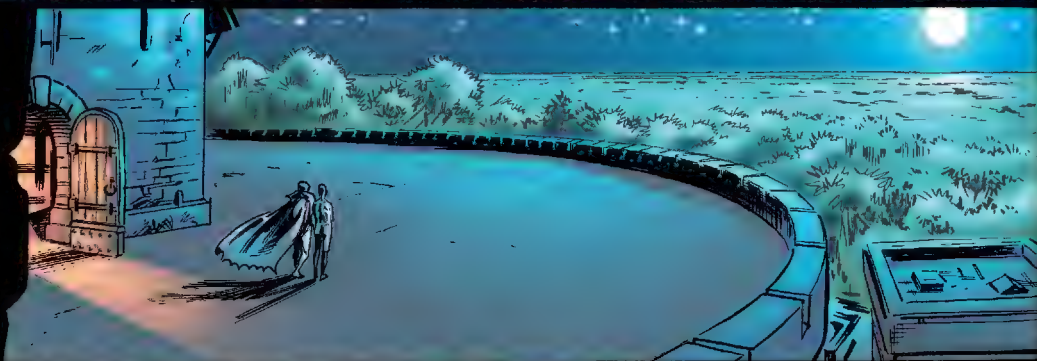
HOW THE HELL DID THAT HAPPEN?

YOU'RE GOING TO NEED A NEW NAME, NOW THAT WHITMAN'S BACK, KNIGHT.

TELL THE KING THAT WE'LL RETURN AFTER WE CATCH THE DAREDEVILS SHOW IN LATVERIA...



...I'M A REALLY BIG FAN.





THE OLD
MAN'S LOOKING
PRETTY HARD
FOR US.

I'VE GOT TO
THINK THAT YOU'RE
SOME KIND OF *GENIUS*
TO THINK OF HIDING
IN *JERSEY*...

...I MEAN,
WHAT WOULD A
GOD BE DOING
HERE OF ALL
PLACES?

WE'RE
NOT GODS,
LOKI.

THE FACT THAT WE
KNOW THAT THREATENS
EVERYTHING HE CARES
ABOUT. WE'VE TAKEN THE MOST
PRECIOUS THING
HE HAS...

...WE'VE
STOLEN
FROM HIS
DREAM.

"Let us agree, there is no one single reality. Not upon this stage, not in this world, all is in the mind...imagination is the only truth. Because it cannot be contradicted except by other imaginations." — Richard Matheson

NEXT:
PARADISE X
VOL. 2

MARVEL

1

A PARADISE **X**™ SPECIAL

DEVILS™



KRUEGER

SADOWSKI

PEPOY



I SUPPOSE
NOW WOULDN'T BE
A GOOD TIME TO MENTION
THAT I'VE NEVER DONE
THIS BEFORE.



THEY'RE NOT
EVEN LAUGHING, **DD**.
THEY **KNOW** YOU'RE NOT
GOING TO MISS!



OH
YEAH?



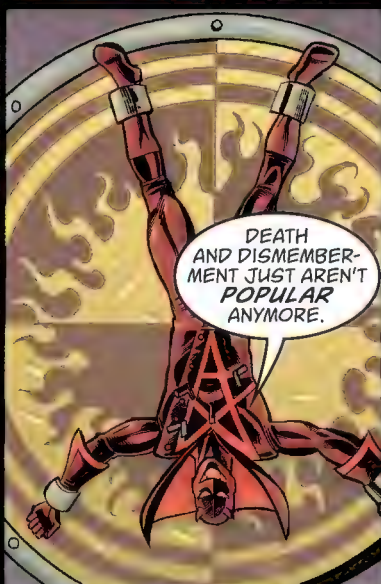
AND AS IF
THAT WEREN'T
ENOUGH, LAIDEEEEEZ
AND GENTLE-
MEN...



...THIS IS A
GOOD TIME TO THANK
MY ABLE, WILLING AND
OH-SO-NAIVE
ASSISTANT!



LOOK,
DD, THIS ISN'T
WORKING FOR
ME.



DEATH
AND DISMEMBER-
MENT JUST AREN'T
POPULAR
ANYMORE.

DAREDEVIL'S PANDEMONIUM & MADHOUSE!

THERE'S NOTHING
LIKE DEATH TO
BRING THE FAMILY
TOGETHER!

MASOCHISM
FOR THE MASSES!

WE DON'T DEFY
DEATH, WE
EMBRACE IT!

"To Live and Die and Die
and Die in LATVERIA!"

YOU WILL BELIEVE
A MAN CAN DIE!

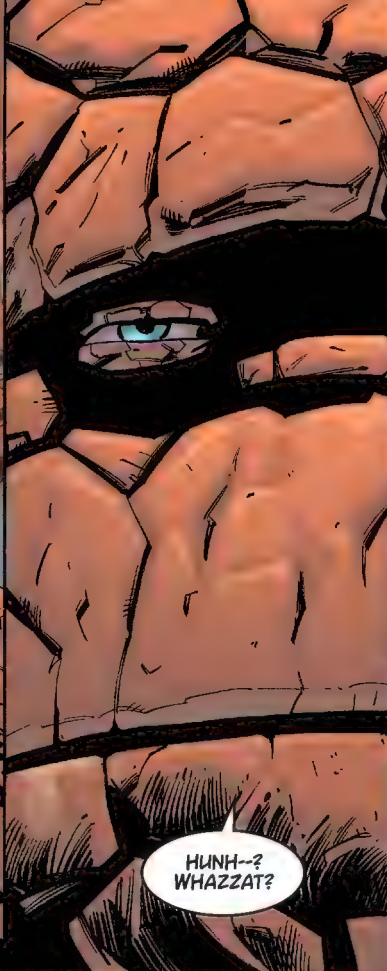
THIS IS
EMBARRASSING.
WE OUTNUMBER
OUR *FANS*.



HOW CAN YOU SLEEP, DAD?

DD'S DA BOMB! OR AT LEAST HE WAS BEFORE HE EX-
PLODED.

SNSNSNOOOOOORRRRRRE*

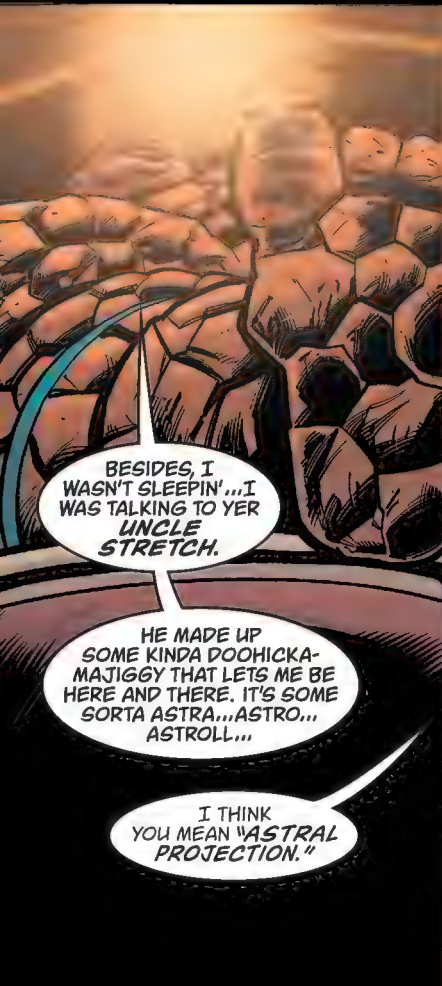


HUNH--?
WHAZZAT?



OH, NOT *THIS*.
YA MEAN TA TELL ME
THIS *YAHOO* IS STILL DOIN'
THIS SHOW? YOU KNOW
IT'S ALL *FAKE*.

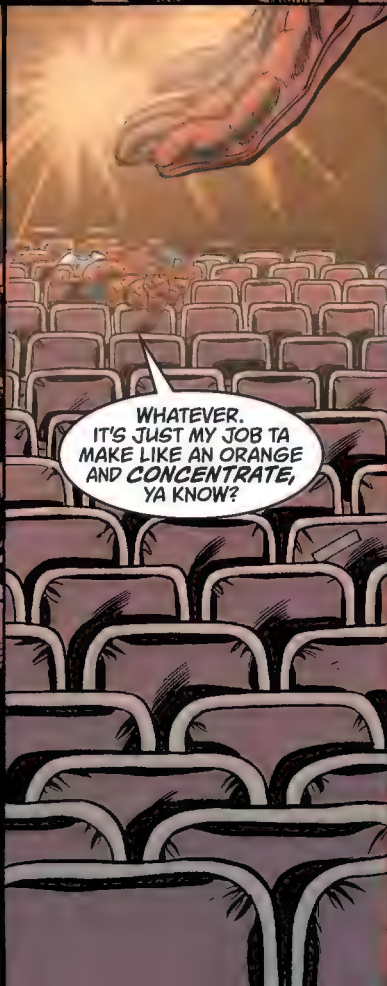
IN MY DAY, WE
HAD *WRESTLING*.
NOW THAT WAS
REAL.



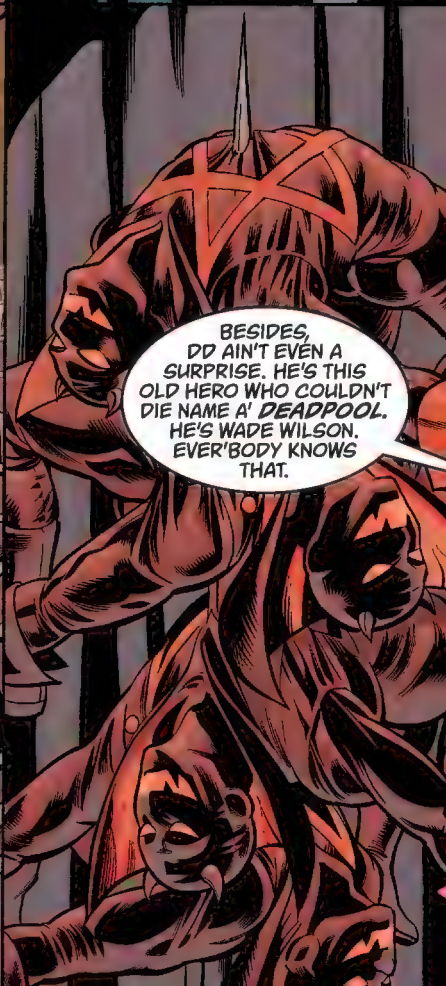
BESIDES, I
WASN'T SLEEPIN'...I
WAS TALKING TO YER
*UNCLE
STRETCH*.

HE MADE UP
SOME KINDA DOOHICKA-
MAJIGGY THAT LETS ME BE
HERE AND THERE. IT'S SOME
SORTA ASTRA...ASTRO...
ASTROLL...

I THINK
YOU MEAN "*ASTRAL
PROJECTION*."



WHATEVER.
IT'S JUST MY JOB TA
MAKE LIKE AN ORANGE
AND *CONCENTRATE*,
YA KNOW?



BESIDES,
DD AIN'T EVEN A
SURPRISE. HE'S THIS
OLD HERO WHO COULDN'T
DIE NAME A' *DEADPOOL*.
HE'S WADE WILSON.
EVER'BODY KNOWS
THAT.



FOR GOD'S
SAKE, GRIMM, WAKE UP.
HOW LONG CAN ONE MAN
SLEEP?



THANK YOU,
GENTLEMEN, FOR
BEING HERE
TODAY.

WHAT
I PROPOSE WILL
MARK US AS **VILLAINS**
IN THE EYES OF
MILLIONS.

BUT I
DON'T BELIEVE
THERE IS **ANY OTHER**
COURSE WE CAN
TAKE.

CAN ANY OF
YOU THINK OF SOMEONE
WE CAN EMPOWER TO BE-
COME THE GREATEST **MASS**
MURDERER THE
WORLD HAS EVER
KNOWN?



THAT'S
HARDLY WHAT
WE'RE HERE
FOR, REED.

THIS IS A
MISSION OF *PEACE*.
FOR THE GOOD OF
HUMANITY, YOU
KNOW THAT.

IT'S HARD
NOT TO BE CYNICAL,
BRUCE. THIS SEEMS
CONTRARY TO EVERY-
THING WE'VE FOUGHT
FOR OUR ENTIRE
LIVES...

...BUT TOO MANY
ARE SUFFERING. TOO
MANY LIE IN OUR HOSPITALS
BEGGING FOR AN END
THAT ISN'T COMING.

TOO MANY
WAIT IN *PAIN* WHILE
THE REST OF US ENJOY
IMMORTALITY.



SEE?
THERE'S MY POINT
EXACTLY. WHAT OF
THOSE *NOT* IN THE
HOSPITALS?

THEY LIVE
AS IF THERE IS NO
TOMORROW, BECAUSE
NOW THERE ISN'T ANY
FEAR OF CONSE-
QUENCE.

THEY
LIVE AS
I ONCE
DID.



THE DEATH
OF *DEATH* HAS BEEN
THE INEBRIATION OF OUR
SPECIES, GENTLE-
MEN.

PLEASURE IS FAST
BECOMING THE ULTIMATE
GOAL...BUT PLEASURE TAKEN
TO ITS ULTIMATE EXTREME
WILL BECOME PAIN.

WE WILL
ALL AWAKEN IN
ONE OF THE HOSPI-
TALS IF WE AREN'T
CAUTIOUS.



YES, MY FRIENDS...
IT APPEARS THAT FOR THE
GOOD OF MANKIND, WE MUST
ONCE AGAIN BECOME A
RACE MEASURED BY
MORTALITY.

THE QUESTION
IS HOW TO *REGAIN*
WHAT MAR-VELL TOOK
FROM US.

THE
OTHER PROBLEM IS
MEPHISTO.

HE'S A BIG
REASON WHY THE
HOSPITALS ARE FILL-
ING UP WITH THE
DYING.

HE
ATTEMPTS TO
KEEP MANKIND
SUFFERING...

...AND
MAKE CERTAIN
THAT NO ONE ESCAPES
TO THE NEW PARADISE
THAT MAR-VELL HAS
CREATED FOR THE
DEAD.

ANY
ATTEMPT TO **STOP**
THE SUFFERING WILL
BE MET BY HIM.

THERE
ARE MANY FORMS
OF SUFFERING,
IMMORTUS.

AND WHILE
I SHARE YOUR GOAL
TO END THE PAIN OF MILLIONS,
I HAVE SOME REASON TO BE-
LIEVE THIS NEW PARADISE ISN'T
ALL IT'S **CRACKED**
UP TO BE.

HMMMM...

FERGIVE ME FER
SLEEPIN' THROUGH THE
FIRST THREE YEARS OF YER
DEBATE AN' ALL, BUT WHAT
IN **SAM HILL** IS GOIN'
ON HERE?

FIRST CAPT'N SHORTY
HERE LEADS A CRUSADE TA GET
'NUFF POWER TO **KILL DEATH...**
AN' NOW YOU WANT TO MAKE
A **NEW ONE?**

WHATTA
REVOLTIN' DEVELOP-
MENT THIS IS!

SORRY,
BEN.

I'LL BEGIN WITH
THE LAST MOMENTS OF MY--
MAR-VELL'S ATTACK ON DEATH
IN HER REALM. THIS IS MY LAST
MEMORY AS A BINARY
BEING.



"AS YOU RECALL, I LED A NUMBER OF HEROES ON A QUEST AROUND THE **UNIVERSE** TO COLLECT WEAPONS OF ARCAINE AND ANCIENT POWER.

"EACH WEAPON, EACH ITEM OF UNLIMITED POWER, WAS THEN TRANSPORTED TO THIS OTHERWORLD TO EMPOWER MY SOUL--MY **OTHER SOUL**, THAT IS-- TO FIGHT DEATH AND **END HER LIFE**.

"EVEN THOSE I ONCE CALLED **ENEMIES** JOINED ME IN THIS STRUGGLE."

WAIT.

"SHE NEVER UTTERED A WORD UNTIL IT WAS **TOO LATE**.

"SHE TOLD US TO WAIT, AS IF THERE WAS SOMETHING WE COULDN'T SEE. THERE WAS ACTUALLY **CARE** IN HER VOICE. BUT IT WAS **TOO LATE**.

"AS IF ANY OF US COULD EVEN **UNDERSTAND** THAT THE BEING WE HAD LOOKED UPON FOR SO MANY YEARS AS A CURSE MIGHT ALSO BE A **MERCY**... A BLESSING, OF SORTS.



"THIS WAS ALL PART OF MAR-VELL'S PLAN... BUT I WASN'T EVEN AWARE OF IT UNTIL IT WAS **ALL OVER**.

"WHEN SOMETHING IS BROKEN DOWN TO ITS ATOMIC STRUCTURE AS A RESULT OF THE WEAPON KNOWN AS THE **ULTIMATE NULLIFIER**, IT'S IMMEDIATELY TRANSPORTED TO THE HEART OF THE **NEGATIVE ZONE**.

"MY **PLAN**...MY OTHER BEING'S PLAN... WASN'T TO **KILL** DEATH TO RETAKE HER THRONE AND BRING A NEW GOVERNMENT TO THE REALM OF THE DEAD..."

"...BUT TO USE THE NULLIFICATION OF HER POWER, HER BEING, TO CREATE A **BRIDGE** FROM THE REALM OF THE DEAD INTO THE **NEGATIVE ZONE**.

"TO A CERTAIN DEGREE, THE QUEST BEGAN AS A MATTER OF **FAITH**.

"THE OTHER MAR-VELL WASN'T OMNISCIENT WHEN IT BEGAN, BUT TRUSTED THAT WHEN HE KNEW EVERYTHING, WHEN HE HAD CONSUMED THE **COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS** AS A RESULT OF HIS QUEST, HE WOULD KNOW HOW TO ESCAPE FROM DEATH'S REALM.

"THE **EXODUS** FROM HER REALM WAS THE LAST THING I SAW, MY LAST MOMENT AS A **KREE**."

LAST
MOMENT AS A
KREE?

I'M NO
LONGER IN TOUCH
WITH ANYTHING FROM MY
CULTURE. THE KREE **NO
LONGER EXIST** IN
THIS REALM.

I DON'T
EVEN HAVE MANY
MEMORIES OF MY
RACE. MAR-VELL
TOOK THOSE,
AS WELL.

MY PARENTS
WERE THE ARTIFICIAL
BEINGS **ADAM AND EVE...**
SOMEHOW THEIR COUPLING
RESULTED IN A **TRUE
HUMAN... ME.**

I JUST
CAN'T BELIEVE
THERE'S A PART
OF ME THAT
WILLINGLY
CAUSED SO MUCH
SUFFERING
AROUND THE
WORLD.

PART OF
WHAT WE LEARNED
DURING YOUR QUEST
FOR POWER, MARV, WAS
THAT THERE WAS A
UNIVERSE **BEFORE**
THIS ONE, ONE THAT
SHATTERED AND
SPLINTERED.

MY BELIEF
IS THAT **DEATH** AS
A FORCE MAY HAVE BEEN
SHATTERED, TOO... AND THE
DEATH ANY OF US HAVE
EXPERIENCED AS A RESULT
OF THE LOSS OF A LOVED
ONE IS **NOT** DEATH
IN FULL.

THE
DEATH YOUR
OTHER IDENTITY
SLEW, MAR-VELL,
WAS NOT
COMPLETE.

SAM?

FOR THOSE
WHO ARE NOT AWARE,
I WAS ONCE KNOWN AS
THE PLANTMAN.

...THE WORLD
CONTINUES TO SPIN,
AND AFTER THE RE-
ESTABLISHMENT AND
REORGANIZATION OF
THE WORLD'S VIBRAN-
IUM, THE SEASONS
RETURNED, AS
WELL.

WHEN
YOU SAID YA
WERE A SUPER-
VILLAIN, YA WERE
TALKIN' **PAST
TENSE,**
RIGHT?

BY THE
WAY, SMITHERS,
HOW'D YA GROW
A **BEARD** SO FAST
AT YER AGE? DIPPIN'
INTA YER OWN
PLANT **GROWTH
JUICE,** ARE
YA?

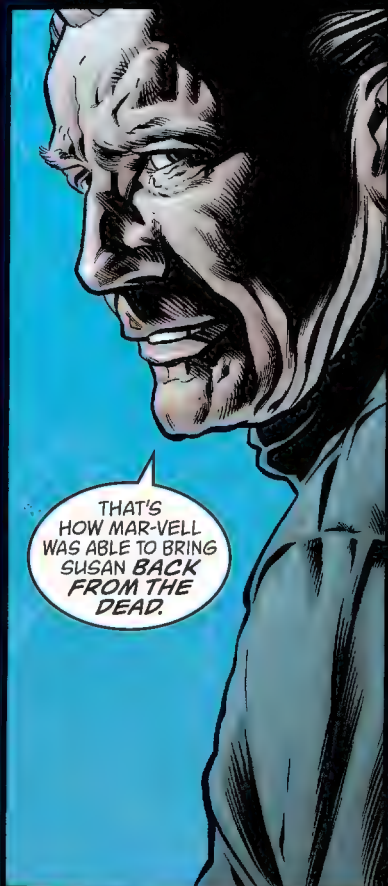
I WAS A
PRETTY BAD SUPER-
VILLAIN WHEN YOU CON-
SIDER HOW MY POWER
COULD HAVE **AIDED**
THE STARVING AND THE
WEAK... SO I HAVE
MUCH TO **ATONE**
FOR.

THE
VEGETATION
OF THIS WORLD
HAS NOT FLOWED
SUIT WITH
HUMANITY...

DEATH STILL TOUCHES
VEGETATION, THOUGH. FROM
WHAT YOU WERE SAYING, THERE ARE NO
ANIMALS IN THIS REALM OF THE
DEAD, CORRECT?

SO IT SEEMS THAT
THE DEATH MAR-VELL KILLED
WAS A DEATH AFFECTING
SENTIENT CREATURES
ALONE...

...THEREFORE
SUPPORTING RICHARDS'
PROPOSAL THAT DEATH AS
A FORCE HAS BEEN THWARTED
ONLY IN ITS ABILITY TO STRIKE
AT THOSE WHO SEEK TO
RULE OVER THE REST
OF NATURE.



THAT'S HOW MAR-VELL WAS ABLE TO BRING SUSAN BACK FROM THE DEAD.

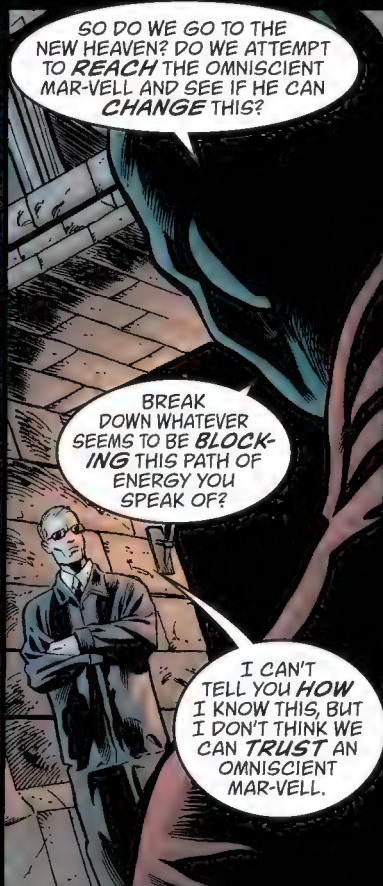
IT'S NOT DEATH AND IT'S NOT MERELY TRANSITION...IT'S **TRANSPORT**. ENERGY CANNOT BE DESTROYED, BUT IT CAN BE **MOVED**.

I'M SUCH A **FOOL**. OF COURSE...THE HOSPITALS ARE **WAITING ROOMS**, AND THAT'S ALL THEY ARE, IRONICALLY. WAITING ROOMS FOR TRANSPORT TO THE REALM OF THE DEAD.

WE DON'T NEED TO CHANGE HOW WE'RE THINKING OF **DEATH**. WE NEED TO CHANGE WHAT WE'RE THINKING OF **OURSELVES**.

IT'S IN THE CHANGING, THE **METAMORPHOSIS** OF ENERGY.

THAT'S STRETCH, FER YA. ONE MINUTE ALL OF LIFE IS **DOOMED**, NEXT HE'S **WHISTLIN' DIXIE** 'CAUSE HE FIGURED OUT A WAY TA SAVE IT-I MEAN **KILL IT**.



SO DO WE GO TO THE NEW HEAVEN? DO WE ATTEMPT TO **REACH** THE OMNISCIENT MAR-VELL AND SEE IF HE CAN **CHANGE THIS**?

BREAK DOWN WHATEVER SEEMS TO BE **BLOCKING** THIS PATH OF ENERGY YOU SPEAK OF?

I CAN'T TELL YOU **HOW** I KNOW THIS, BUT I DON'T THINK WE CAN **TRUST** AN OMNISCIENT MAR-VELL.



AND THE DOORWAY TO THE NEGATIVE ZONE CAN NOW ONLY BE OPENED FROM THE **INSIDE**...THE PORTAL I CREATED WAS CLOSED LONG AGO, FOR BETTER OR WORSE.

THERE'S NO WAY TO CONTACT MAR-VELL...



...THE OTHER MAR-VELL, EVEN IF IT WERE A GOOD IDEA.

WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO COME UP WITH A **NEW DEATH** OF OUR OWN.



WHICH IS WHERE **BEN** COMES IN.

WHAT KIND'A **COCKAMAMIE** PLANET IS IT WHERE THE **HEROES** ARE TRYIN' TA FIND WAYS TO **KILL EVERYONE** AND MEPHISTO, SATAN, THE **BIG BAD D HIMSELF**, IS TRYING TO **KEEP 'EM ALL ALIVE**?



WE NEED
A BEING WITH
THE POWER OF
**ENTROPIC
BREAK-
DOWN.**

DON'T
MAKE ME **BEG**,
BEN. YOU WERE
THERE. TELL
THEM.



BEG?
ENTROPIC
BREAKDOWN? WHAT
IN THE WIDE, WIDE
WORLD OF SPORTS
ARE YOU **TALKING
ABOUT?**



OH... **JUDE**.
YOU'RE TALKING
ABOUT **JUDE!** AND
YOU WANT **ME** TA
TALK ABOUT
JUDE? ME?

FER ONCE,
I'M NOT JUS' HERE
CAUSE I'M GOOD AT
CLOBBERIN'? I
DON'T KNOW WHAT
TO DO. OKAY..



"...A BUNCH'A YEARS AGO,
CAPTAIN AMERICA AND I
FOUGHT AGAINST THIS
RELIGIOUS CULT THAT WAS
TRYING TA BRING THIS CRAZY
GUY CALLED **JUDE, THE
ENTROPIC MAN** BACK TA
LIFE WITH THE COSMIC
CUBE.

"FUNNY THING WAS, **JUDE**
DIDN'T EVEN **FIGHT** US,
IT WAS ONLY THE WACKOS
THAT PUT UP ANY KIND'A
STRUGGLE.

"ANYHOW, **JUDE** SAID HE'D
RETURN WHEN MANKIND
BEGGED HIM TO. SIMPLE
AS THAT. HE TURNED INTO
A BIG ROCK, AND WE LEFT
IT AT THAT.

"FIGURED NO ONE WOULD EVER
GO TO A THINGAMAJIGGER AND
BEG IT TO COME BACK AND **KILL
EVERYONE...** ESPECIALLY NOT
THE **GOOD GUYS.**"



MY PLAN IS
TO **TRAP** JUDE AFTER
HIS RETURN...

...TO
SYNTHESIZE
HIM, AND ARTIFICIALLY REPLI-
CATE HIS ABILITIES TO METE OUT
MOLECULAR ENTROPY
FOR THOSE IN NEED
OF IT.

I HAVE A
RECENTLY-BUILT
FORCE FIELD THAT
HELPS SUE OUT NOW
THAT SHE NO LONGER
HAS THE POWER OF
INVISIBILITY.

GENTLEMEN,
DO I HAVE YOUR
SUPPORT?



WHAT ARE
WE DOING HERE?
WE'RE GOING TO
BRING BACK DEATH,
AND THEN **CON-**
TROL IT?

IS THAT
WHAT YOU'RE
SAYING? AM I THE
ONLY ONE WHO
AGREES WITH
BEN?

SOME-
THING HAS TO
BE DONE...



WE'VE ALL
BEEN TOUCHED BY
DEATH, BRUCE.
WE'VE ALL GROWN
TO **HATE** IT.

I
LOST
SUE.

BUT
SHE CAME
BACK, REED. ADAM
WARLOCK AND
MAR-VELL BROUGHT
HER BACK.



IT COST YOU
YOUR ARM, BUT WE'D
ALL GIVE OUR **LIVES**
TO BRING BACK
LOVED ONES.



YES, WE'D
DO **ANYTHING** TO
HAVE THEM BACK, BUT TO
EASE **OUR SUFFER-**
ING, NOT THEIRS.

IMAGINE...
SCOTT, YOU LOST
PHOENIX. WHAT IF IT
WERE HER SUFFERING,
BEGGING FOR
DEATH?



YOU
LOST **BETTY**,
BRUCE.



YOU SOUGHT
YOUR OWN WAYS TO
TRY AND SAVE **PRIN-**
CCESS RAVONNA,
IMMORTUS.



HENRY...
ALLISON IS
SUFFERING RIGHT
NOW. MEPHISTO
STOLE HER HEART,
HENRY. HE TOOK
IT AWAY.

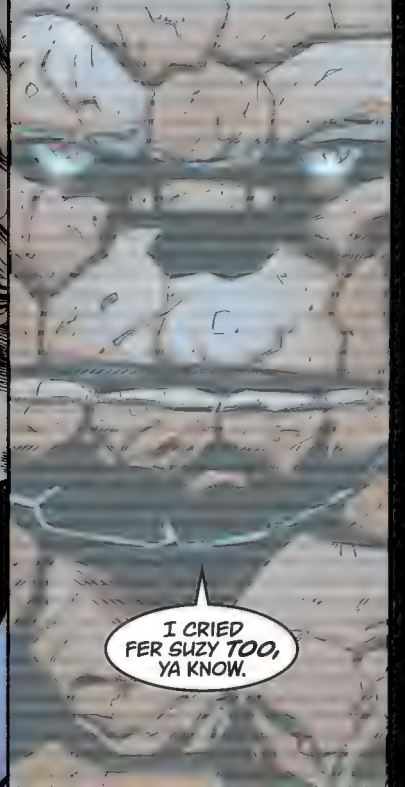


SAM,
I'M AFRAID I
DON'T--

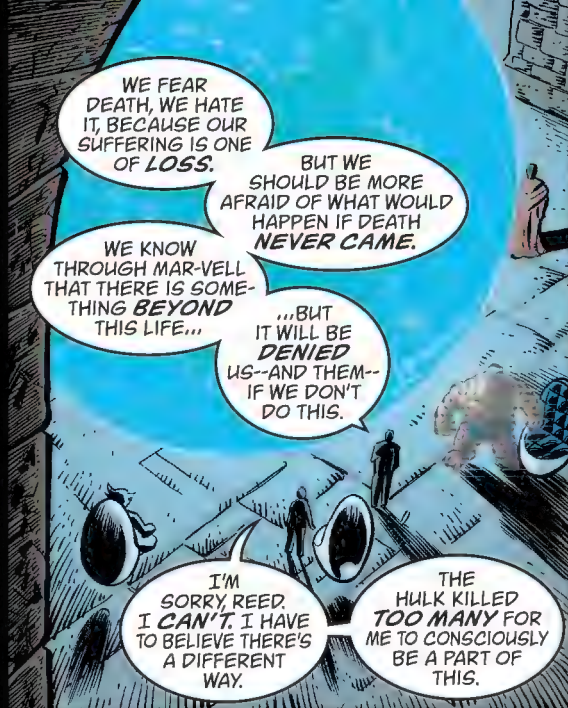
HER
NAME WAS
JENNIFER.
AND SHE
LOVED
ME.



UNA.



I CRIED
FER SUZY TOO,
YA KNOW.



WE FEAR DEATH, WE HATE IT, BECAUSE OUR SUFFERING IS ONE OF **LOSS**.

BUT WE SHOULD BE MORE AFRAID OF WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF DEATH **NEVER CAME**.

WE KNOW THROUGH MAR-VELL THAT THERE IS SOMETHING **BEYOND** THIS LIFE...

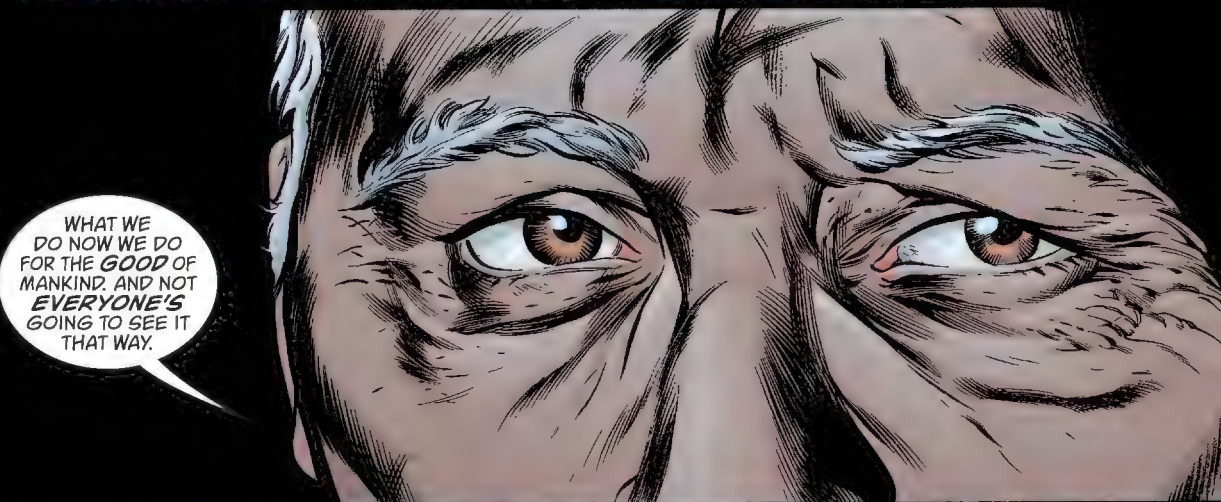
...BUT IT WILL BE **DENIED** US--AND THEM--IF WE DON'T DO THIS.

I'M SORRY, REED. I **CAN'T**. I HAVE TO BELIEVE THERE'S A DIFFERENT WAY.

THE HULK KILLED **TOO MANY** FOR ME TO CONSCIOUSLY BE A PART OF THIS.



I UNDERSTAND, BRUCE. IT'S OKAY.



WHAT WE DO NOW WE DO FOR THE **GOOD** OF MANKIND. AND NOT **EVERYONE'S** GOING TO SEE IT THAT WAY.



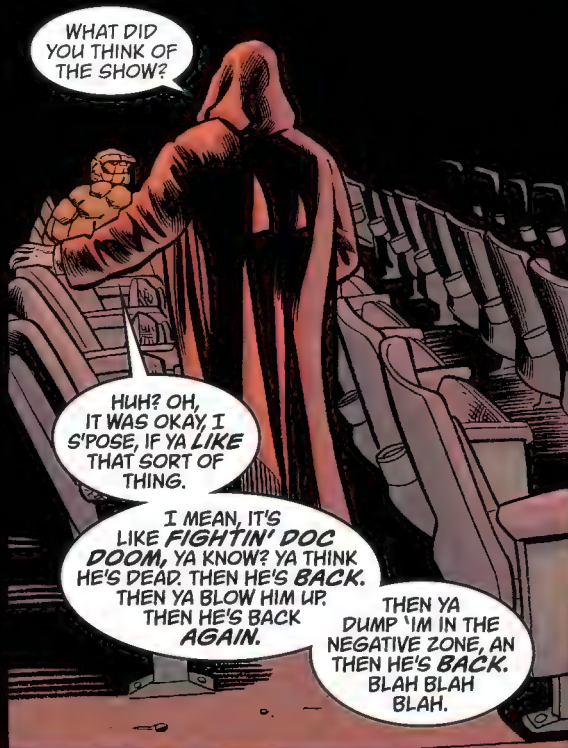
BEN, YOU BETTER TELL YOUR SONS TO GET READY. SORRY TO CUT THE MATINEE SHORT.



'S'OKAY, STRETCH. YA SEEN ONE DAREDEVIL, YA SEEN 'EM ALL.



WHAZZAT?
HUNH?



WHAT DID
YOU THINK OF
THE SHOW?

HUH? OH,
IT WAS OKAY, I
S'POSE, IF YA *LIKE*
THAT SORT OF
THING.

I MEAN, IT'S
LIKE *FIGHTIN' DOC*
DOOM, YA KNOW? YA THINK
HE'S DEAD. THEN HE'S *BACK*.
THEN YA BLOW HIM UP.
THEN HE'S *BACK*
AGAIN.

THEN YA
DUMP 'IM IN THE
NEGATIVE ZONE, AN
THEN HE'S *BACK*.
BLAH BLAH
BLAH.



YO, BUZZ...CHUCK...
PACK UP FER US, THE DAREDEVILS'
72-HOUR MURDER THON IS
COMIN' TO A CLOSE.

BUT DON'T
FRET, I'M SURE
THEY'LL COME BACK
TO LATVERIA
SOON.



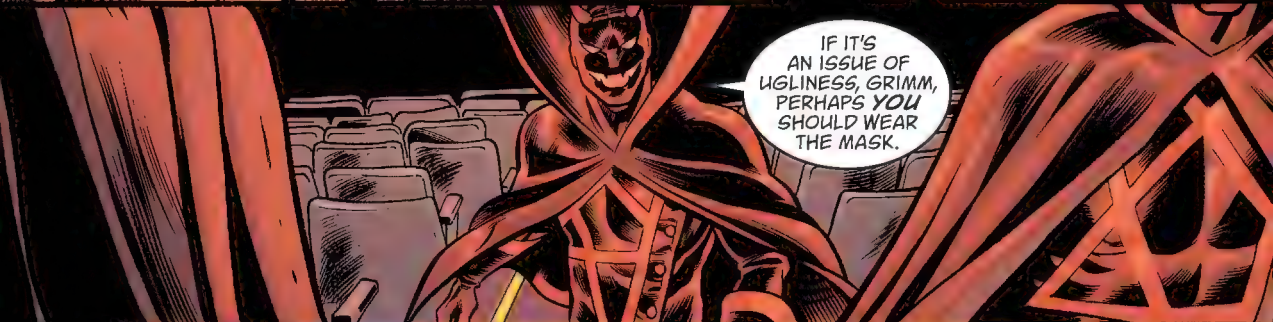
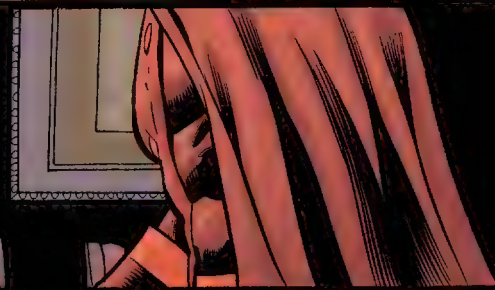
THEY
GOTTA GO
WHERE THE
FANS ARE,
YA KNOW?



CAN WE
COME?



FINE
BY ME.





UGLY. THEY
CALLED ME
UGLY.

THAT
WAS **THREE**
HOURS AGO, DAD,
AND YOU STARTED
IT BY SAYING
DEADPOOL WAS
UGLY. IT'S YER
OWN FAULT.

THAT'S
DIFFERENT!
YOU KIDS'VE GOT
A LOT TA
LEARN.

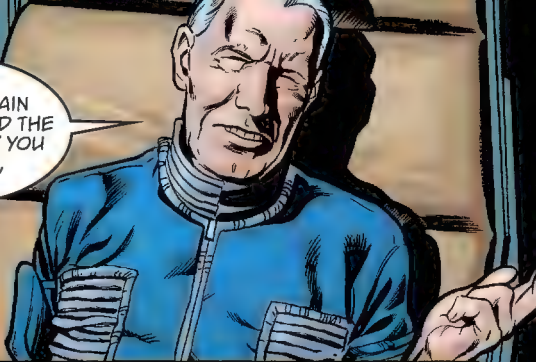
YER **PROOF**
THAT HOME SCHOOLIN'
STILL AIN'T EVERYTHIN'...
EVEN IF YER UNCLE REED
IS YER TEACHER.

BEN, YOU
ARE A CONSTANT
AND UNWAVERING
AXIOM IN A SEA
OF TURMOIL.

SURE, CURLY,
WHATEVER **THAT**
MEANS. BUT I
AIN'T UGLY.

AN' THAT'S
ALL THERE IS
TO IT!

NEXT STOP **THE**
EVERGLADES.



HANK'S
DRIVING.
WHAT'D YA
WANT,
STRETCH?

I WANT
YOU TO EXPLAIN
WHAT HAPPENED THE
FIRST TIME YOU
MET JUDE,
BEN.



"I GUESS IT STARTED WITH **PROJECT PEGASUS...**
ANOTHER A' THOSE TOP SECRET GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
EVEN MY **AUNT PETUNIA** NEVER LIKED TO TALK ABOUT.



"EVEN OL' **CAP AMERICA** AN
THE MAN-THING COULDN'T
HELP ME STOP THIS THING
CALLED THE ENTROPIC MAN
FROM COMIN' BACK TA LIFE.

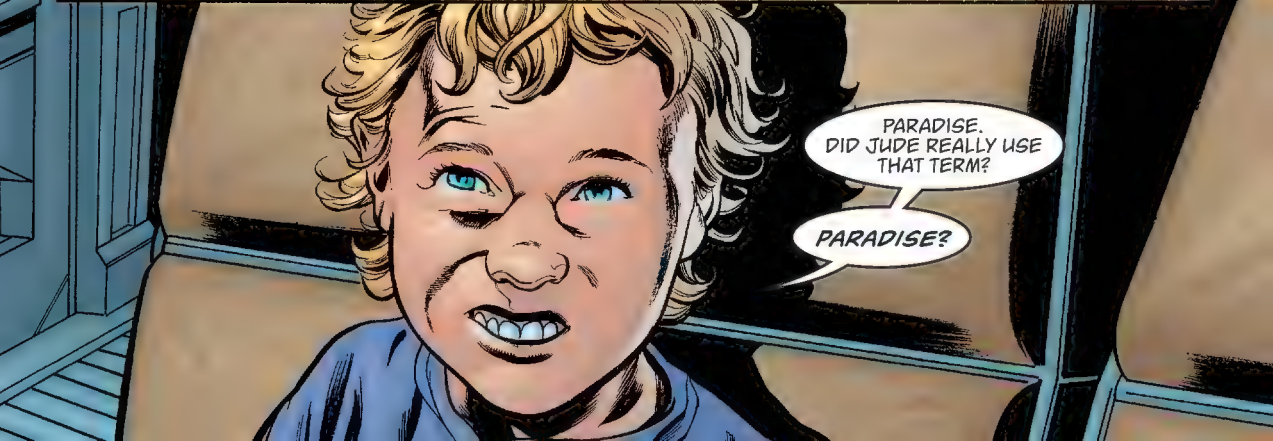
"I'D GONE THERE TRYIN' TA HELP A FRIEND, AN' GOT
CAUGHT UP IN A CONSPIRACY TA RECREATE THE
GOLL-DANGED **COSMIC CUBE** SO A BUNCH A
RELIGIOUS YAHOOOS COULD USE THE POWER'A GOD
TA BRING BACK THIS CHARACTER FROM ONE'A THEIR
ANCIENT MUMBO-JUMBO HISTORY BOOKS!

"I DIDN'T EVEN **TOUCH** JUDE, AN
I WAS ALREADY REVERTIN' BACK TA
PLAIN OL' **BENJAMIN J. GRIMM.**



"TURNED OUT
JUDE DIDN'T
EVEN **WANNA**
BE THERE IF WE
DIDN'T WANT 'IM
AROUND..."

"...HE THOUGHT
HUMANITY **WANTED**
TA DIE, WANTED
THE PARADISE HE
WAS OFFERIN'..."



PARADISE.
DID JUDE REALLY USE
THAT TERM?

PARADISE?



YEAH...I
GUESS HE SAID
PARADISE.



SO, ANYHOW,
JUDE SAID HE WOULDN'T
RETURN AN' KILL EVERYONE
UNTIL WE **BEGGED** 'IM TO. BAD
DAY TA BE A RELIGIOUS
WACKO, I SUPPOSE.

HE TURNED
INTA SOME KINDA
CRYSTAL VERSION
A' HIMSELF.

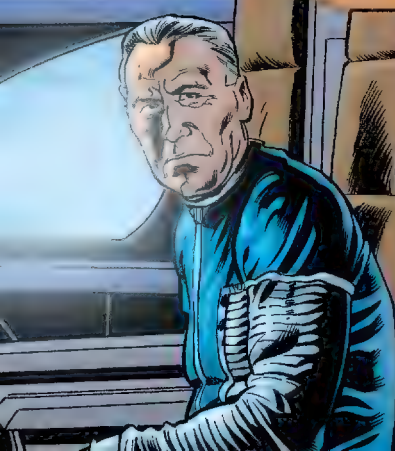
"IF REED WUZ THERE, HE'D'A
FIGURED SOME KINDA WAY TA
SAY JUDE WAS **FUSED** TA THE
COSMIC CUBE.

"'COURSE, STRETCH WASN'T
THERE, SO WHY WASTE TIME
THINKIN' SOMETHIN' OUT, YA KNOW?"

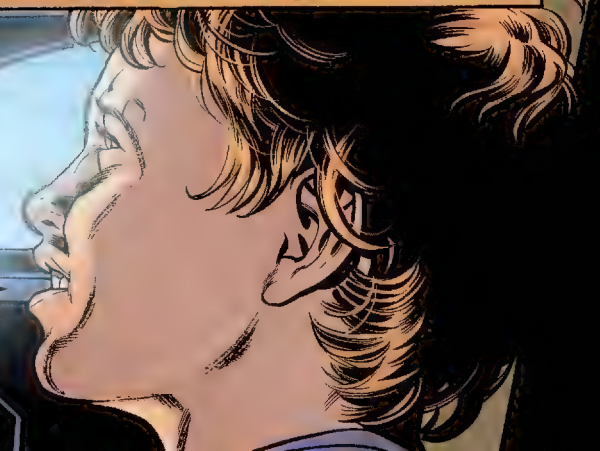


SO ROGERS
AND I LEFT, THINKIN'
THERE'D NEVER BE A DAY
WHEN ANYBODY'D **WANT**
SOMETHIN' LIKE JUDE
TA RETURN.

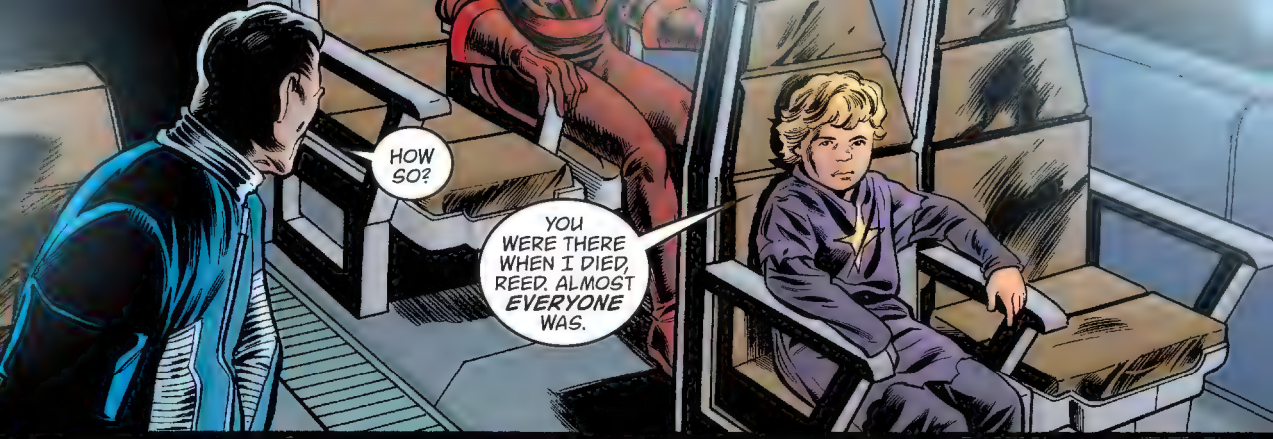
BUT
HERE WE ARE,
ANYWHO.



I CAN'T
BELIEVE THIS,
REED.

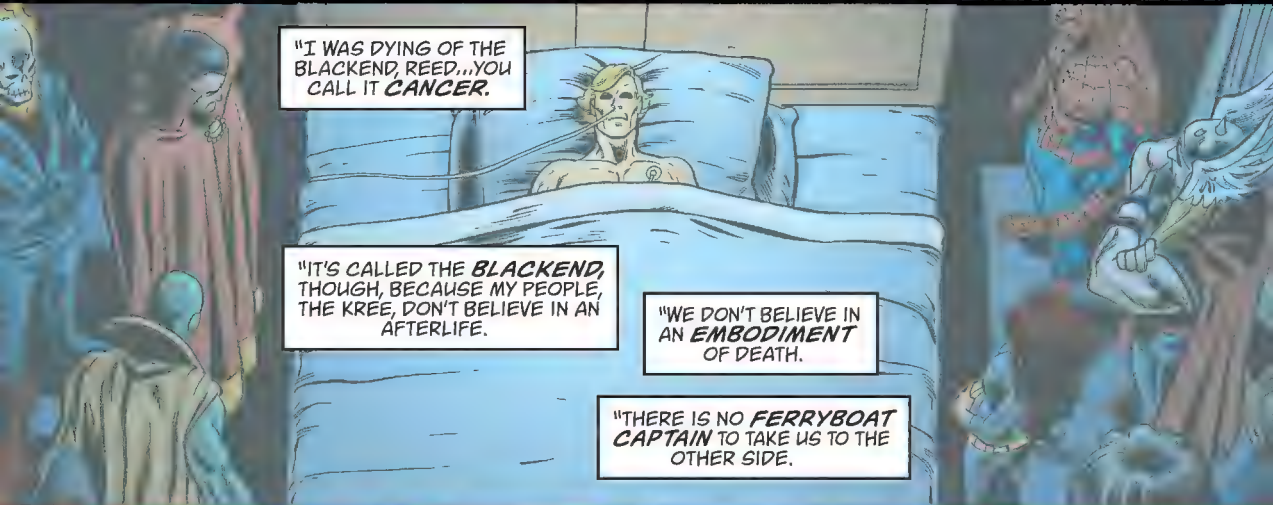


YOUR
NOTION OF
SHATTERED
FORCE FOR
DEATH GROWS
IN MERIT
WITH EACH
MOMENT.



HOW
SO?

YOU
WERE THERE
WHEN I DIED,
REED. ALMOST
EVERYONE
WAS.

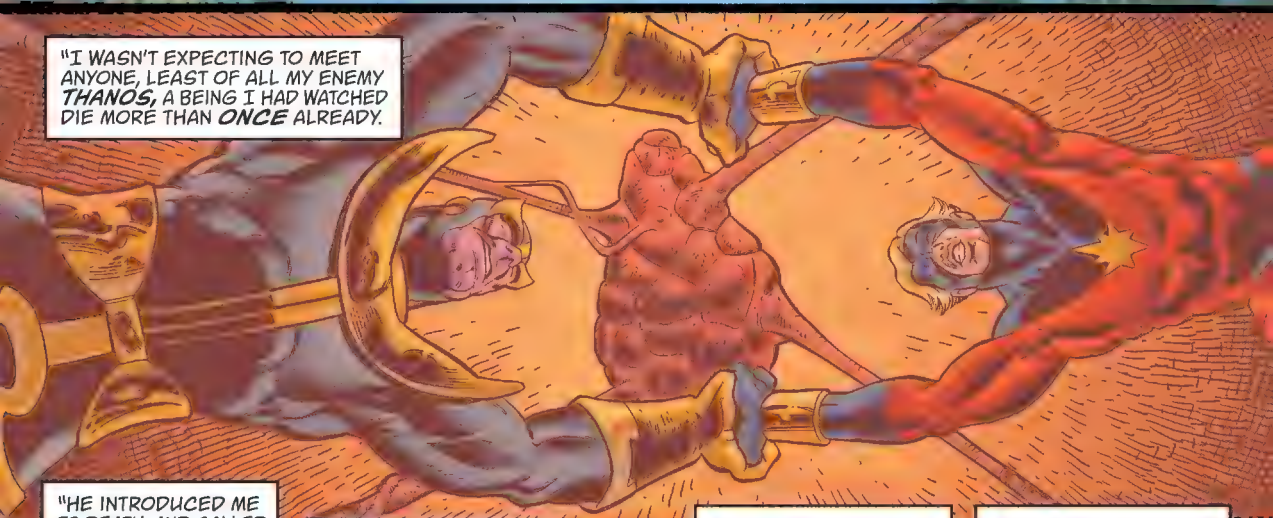


"I WAS DYING OF THE
BLACKEND, REED...YOU
CALL IT **CANCER**.

"IT'S CALLED THE **BLACKEND**,
THOUGH, BECAUSE MY PEOPLE,
THE KREE, DON'T BELIEVE IN AN
AFTERLIFE.

"WE DON'T BELIEVE IN
AN **EMBODIMENT**
OF DEATH.

"THERE IS NO **FERRYBOAT**
CAPTAIN TO TAKE US TO THE
OTHER SIDE.



"I WASN'T EXPECTING TO MEET
ANYONE, LEAST OF ALL MY ENEMY
THANOS, A BEING I HAD WATCHED
DIE MORE THAN **ONCE** ALREADY.

"HE INTRODUCED ME
TO DEATH, AND CALLED
HER THE **GATEWAY**
TO ETERNITY.

"OF COURSE, WITH ONLY
A **PIECE** OF THE COSMIC
CONSCIOUSNESS AT THE
TIME, I DIDN'T REALIZE
HOW **LITERAL** THANOS
WAS BEING.

"I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND
HOW **LITTLE** I KNEW.

"HOW ALL KNOWLEDGE
ITSELF WAS SHATTERED...
HOW WRONG MY
SCIENTIFICALLY AD-
VANCED PEOPLE HAD
BEEN.



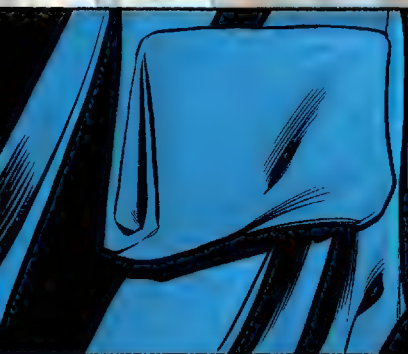
"BUT STILL I KEPT
TO MY FOOLISH
NOTIONS OF THE
END, AND TOLD THIS
STRANGE EMBODI-
MENT THAT IT NEED
NOT COME TO ME
MASKED IN
ILLUSION."



"I EXPECTED TO FIND MYSELF
FACING NOTHING. NO DEATH.
NO THANOS. **NOTHING.**"

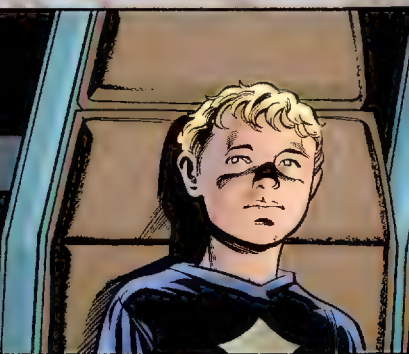
"INSTEAD, I WAS
EMBRACED BY
MY IGNORANCE."

"AND I KNEW THAT
ALL OF THIS WAS
FAR, **FAR** FROM
OVER. LIFE GOES
ON."



INTERESTING.
DEATH CAME
DISGUISED...
THAT'S THE MOST
INTERESTING
THING.

SUSAN
REMEMBERS
NOTHING OF HER
TIME IN THIS REALM
OF THE DEAD YOU'VE
SPOKEN OF. WHAT DO
YOU REMEMBER,
MAR-VELL?

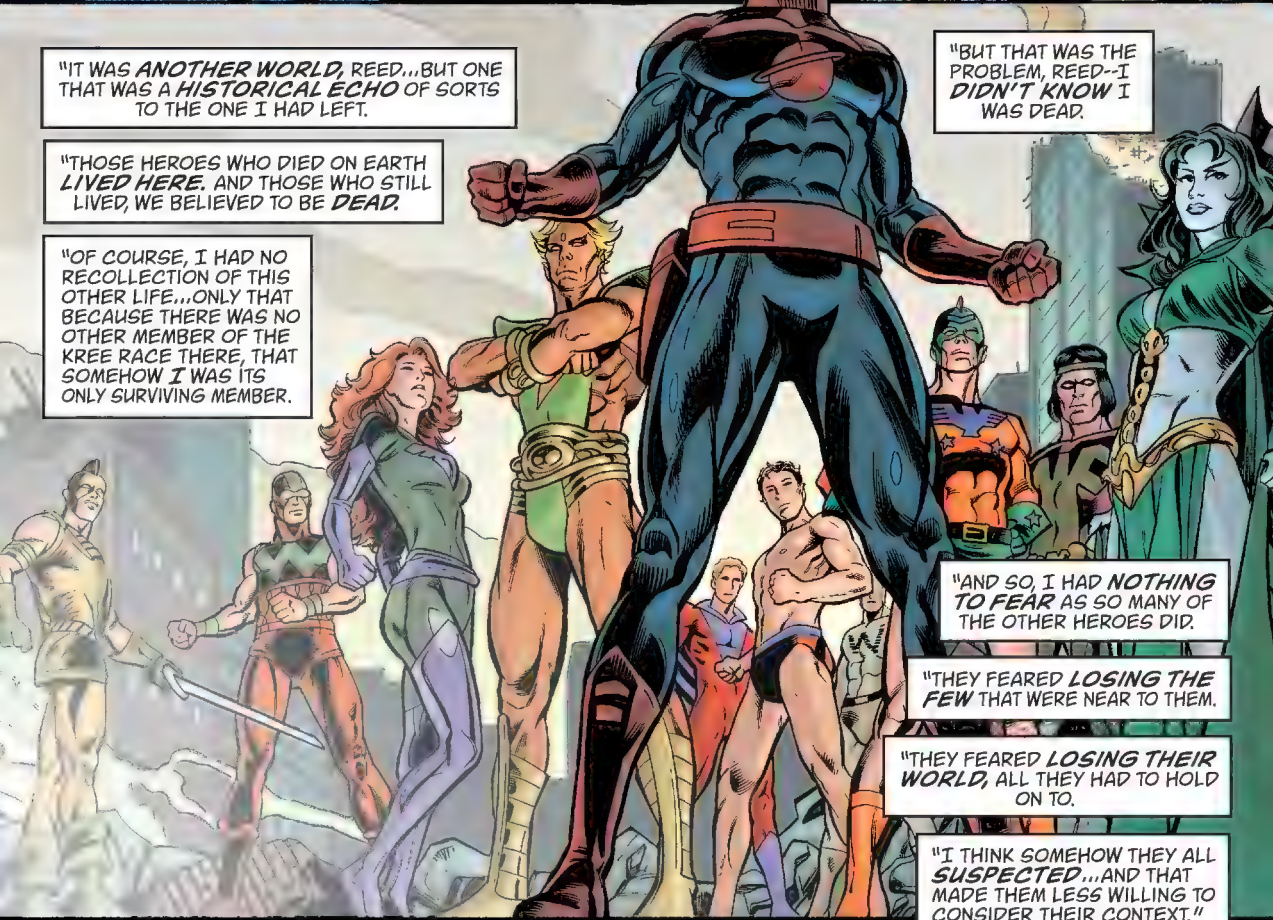


"IT WAS **ANOTHER WORLD**, REED,, BUT ONE
THAT WAS A **HISTORICAL ECHO** OF SORTS
TO THE ONE I HAD LEFT.

"THOSE HEROES WHO DIED ON EARTH
LIVED HERE. AND THOSE WHO STILL
LIVED, WE BELIEVED TO BE **DEAD**."

"OF COURSE, I HAD NO
RECOLLECTION OF THIS
OTHER LIFE... ONLY THAT
BECAUSE THERE WAS NO
OTHER MEMBER OF THE
KREE RACE THERE, THAT
SOMEHOW **I** WAS ITS
ONLY SURVIVING MEMBER."

"BUT THAT WAS THE
PROBLEM, REED--I
DIDN'T KNOW I
WAS DEAD."

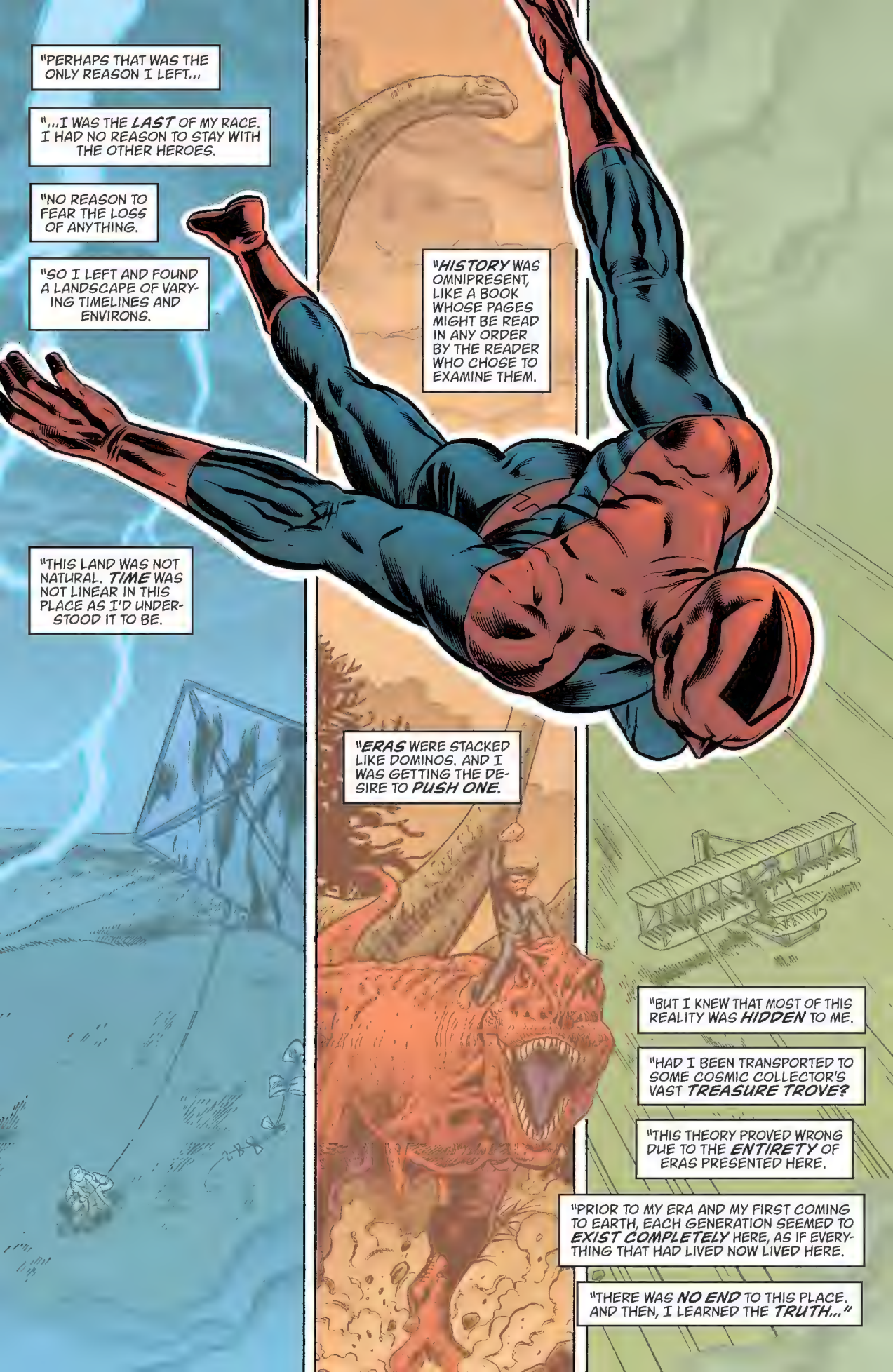


"AND SO, I HAD **NOTHING**
TO FEAR AS SO MANY OF
THE OTHER HEROES DID."

"THEY FEARED **LOSING THE**
FEW THAT WERE NEAR TO THEM."

"THEY FEARED **LOSING THEIR**
WORLD, ALL THEY HAD TO HOLD
ON TO."

"I THINK SOMEHOW THEY ALL
SUSPECTED... AND THAT
MADE THEM LESS WILLING TO
CONSIDER THEIR CONTEXT."



"PERHAPS THAT WAS THE ONLY REASON I LEFT..."

"...I WAS THE **LAST** OF MY RACE. I HAD NO REASON TO STAY WITH THE OTHER HEROES.

"NO REASON TO FEAR THE LOSS OF ANYTHING.

"SO I LEFT AND FOUND A LANDSCAPE OF VARYING TIMELINES AND ENVIRONS.

"THIS LAND WAS NOT NATURAL. **TIME** WAS NOT LINEAR IN THIS PLACE AS I'D UNDERSTOOD IT TO BE.

"**HISTORY** WAS OMNIPRESENT, LIKE A BOOK WHOSE PAGES MIGHT BE READ IN ANY ORDER BY THE READER WHO CHOSE TO EXAMINE THEM.

"**ERAS** WERE STACKED LIKE DOMINOS, AND I WAS GETTING THE DESIRE TO **PUSH ONE**.

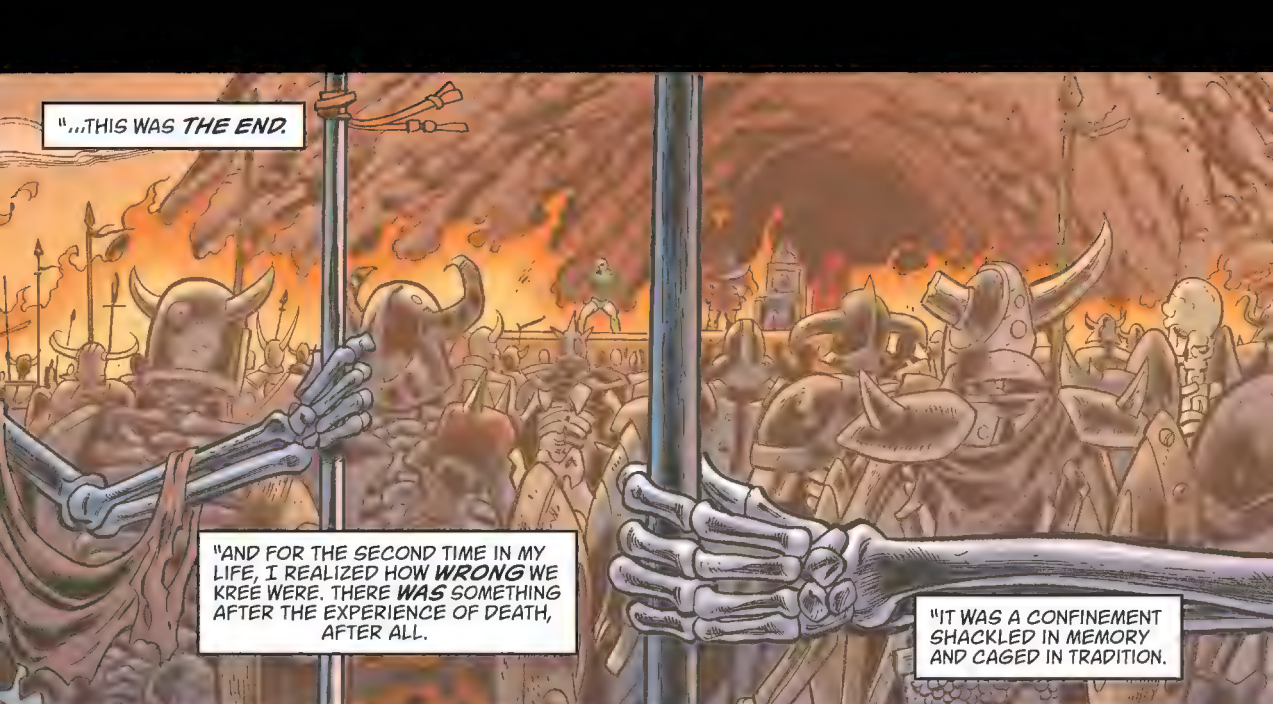
"BUT I KNEW THAT MOST OF THIS REALITY WAS **HIDDEN** TO ME.

"HAD I BEEN TRANSPORTED TO SOME COSMIC COLLECTOR'S VAST **TREASURE TROVE**?

"THIS THEORY PROVED WRONG DUE TO THE **ENTIRETY** OF ERAS PRESENTED HERE.

"PRIOR TO MY ERA AND MY FIRST COMING TO EARTH, EACH GENERATION SEEMED TO **EXIST COMPLETELY** HERE, AS IF EVERYTHING THAT HAD LIVED NOW LIVED HERE.

"THERE WAS **NO END** TO THIS PLACE, AND THEN, I LEARNED THE **TRUTH**..."



"...THIS WAS *THE END*.

"AND FOR THE SECOND TIME IN MY LIFE, I REALIZED HOW *WRONG* WE KREE WERE. THERE *WAS* SOMETHING AFTER THE EXPERIENCE OF DEATH, AFTER ALL.

"IT WAS A CONFINEMENT SHACKLED IN MEMORY AND CAGED IN TRADITION.



"I COULDN'T GO BACK, COULDN'T BRING MYSELF TO CHOOSE AN ERA AND MAKE A PLACE FOR MYSELF THERE.

"I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND HOW I COULD BE THE *ONLY MEMBER* OF MY RACE HERE...AND SO I *WAITED*...AND WATCHED THIS IMPOSSIBLE FIGUREHEAD OF *DEATH*.

"I WATCHED HER DRAW *THANOS* FROM THE LAND OF THE LIVING INTO THIS REALITY TIME AND TIME AGAIN.

"*MEPHISTO* ALSO SHOWED SIMILAR ABILITIES TO PASS BETWEEN METAPHYSICAL REALITIES.



"HE WAS ABLE TO DRAW THE LIVING INTO THE REALM OF THE DEAD, AS WELL. I SAW *OLD ALLIES* I KNEW NOT TO BE PART OF THIS REALM.

"AND LEARNED THAT IT WAS POSSIBLE TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN DEATH AND LIFE.



"WHAT I LACKED IN ORDER TO *ESCAPE* THIS REALM WAS THE POWER AND UNDERSTANDING TO ACCOMPLISH THIS FEAT.

"SOMETIMES I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT I SAW... OR HOW *CLOSE* I WAS TO GETTING MY FULL COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS BACK."



"AND ONE DAY, I REALIZED
THAT THE POWER I NEEDED
WAS *COSMIC* IN ORIGIN.

"PERHAPS IT WAS THE LITTLE
OF THE *COSMIC CONSCIOUS-*
NESS THAT STILL RESTED WITHIN
ME. I'M NOT CERTAIN ANYMORE.

"THE *SILVER SURFER* WAS THE
ONLY ALLY I HAD WHO SEEMED
CAPABLE OF BRIDGING THE GAP
BETWEEN METAPHYSICAL REALITIES.

"I HELPED HIM ESCAPE ANOTHER
TRAP DEVISED BY THANOS...OR
PERHAPS BY DEATH. BUT THIS TIME
I LET HIM *SEE ME*.

"I WANTED HIM TO
REMEMBER I WAS
HERE. I WANTED THE
COSMIC POWER THAT
HE WAS A PART OF TO
KNOW I WAS HERE.
I WANTED IT TO *SEEK*
ME OUT.

"AND ONE DAY, WHEN
A HERO IMBUED WITH
ANOTHER ASPECT OF
THE POWER COSMIC
KNOWN AS THE
ENIGMA FORCE
DIED, THE POWER
CAME TO ME.

"AND I WAS *TRANS-*
FIGURED.

"BUT IT WASN'T
ENOUGH FOR
ME TO ESCAPE.

"I KNEW THAT IF ANY-
ONE WERE STILL IN
THE REALM OF THE
DEAD AFTER I'D
ESCAPED, I WOULDN'T
BE *FREE* AT ALL.
THAT IS NOT THE WAY
OF *HEROES*.

"AND SO I BEGAN TO PLAN
THE *DEATH* OF DEATH AND
THE LIBERATION FROM HER
CURSE.

"I BEGAN TO PLAN
THE *FREEDOM* OF
ALL OF HISTORY."



DON'T ASK ME
WHAT HAPPENED, REED.
I DON'T KNOW.

I DON'T KNOW
WHAT MY OTHER SELF
IS DOING NOW. I'M
CUT OFF.

I DON'T KNOW
WHY HE LEFT THE REST
OF MANKIND TO SUFFER
LIKE THIS.



I **GOT IT!** IF
YER NOT **DEADPOOL**,
YER REALLY THIS GUY
SPIDER-WOMAN TOLD ME
ABOUT...A GUY CURSED
BY MORGAN LEFAY TA
LIVE FOREVER.

NO.



OKAY, THEN
YER A **SKRULL**, AND
YER JUST **SHAPE-
SHIFTIN'** YER VITAL
ORGANS AROUND
WHEN YA PRETEND
TA KILL YERSELF?

YER
PRETTY CLEVER.
THIS AIN'T A **HATRACK**
UP HERE, IF YA GET
MY MEANIN'.



STRETCH
AIN'T THE **ONLY ONE**
WIT' IMAGINATION. THIS
IS PART OF AN **INVASION**
A' EARTH. YA SUCKIN'
SKRULLS...

...THAT'S WHY
THERE'S **MORE** OF YOU
DAREDEVILS THAN EVER
BEFORE!



**SHUT
UP! I AM
NOBODY!**



I SUGGEST
YOU SECURE YOUR
LANDING GEAR, TEAM-
MATES. WE'RE
HERE.

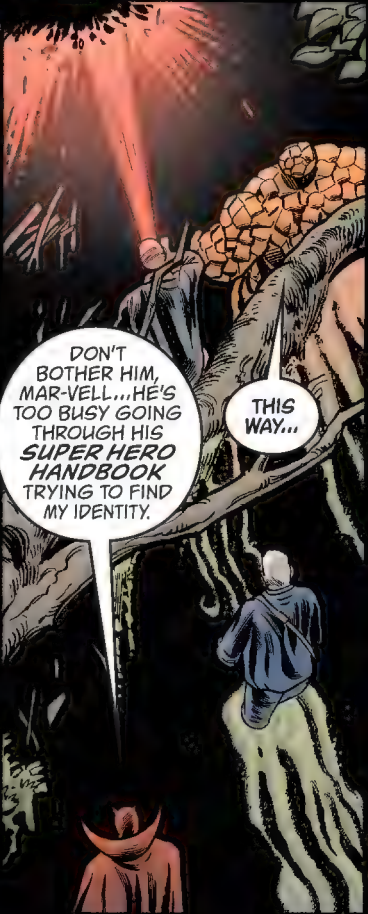


ALL RIGHT, BOYS. STAY BEHIND ME AND **BE CAREFUL.**

AW, DAD. WHY ARE YOU ACTING THIS WAY? MOM'S NOT HERE!

BECAUSE THIS IS SOMETHIN' DIFFERENT THAN ANYTHIN' WE'RE USED TO DEALIN' WITH!

DO YOU REMEMBER WHERE **JUDE** WAS, BEN?



DON'T BOTHER HIM, MAR-VELL...HE'S TOO BUSY GOING THROUGH HIS **SUPER HERO HANDBOOK** TRYING TO FIND MY IDENTITY.

THIS WAY...



...REED'S DOOHICKY CONFIRMS IT.

I **KNEW** RICHARDS WOULD BE THE REAL GUIDE.

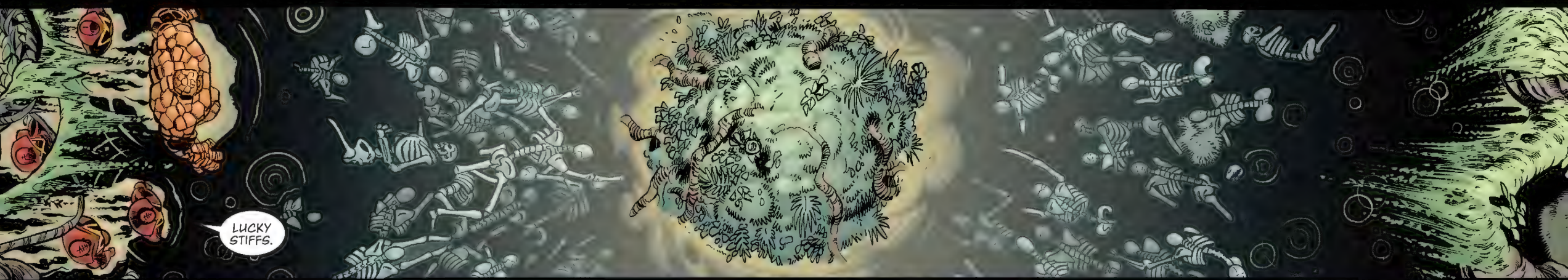
BE NICE.



OH, **GROSS.**

SOME-THIN'S **WRONG.** IT WAS **THERE,** I TELL YA.

DON'T WORRY, BEN. IT'S THERE.







BUT I
ONLY WANTED TA
TOUCH IT...

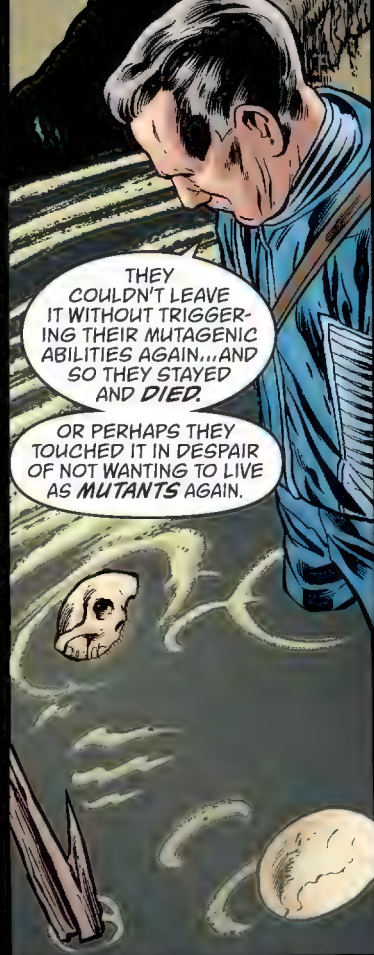


IT'S AS I
SUSPECTED.
THE POWER IS NOT
DORMANT OR
ASLEEP.

IT'S
MERELY
TRAPPED...
LIMITED OR
QUANTIFIED
TO THIS
PLACE.

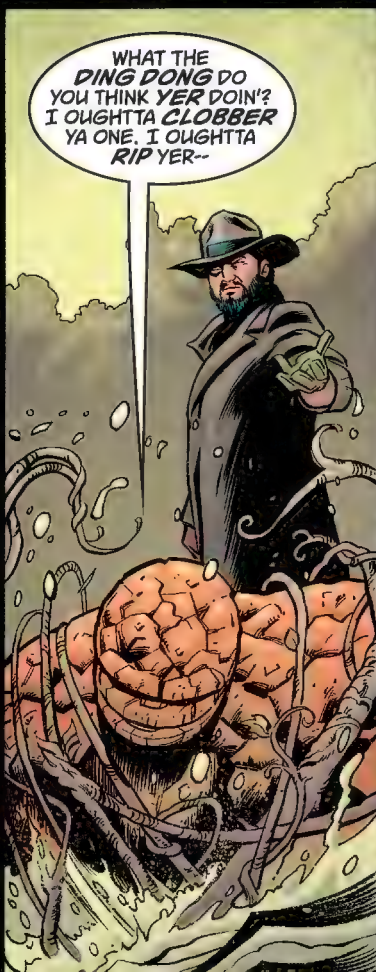
I THINK
THIS JUDE CRYSTAL
SOMEHOW **STABILIZED**
THEIR MUTATION TO
THE DEGREE OF
APPROACH.

IT BREAKS
DOWN GENETIC
STRUCTURE IN INTER-
VALS, BEGINNING
WITH THE
MUTATION.



THEY
COULDN'T LEAVE
IT WITHOUT TRIGGER-
ING THEIR MUTAGENIC
ABILITIES AGAIN...AND
SO THEY STAYED
AND **DIED**.

OR PERHAPS THEY
TOUCHED IT IN DESPAIR
OF NOT WANTING TO LIVE
AS **MUTANTS** AGAIN.

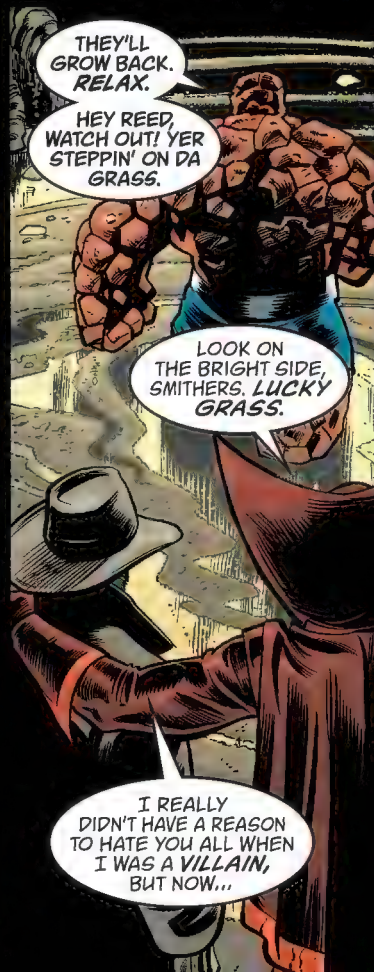


WHAT THE
DING DONG DO
YOU THINK **YER** DOIN'?
I OUGHTTA **CLOBBER**
YA ONE. I OUGHTTA
RIP YER--



LIKE YOU DID TO
THE **LIFE FORM** THAT JUST
SAVED YOUR BUTT?

YOU MURDERER...
WHO DO YOU THINK YOU
ARE TO **TREAT** THEM
THIS WAY?



THEY'LL
GROW BACK.
RELAX.

HEY REED,
WATCH OUT! YER
STEPPIN' ON DA
GRASS.

LOOK ON
THE BRIGHT SIDE
SMITHERS. **LUCKY
GRASS**.

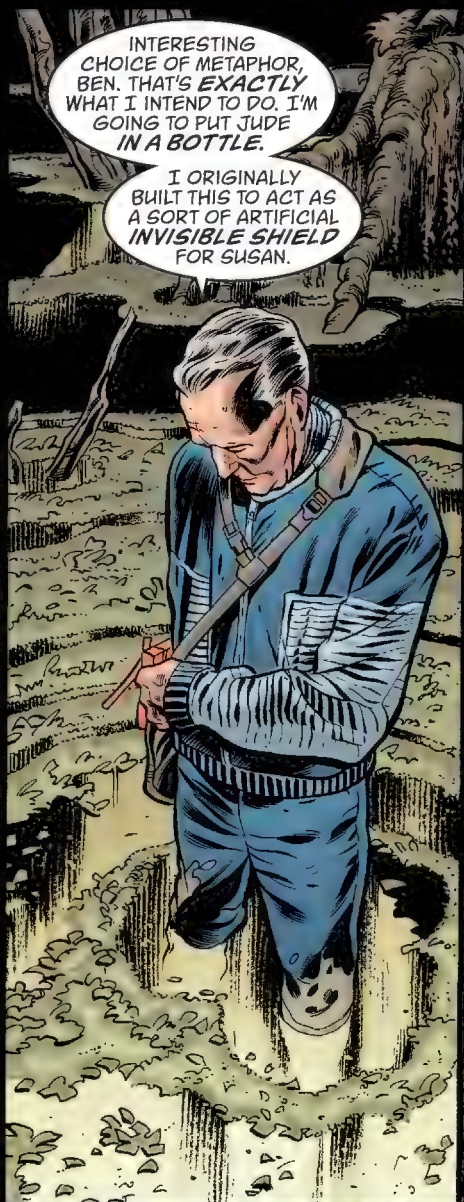
I REALLY
DIDN'T HAVE A REASON
TO HATE YOU ALL WHEN
I WAS A **VILLAIN**,
BUT NOW...



IT'S NOT
LIKE WE CAN JUST
MAKE FRIENDS WITH
THIS GUY. HE'S A **FREAK**.
HE'LL **KILL US**
ALL.

I JUS' **KNOW**
YOU HAVE SOME SORT'A
THING THUNKED UP TA **DEAL**
WITH THIS GUY.

JUDE AIN'T
SOME **GENIE**
YOU CAN JUST
COMMAND.



INTERESTING
CHOICE OF METAPHOR,
BEN. THAT'S **EXACTLY**
WHAT I INTEND TO DO. I'M
GOING TO PUT JUDE
IN A **BOTTLE**.

I ORIGINALLY
BUILT THIS TO ACT AS
A SORT OF ARTIFICIAL
INVISIBLE SHIELD
FOR SUSAN.



IT SHOULD
TRAP JUDE UNTIL WE
CAN MOVE HIM TO **PERMA-
NENT CONTAINMENT**
IN THE CASTLE--

WHERE YOUR
SYNTHESIS OF JUDE'S
ABILITIES CAN BEGIN AND
YOU CAN DEVISE A TOOL
TO DO WHAT JUDE'S
TOUCH DOES.

EXACTLY,
MAR-VELL...



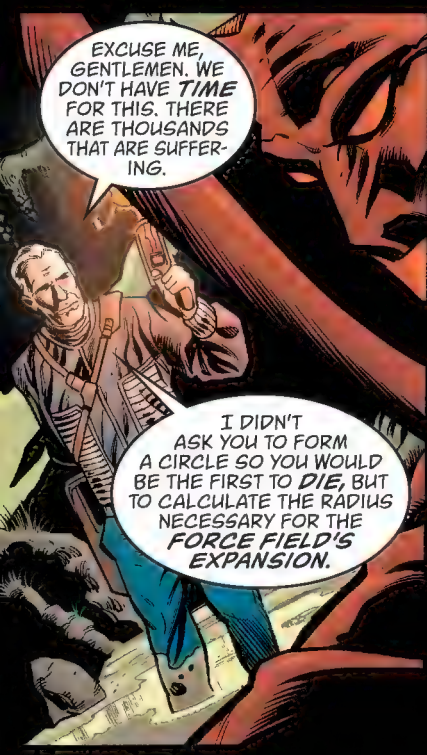
NOW, IF WE COULD HAVE THE **DAREDEVILS** FORM A CIRCLE AROUND JUDE...

WHAT'S WITH HIM?

I HAVE NO IDEA. WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM? DON'T YOU WANT TO DIE?

WE CAN'T DIE...AND I'M TIRED OF PRETENDING LIKE WE CAN...

LISTEN TO HIM TALK LIKE HE'S BETTER THAN US.



EXCUSE ME, GENTLEMEN. WE DON'T HAVE **TIME** FOR THIS. THERE ARE THOUSANDS THAT ARE SUFFERING.

I DIDN'T ASK YOU TO FORM A CIRCLE SO YOU WOULD BE THE FIRST TO **DIE**, BUT TO CALCULATE THE RADIUS NECESSARY FOR THE **FORCE FIELD'S** EXPANSION.



SO NOW IT'S TIME TO **BEG** JUDE FOR HIS RETURN.

AS I UNDERSTAND IT, BEGGING REQUIRES AN **ACT OF CONTRITION**. ON YOUR KNEES, GENTLEMEN.



JUDE? CAN YA **HEAR ME?** WE NEED YA. YA ONCE SAID THAT YOU'D COME BACK WHEN WE NEEDED YA, JUDE.



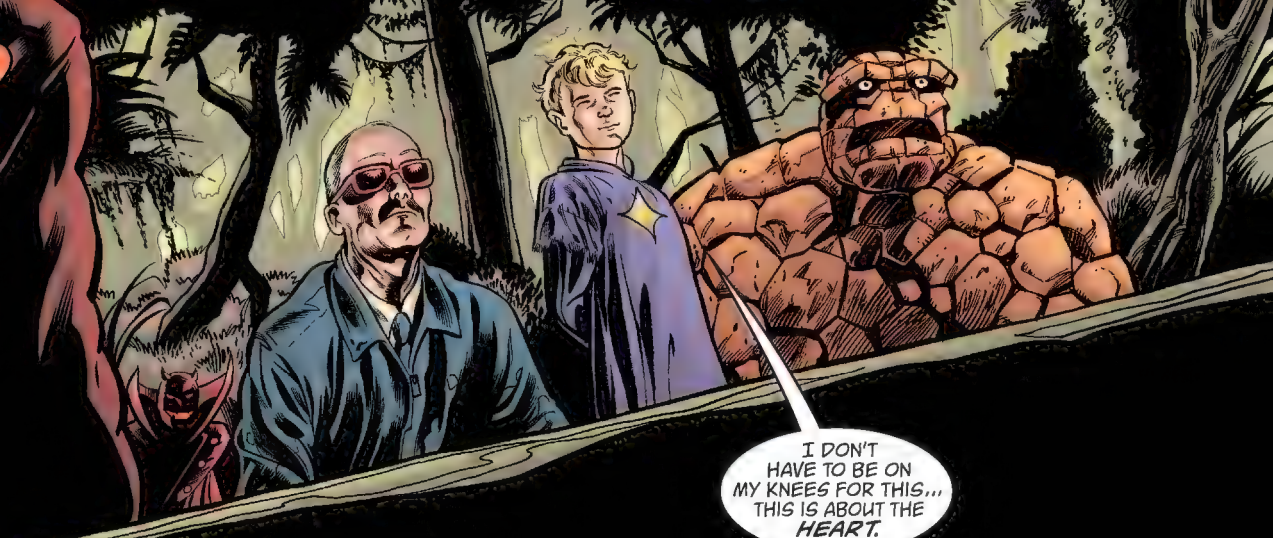
YA SAID THAT WHEN MANKIND NEEDED YA, YA'D **BE HERE**. CAN'T YA HEAR ME?



NOTHIN', STRETCH.

PERHAPS YOU'RE RIGHT, BEN. PERHAPS HE CAN'T HEAR YOU. BECAUSE YOU'RE NOT **HUMAN** ANYMORE.

BUT I AM.



I DON'T
HAVE TO BE ON
MY KNEES FOR THIS...
THIS IS ABOUT THE
HEART.



I'M THE
ONLY ONE WHO
CAN DO THIS.

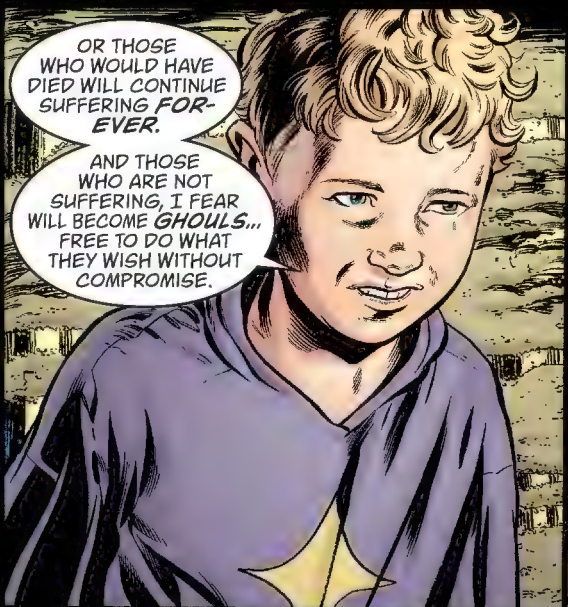
JUDE...I
BELIEVE YOU ARE
FROM THE **FIRST**
UNIVERSE, ONE OF
THE **ANCIENT**
BEINGS.

I WANT
YOU TO KNOW
THAT THE REASON
WE ARE COMING TO
YOU IS **MY FAULT**
AND **MINE**
ALONE.



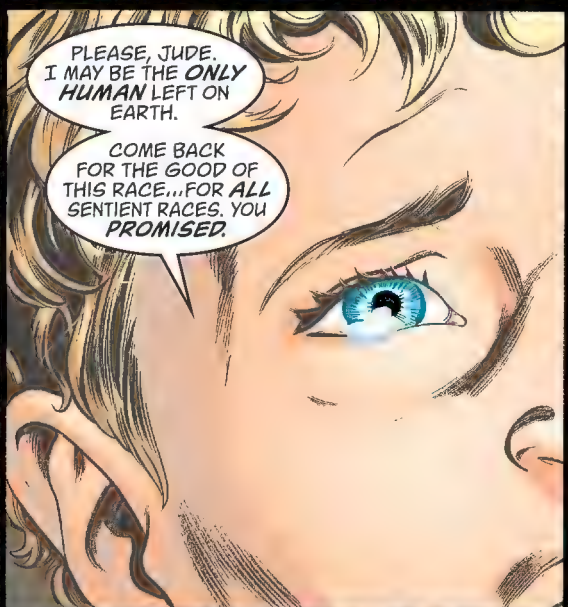
TO RESCUE
THE AFTERLIVES OF
MANKIND, I HELPED
DESTROY PART OF THE
FORCE THAT YOU ARE
A PART OF...PART OF
THE FORCE THAT WAS
SHATTERED WHEN
THE CURRENT
UNIVERSE WAS
BORN.

AS A RESULT,
THE PART OF THAT FORCE
MEANT FOR **SENTIENT**
LIFE NO LONGER EXISTS.
MANKIND NEEDS A **NEW**
AMBASSADOR.



OR THOSE
WHO WOULD HAVE
DIED WILL CONTINUE
SUFFERING **FOR-**
EVER.

AND THOSE
WHO ARE NOT
SUFFERING, I FEAR
WILL BECOME **GHOULS...**
FREE TO DO WHAT
THEY WISH WITHOUT
COMPROMISE.



PLEASE, **JUDE.**
I MAY BE THE **ONLY**
HUMAN LEFT ON
EARTH.

COME BACK
FOR THE **GOOD** OF
THIS RACE...FOR **ALL**
SENTIENT RACES. YOU
PROMISED.



WATCH
OUT, MARY!

DAD? WHAT'S
HAPPENING?

I
DON'T WANT
TO DIE!

YOU
DON'T KNOW
WHAT YOU'RE
MISSING,
KID!

BUT
OF COURSE,
NEITHER DO
WE... AT LEAST,
NOT YET.



ARE YOU
NOW, AT LAST,
READY FOR THE
SWEET GIFT
I OFFER?

DO YOU
TRULY *HUNGER*
FOR THE *GRACE*
ONLY I CAN GIVE?
THE *GIFT*?



MR.
JUDE,
SIR?

ON BEHALF
OF THOSE WHO
CANNOT DIE, BUT
WOULD REALLY LIKE
TO TRY...LET ME
BE THE FIRST TO
WELCOME YOU
TO EARTH.

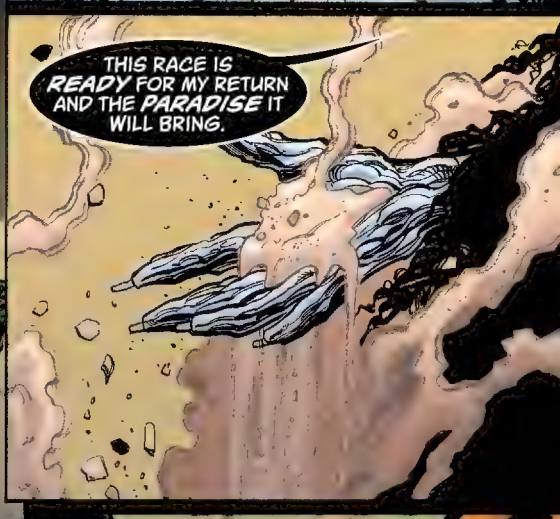


PUT IT
THERE.

NICE TA
MEETCHA...



YOU
SPOKE TRUE
WORDS INDEED,
CHILD.



THIS RACE IS
READY FOR MY RETURN
AND THE PARADISE IT
WILL BRING.



THIS IS A
HAPPY DAY FOR
HUMANITY.



IT'S A MIRACLE!

I SAW HIM FIRST, YOU WHORE!

PLEASE, JUDE! I WAS THE FIRST. THEY'RE JUST COPIES OF ME!

TOUCH ME NEXT. PLEASE, TOUCH ME!

NO, ME!

NO, I WAS THE FIRST. TAKE ME!

LIARS!

ME!

ME!

ME!

ME!

ME!

ME!

HEY, STRETCH! THIS AIN'T AS EASY AS IT LOOKS! HURRY UP, WILL YA?

JUST ANOTHER MOMENT, BEN...

...THERE.



NO FAIR!

AW,
COME
ON!

JUST ONE
MORE OF US,
PLEASE?

I DON'T
UNDERSTAND. YOU
ASKED FOR ME TO
COME BACK. WHAT
IS WRONG?

DON'T
YOU WANT ME
HERE?

HAVE HANK
BRING THE SHIP
OVER AND PULL
JUDE IN.

SHEESH!

YOU
DID IT,
REED. YOU
DID IT.

"GENTLY, HANK. IT REQUIRES AN ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF ENERGY JUST TO HOLD DEATH, NOT TO MENTION TRANSPORT IT IN A GRAVI-BEAM."

"REED, DO YOU FEEL STRANGE ABOUT THIS? DO YOU THINK WE'VE DONE THE RIGHT THING?"

I DON'T HAVE THE LUXURY TO DOUBT MYSELF NOW, HANK. IT'S TOO LATE FOR THAT.

THAT'S THE REASON WE SPENT SO MUCH TIME DISCUSSING THIS.

IT'S OUT OF MY HANDS.

I GOT IT.

YER CURT CONNERS, THE LIZARD! SPIDEY-MAN'S OLD ENEMY-- MAYBE THAT'S WHY YA WANTED TA COME BACK HERE.

SEE THE OLD DIGGS. SAY BYE TA THE BAYOU AN' ALL THAT.

YA FIGURED OUT HOW TA GROW YER ARM BACK--AN' EVERYTHING ELSE FER THAT MATTER-- WITHOUT GETTIN' ALL SCALY.

YER CONNERS. I KNOW IT.

NO, FOR GOD'S SAKE! I'M NOT CURT CONNERS! WHY DO I HAVE TO BE ANYBODY?



"I'M *SORRY*, JUDE.
BUT I'M NOT FREE..."



...NOT
FREE TO ALLOW A
FORCE AS *POWERFUL*
AS YOURS TO MAKE THE
DECISION OF WHO
LIVES AND WHO
DIES.

THEN
WHO, RICHARDS?
WHO WILL MAKE THAT
DECISION?



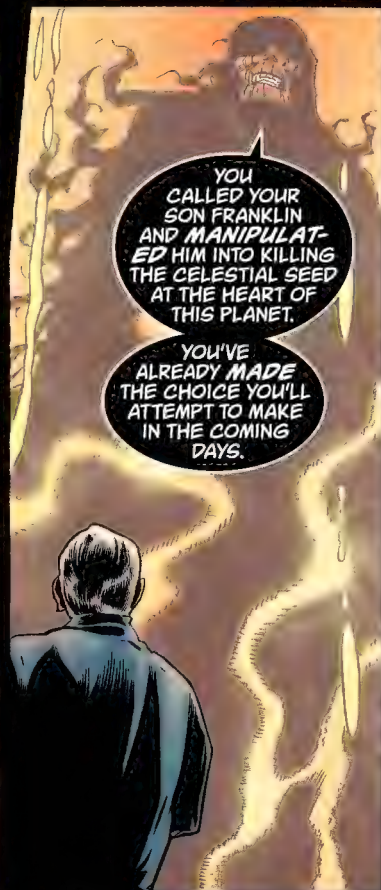
YOU,
RICHARDS? WILL
THE DECISION BE
YOURS?



IT'S
NOT LIKE
THAT.



YES,
IT IS.



YOU
CALLED YOUR
SON FRANKLIN
AND **MANIPULAT-
ED** HIM INTO KILLING
THE CELESTIAL SEED
AT THE HEART OF
THIS PLANET.

YOU'VE
ALREADY **MADE**
THE CHOICE YOU'LL
ATTEMPT TO MAKE
IN THE COMING
DAYS.



...SUSAN.



HE'S TRYING
TO **TRICK** YOU, REED.
I DON'T KNOW HOW HE
KNOWS WHAT HE
KNOWS...

...BUT
YOU'RE A
GOOD
MAN.



AND
YOU'RE **NOT**
ALONE.

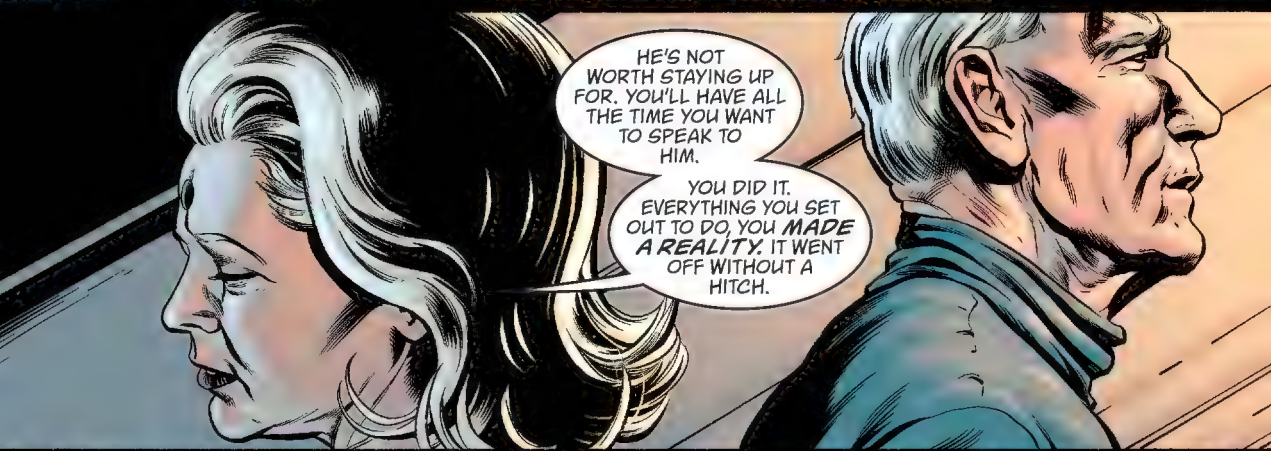


IT'S GOING
TO **WORK**, SUSAN.
I CAN SYNTHESIZE
AND REPLICATE IT...
IT'S LIKE NOTHING
I'VE EVER COME
INTO CONTACT
WITH.

I **COULD**
SPEND THE **REST**
OF MY LIFE STUDY-
ING IT.



AS LONG
AS I AM IN HERE,
RICHARDS, THAT WILL
BE A **VERY LONG**
TIME.



HE'S NOT
WORTH STAYING UP
FOR. YOU'LL HAVE ALL
THE TIME YOU WANT
TO SPEAK TO
HIM.

YOU DID IT.
EVERYTHING YOU SET
OUT TO DO, YOU **MADE**
A REALITY. IT WENT
OFF WITHOUT A
HITCH.



COME
TO BED, MR.
RICHARDS.



THIS WILL
REPLICATE A
PORTION OF YOUR
ABILITIES AND HELP
ME CONSTRUCT
A TOXIN...

I SEE
YOU LIKE TO
PUSH BUTTONS.
BUT I DON'T THINK
THAT'S YOUR **ONLY**
GIFT. YOU'RE
PLAYING WITH
ATOMS,
TINKERER.

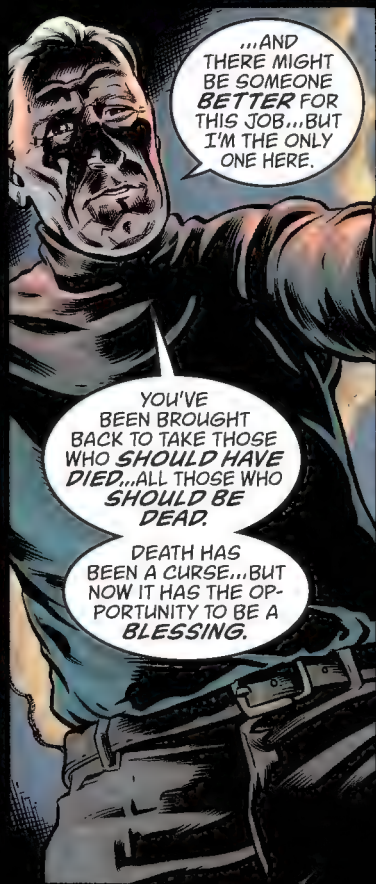


YOU
SHOW ALL THE
SKILL AND CONTROL
OF A **RETARDED**
SURGEON ON
CRACK.

GO TO
YOUR WIFE...
HOLD HER IF YOU
CAN. **COMFORT**
HER WITH WORDS
OF WHAT YOU'VE
DONE THESE
PAST FEW
WEEKS.



YOU HAVE TO BE
CONTROLLED...



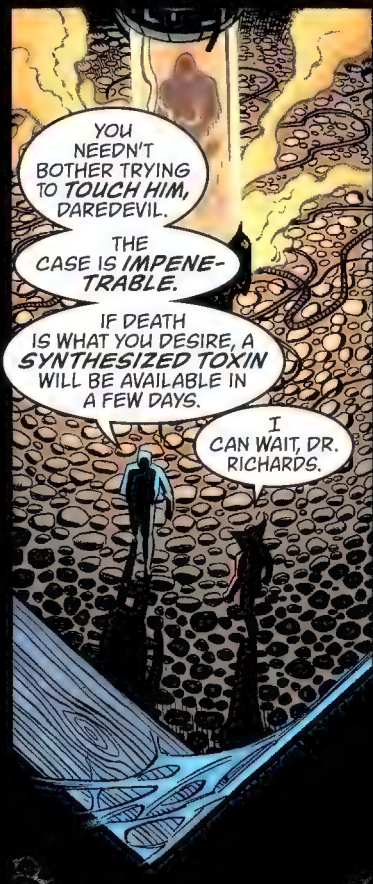
...AND
THERE MIGHT
BE SOMEONE
BETTER FOR
THIS JOB...BUT
I'M THE ONLY
ONE HERE.

YOU'VE
BEEN BROUGHT
BACK TO TAKE THOSE
WHO **SHOULD HAVE**
DIED... ALL THOSE WHO
SHOULD BE
DEAD.

DEATH HAS
BEEN A CURSE...BUT
NOW IT HAS THE OP-
PORTUNITY TO BE A
BLESSING.



WE'LL
CONTINUE
IN THE
MORNING.



YOU
NEEDN'T
BOTHR TRYING
TO **TOUCH HIM,**
DAREDEVIL.

THE
CASE IS **IMPENE-**
TRABLE.

IF DEATH
IS WHAT YOU DESIRE, A
SYNTHESIZED TOXIN
WILL BE AVAILABLE IN
A FEW DAYS.

I
CAN WAIT, DR.
RICHARDS.



I
THINK I
PREFERRED
YOU WITH A
WOMAN'S
FACE.



THEN
AGAIN, I'VE
ALWAYS BEEN
PARTIAL TO
MASKS AND
DECEPTIONS.



YOU
ARE **NOT**
WHO YOU
PRETEND
TO BE?

YOU
DO NOT
WANT TO
DIE?



NO,
AND YOU
ARE **RIGHT**.
I AM **NOT** WHO
I PRETEND TO
BE.



I WAS A
FRIEND TO YOUR
PREDECESSOR...**SORT**
OF A FATHER
FIGURE.

AND I
CAN **HELP**
YOU.



I HAVE
ALREADY WALKED
IN YOUR REALM,
JUDE...

...AND I BELIEVE
YOU WILL BE **SADDENED**
TO HEAR THAT THESE HEROES
WHO CAGE YOU ARE DOING
FAR MORE THAN JUST
THAT.

NOT ONLY
DO THEY **CONTROL**
YOU, BUT THEY HAVE
DIMINISHED THE
POWER OF YOUR
REALM.

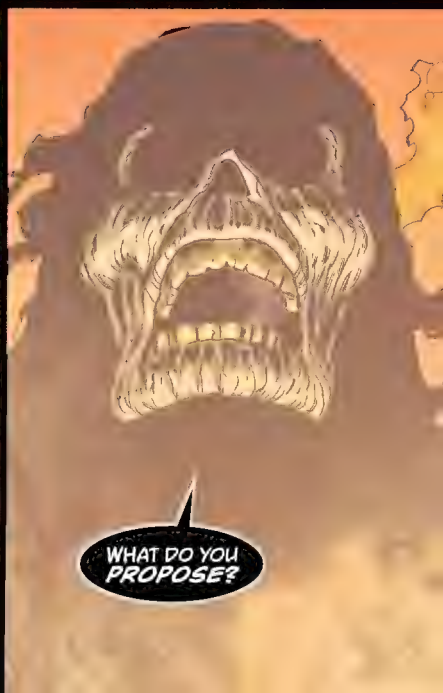


MANY OF
THOSE WHO **SHOULD**
BE IN YOUR REALM HAVE
BEEN **RESCUED**
FROM IT.

THEY NOW
LIVE AGAIN IN A PLACE
CALLED **THE PARADISE**,
A PLACE RESIDING IN THE
NEGATIVE ZONE, HAVING
ESCAPED THROUGH THE
DEATH OF YOUR PRE-
DECESSOR.



I CAN
HELP YOU BE
ALL YOU CAN
BE.

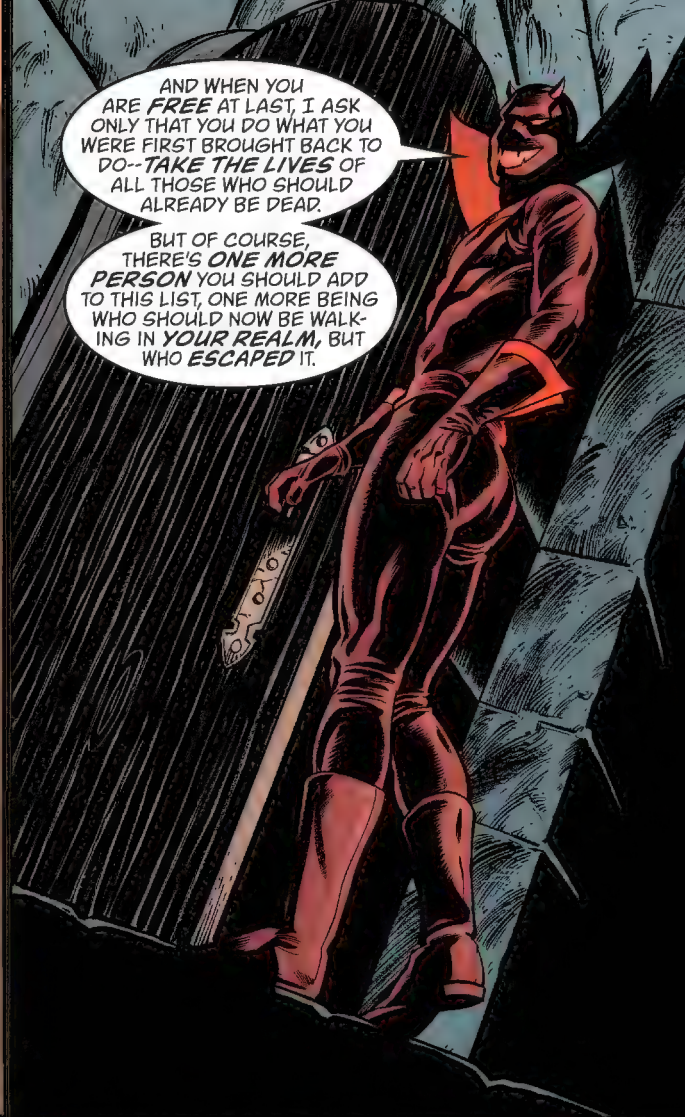


WHAT DO YOU
PROPOSE?



INITIALLY,
THERE IS **VERY LITTLE**
I CAN DO, SAVE **GUIDE**
YOU AND MAKE A **FEW**
SUGGESTIONS...

...BUT YOU
WON'T BE TRAPPED FOR
MUCH LONGER. THAT
IS MY **PROMISE**.



AND WHEN YOU
ARE **FREE** AT LAST, I ASK
ONLY THAT YOU DO WHAT YOU
WERE FIRST BROUGHT BACK TO
DO--**TAKE THE LIVES** OF
ALL THOSE WHO SHOULD
ALREADY BE DEAD.

BUT OF COURSE,
THERE'S **ONE MORE**
PERSON YOU SHOULD ADD
TO THIS LIST, ONE MORE BEING
WHO SHOULD NOW BE WALK-
ING IN **YOUR REALM**, BUT
WHO **ESCAPED** IT.



HER
NAME IS **SUSAN**
RICHARDS.

MARVEL

6

P A R A D I S E

KRUEGER
BRAITHWAITE
REINHOLD

"Why did you bring the Heralds to this Earth, Aaron? Sure, you promised them knowledge in exchange for being your messengers, but there's another reason. Why mix the alternate reality heroes with our own counterparts...*here*, of all places, where the Celestial seed at the core of the planet has already been put to death?"

"Because if I'm understanding everything you're telling me, Kyle, this is all much larger than the Celestials; it's bigger than warning worlds of the Celestial egg that they've become.

"I've given the Heralds access to our Earth and our people because they will meet them one day in the Realm of the Dead...they will be joined to them there. That is what you are telling me, isn't it? That the Realm of the Dead is not an alternate world, not another timeline created by Mephisto. It's something created by these beings, the Elders, who are older even than our understanding of matter and atomic structure.

"Every new timeline splinters us, breaks our possibilities down into concrete realities. And those possibilities are being reassembled in the Realm of the Dead as every hero perishes in their own reality.

"Death's Realm is a collecting pool, isn't it, Kyle? It's a place where the souls of heroes and villains alike go until all their various alternate timeline forms can be recombined into one pure form once again. These pure forms then become the stuff that will be used to reassemble the original cosmos by the Elders of the Universe."

"You are absolutely right, Aaron. Though even what we will become then is hidden to me. My suspicion is that we will lose all sense of individuality, but I cannot be certain."

"Then the Elders of the Universe, the beings who created the Realm of the Dead, are just as manipulative as the Celestials? They care nothing for us. We are merely the means to their end."

"Yes, Aaron. That is the problem we face. Though I can think of one member of your team who does not fit within the Elders' framework for reassembling the universe that existed before this one."

"Who?"

"Hyperion."

PARADISE X

I S S U E 6

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"LET ME EXPLAIN BY FIRST SPEAKING ABOUT MY ALTERNATE WORLD COUNTERPART, **KYLE RICHMOND**, FROM THE SAME REALITY THAT HYPERION COMES FROM.

"ON OUR WORLD, THE **SQUADRON SUPREME** WAS A TEAM OF **VILLAINS**--SUPER-POWERED CRIMINALS.

"BUT ON HYPERION'S WORLD, THEY WERE **HEROES**, A LEAGUE DEDICATED TO THE CAUSE OF **JUSTICE**."

"EVERYONE LOVED THEM, WITH KYLE RICHMOND BEING THE ONLY **DISSENTER** TO THEIR POPULARITY. SO MUCH SO THAT HE PLANNED TO **ASSASSINATE** HIS TEAMMATE, HYPERION."

"WHY, KYLE?"



"BECAUSE, AARON, THERE CAME A DAY WHEN THE SQUADRON SUPREME *UNMASKED* THEMSELVES AND CHOSE TO SOLVE HUMANITY'S SINS WITH THEIR OWN SUPER POWERS."

"HUNGER."

"CRIME."

"WAR."

"POVERTY."

"DISEASE."

"SOCIAL CLASS."

"THE ENVIRONMENT."

"THEIR ATTEMPT TO SOLVE SOCIETY'S ILLS WAS SOMETHING NIGHTHAWK *COULD NOT ALLOW.*"

"WHY? BECAUSE NIGHTHAWK THOUGHT THESE WERE PROBLEMS FOR MANKIND TO SOLVE ON ITS *OWN*?"

"THAT'S CERTAINLY WHAT HE ARGUED WITH HYPERION."

"BUT THE TRUTH WAS THAT NIGHT-HAWK WAS *CONVINCED* THAT NO EXTERNAL FORCE *COULD* SOLVE AN INTERNAL PREDISPOSITION TOWARDS CREATING THESE PROBLEMS."

"HE BELIEVED THAT THERE WAS A *REASON* FOR THESE SOCIETAL ILLS, AND NO AMOUNT OF SUPER-HUMAN CONTROL *COULD* SOLVE THEM."

"THE REAL PROBLEM, THOUGH, WAS SOMETHING AT *HUMANITY'S CORE.*"

"THESE EVENTS WERE REVEALED TO *CAPTAIN AMERICA* WHEN NIGHT-HAWK CAME TO THIS REALITY IN SEARCH OF ALLIES...SO WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH HYPERION AND MY HERALDS?"

"ONE OF THE ELDERS OF THE UNIVERSE, *THE GRANDMASTER*, CREATED HIS OWN HYPERION OUT OF STATIC INTER-DIMENSIONAL MATTER TO FIGHT AND KILL ON HIS BEHALF."

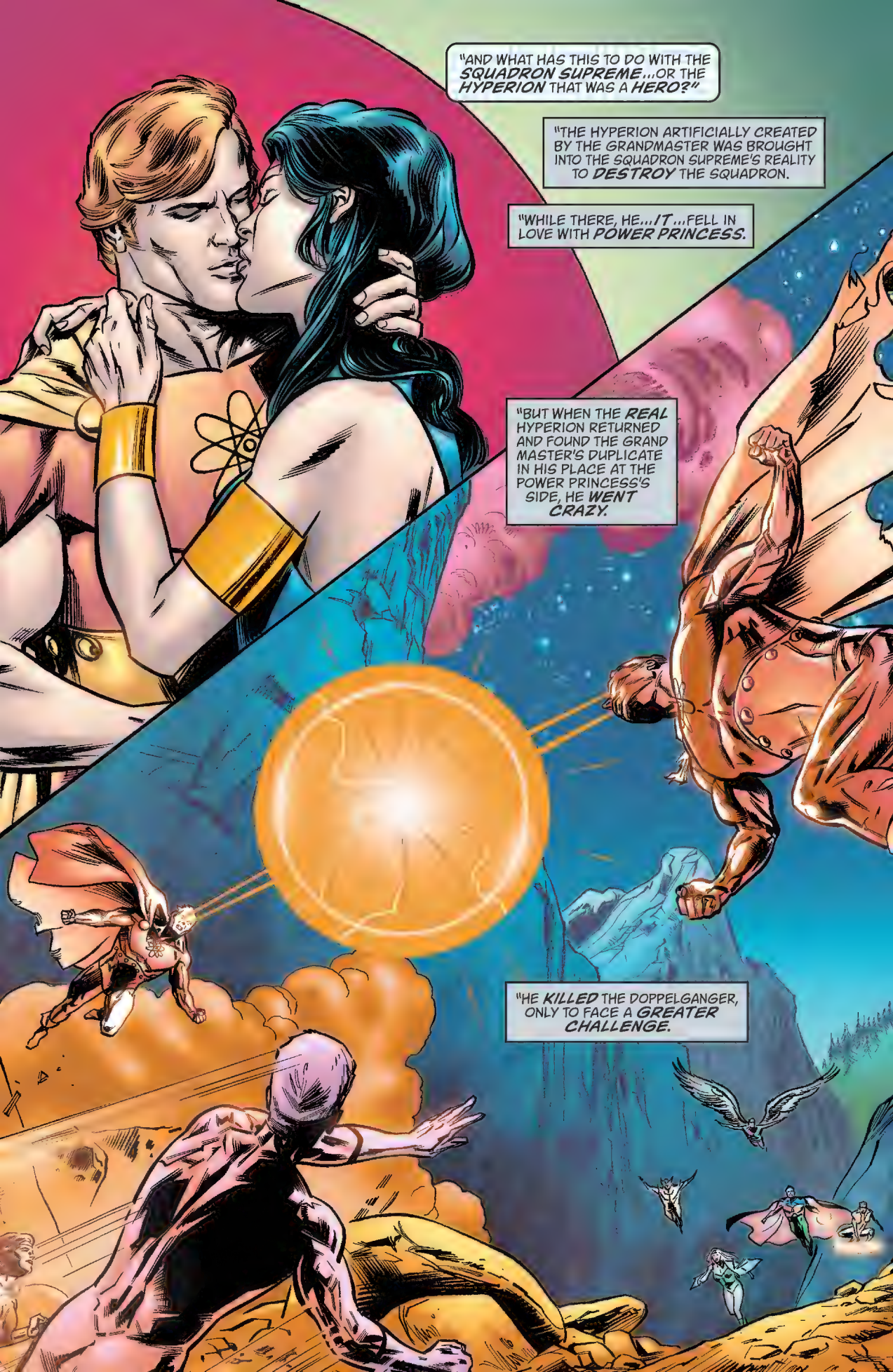
"WHY?"

"BECAUSE OF HOW *POWERFUL* HYPERION WAS. HOW *INSPIRING* HE *COULD* BE."



"THINK ABOUT IT, AARON. THE SQUADRON SUPREME ASIDE, HYPERION WAS ABLE TO *CONVINCE AN ENTIRE WORLD* TO TRUST HIM TO SOLVE THEIR GREATEST VICES."

"IT'S ONLY BECAUSE HE WAS A *VILLAIN* ON OUR WORLD THAT HE DIDN'T RISE TO BECOME OUR *GREATEST CHAMPION.*"



"AND WHAT HAS THIS TO DO WITH THE **SQUADRON SUPREME**...OR THE **HYPERION** THAT WAS A **HERO**?"

"THE **HYPERION** ARTIFICIALLY CREATED BY THE **GRANDMASTER** WAS BROUGHT INTO THE **SQUADRON SUPREME**'S REALITY TO **DESTROY** THE **SQUADRON**.

"WHILE THERE, HE...*IT*...FELL IN LOVE WITH **POWER PRINCESS**.

"BUT WHEN THE **REAL** **HYPERION** RETURNED AND FOUND THE **GRAND MASTER**'S DUPLICATE IN HIS PLACE AT THE **POWER PRINCESS**'S SIDE, HE **WENT CRAZY**.

"HE **KILLED** THE **DOPPELGANGER**, ONLY TO FACE A **GREATER CHALLENGE**.



"NIGHTHAWK CREATED A TEAM TO **OPPOSE** THE SQUADRON SUPREME..."

"...AND RICHMOND'S VICTORY COST HIM HIS **OWN LIFE**."

"YES, HYPERION TOLD ME WHAT HAPPENED...THE SQUADRON WAS **NUKED** BY THE HUMANITY THEY HAD TRIED TO HELP."

"AND ONLY **HE** SURVIVED, MUCH TO HIS OWN REGRET. HE **WANTS TO DIE**, KYLE."

"BUT DO YOU KNOW WHY?"

"I ASSUMED IT WAS A FORM OF **SURVIVOR'S GUILT**. HE REGRETTED THAT HE LIVED AND HIS TEAMMATES DID NOT."

"NOT AT ALL, AARON. HYPERION KNOWS ALL ABOUT SURVIVOR'S GUILT. AFTER ALL, HE WAS THE **LAST** OF HIS RACE. HYPERION WANTS TO DIE SO HE CAN STOP **HIM**."

"WHO?"

"THE **GRANDMASTER'S HYPERION**. HE'S THERE AMONGST THE DEAD RIGHT NOW. HE'S THERE WITH HYPERION'S TEAMMATES. HE'S THERE WITH HER, THE POWER PRINCESS."

"THE GRANDMASTER IS ONE OF THE ELDERS OF THE UNIVERSE. THE REALM OF THE DEAD IS THEIR **COLLECTING POOL** TO RECREATE THE ORIGINAL UNIVERSE."

"AND THEIR HYPERION MIGHT BE THE **MOST POWERFUL BEING** IN THE REALM OF THE DEAD."

"THIS ALONE MAY BE THE **REASON** WHY THE ARTIFICIAL HYPERION WAS CREATED. HE WAS TO JOIN PHOENIX AND DEATH IN THE ELDERS' BID TO **RECLAIM** THE UNIVERSE."

"DOES HYPERION KNOW ABOUT THE ELDERS' PLAN TO RECONSTRUCT THE ORIGINAL UNIVERSE FROM THOSE THAT DIE IN THIS ONE?"

"NO, BUT HYPERION IS ABOUT TO BE DRAWN INTO A WAR THAT MAY LEAD TO HIS HEART'S DESIRE."

"HE IS ABOUT TO ARRIVE IN NEW YORK, WHERE ALREADY THE GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY AND CERTAIN AMBASSADORS OF THE NEGATIVE ZONE PREPARE TO FACE OFF AGAINST EACH OTHER."

DON'T TELL ME YOU'RE HERE FOR REED RICHARDS!

WHY?

BECAUSE I'M GOING TO KILL RICHARDS!

WE CAN'T ALLOW YOU TO DO THAT.

AT LEAST NOT UNTIL RICHARDS ANSWERS A FEW QUESTIONS OF OURS.

STARHAWK? TAKE 'EM DOWN!

"THERE WAS A TIME, KYLE, BEFORE UATU BROUGHT ME HERE TO BECOME THE NEW WATCHER..."

"...BEFORE THE WHOLE OF MANKIND WAS MUTATED AND THE CELESTIAL PLAN FOR EARTH WAS REVEALED..." WHEN I LOOKED AT EVERYTHING AS IF IT WERE HAPPENING BY COINCIDENCE.

"THE BLISS OF IGNORANCE, A TIME BEFORE I COULD SEE HOW EVERYTHING WAS PART OF A GREAT DESIGN. JUST ONCE, KYLE, I'D LIKE TO SEE COINCIDENCE AT WORK ONCE AGAIN."

"THEN KEEP YOUR EYE UPON THE BAXTER BUILDING, AARON. FOR THE BATTLE BEING FOUGHT THERE THIS MOMENT WILL FORGE AN ARMY."



GET OFF ME! THE LONGER THIS HUMILIATION LASTS, THE LONGER YOU WILL DIE!

FOCUS ON THE BIG ONE!

FOOLS!

SHUT UP AND TELL ME WHERE RICHARDS IS!

WHAT HAVE YOU GOTTEN ME INTO THIS TIME, REED?

I KNOW YOU TOLD ME NOT TO USE THIS **INDOORS**, REED...

...BUT I CAN'T AFFORD THE TIME TO HOLLOW OUT ANOTHER **HELMET** IF THIS ONE CRACKS IN A FIGHT.





REMARKABLE
TRANSPORTATION
DEVICE. IT REALLY
IS AMAZING.

GREAT. OF
ALL THE "FAMILY
MEMBERS" TO
GET STUCK WITH,
I GET MR.
WIZARD.

YOU
SAID IT,
'PUTER.

I
DIDN'T HEAR
ANYTHING.



THAT'S
REDWING,...
WYATT WINGFOOT,
ACTUALLY.

YOU
BETTER
RESCUE HIM,
ARNO.



SO, LOGAN...YOU'RE
GOING TO TALK TO THE
OTHER YOU AND WE'RE
SUPPOSED TO JUST
SIT HERE?

SOMETHIN'
LIKE THAT.



YOU
SMELL SOMETHING,
WALTER?

THIS IS
NO TIME TO
THINK ABOUT
YOUR STOMACH,
MAC.

NO...HE'S
RIGHT.



FINALLY,
A LITTLE
ACTION!



"KYLE...WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE LOGAN OF OUR WORLD WHEN HE LEARNS THE **TRUTH** ABOUT HIS ORIGIN?"

"WHAT WILL HAPPEN, AARON?"

"YES, WILL HE LOSE WEIGHT AND REJOIN THE SUPER HERO COMMUNITY AS PETER PARKER DID?"

"NO."

THERE YOU ARE.



AW, HELL! AS IF LIVIN' WITH MYSELF WASN'T **BAD ENOUGH** ALREADY.



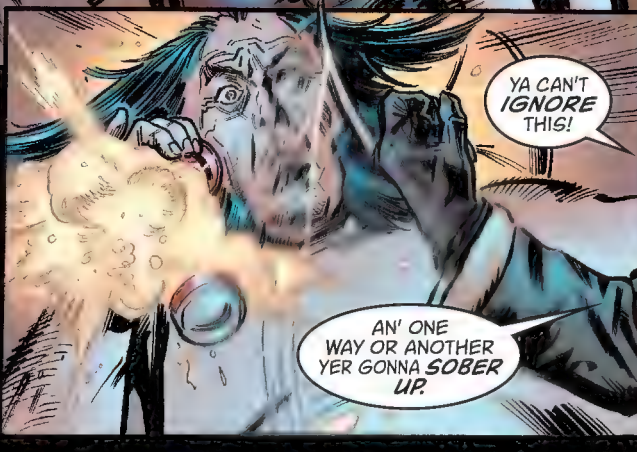
LOOK, IF I WERE YOU, I WOULDN'T WANT ME HERE, EITHER.

BUT I FOUND OUT ABOUT WHO I AM...WHO WE ARE.

WHERE WE **COME FROM**.



YEAH... WELL, LET ME TELL YA WHERE YOU CAN **GO**.



YA CAN'T **IGNORE THIS!**

AN' ONE WAY OR ANOTHER YER GONNA **SOBER UP**.

I'M ALL WET!

RELAX, YOU'LL HEAL. REMEMBER YOUR **"MUTANT" POWER?**



'CEPT, IT AIN'T A **MUTANT** POWER AT ALL. YER NOT EVEN A **MUTANT**.



BEFORE
FLAMIN' WEAPON X,
BEFORE SOME FAMILY
IN A HILLTOP
MANSION TOOK
YOU IN...

...BEFORE
ALPHA FLIGHT,
BEFORE THE X-
MEN, BEFORE
ANY OF THAT
CRAP...

...YOU HAD
NO ASPIRATION
TA BE A MAN, AT
ALL.

WHAT ARE
YOU TALKIN'
ABOUT? I'M
A MAN!



NO, WE'RE
NOT! NOT IN THE
EXPECTED SENSE, I
MEAN. AN' DRINKIN'
MORE BREWSKIS AIN'T
GONNA MAKE IT
SO.

YA SEE, IT AIN'T
LIKE WE'RE SOME KIND OF
FLAMIN' **MOWGLI** LIKE WE
ALWAYS FIGURED...

...LOST IN
THE WILDERNESS,
RAISED BY **WOLVES**
AN' ALL THAT UNTIL WE
WAS RESCUED BY
CIVILIZA-
TION!

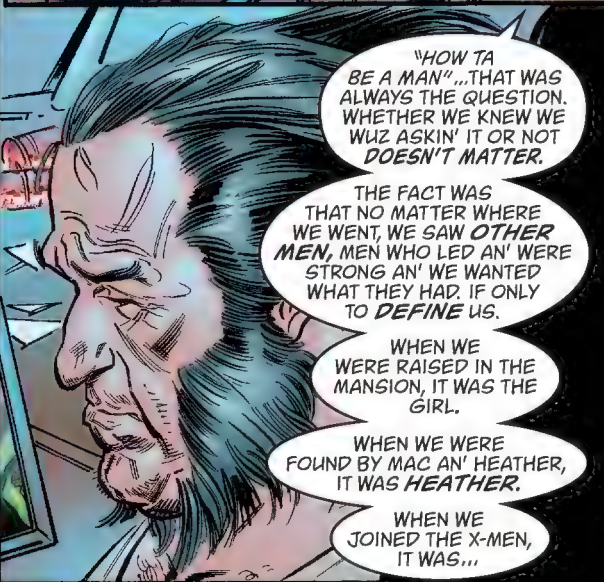


IT'S MORE
LIKE **WE'RE** THE
WOLF THAT WAS
RAISED BY
HUMANS.

AN' WE'RE NOT
ALONE. SASQUATCH,
JOHN JAMESON, EVEN
SABRETOOTH...

...WE'RE
ALL PART OF A
**DIVERGENT
GENETIC RACE**
THAT RAN PARALLEL
TO HUMANITY. THAT'S
WHY THERE ARE
SO MANY
LIKE US.

WE THOUGHT
WE WERE MEN
STRUGGLING WITH
OUR BESTIAL SIDE.
BUT IT'S THE
OPPOSITE.



"HOW TA
BE A MAN"...THAT WAS
ALWAYS THE QUESTION.
WHETHER WE KNEW WE
WUZ ASKIN' IT OR NOT
DOESN'T MATTER.

THE FACT WAS
THAT NO MATTER WHERE
WE WENT, WE SAW **OTHER
MEN**, MEN WHO LED AN' WERE
STRONG AN' WE WANTED
WHAT THEY HAD. IF ONLY
TO **DEFINE** US.

WHEN WE
WERE RAISED IN THE
MANSION, IT WAS THE
GIRL.

WHEN WE WERE
FOUND BY MAC AN' HEATHER,
IT WAS **HEATHER**.

WHEN WE
JOINED THE X-MEN,
IT WAS...



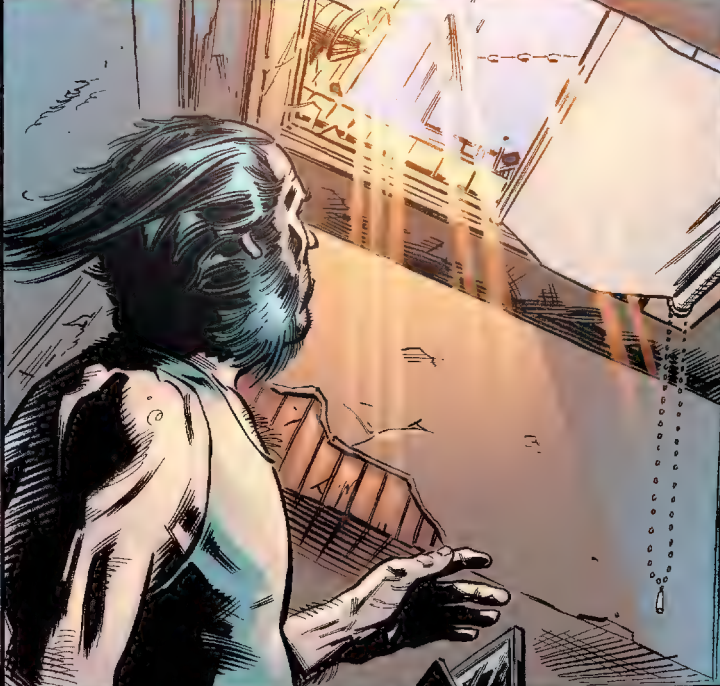
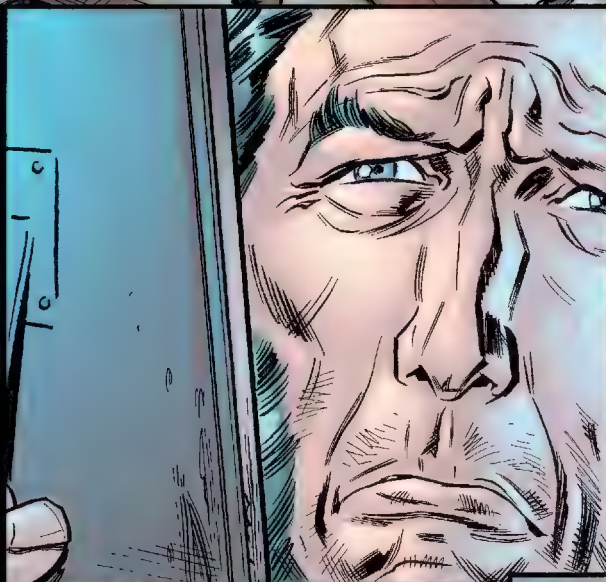
...JEANNIE.

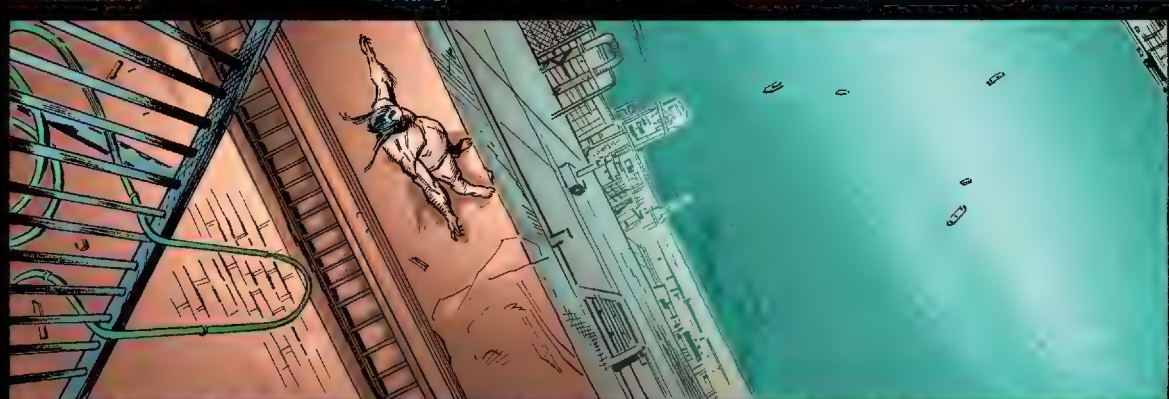
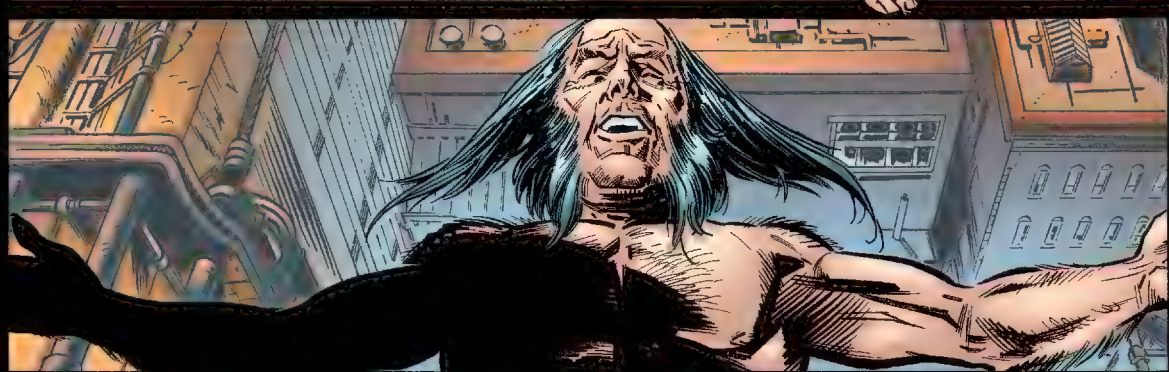
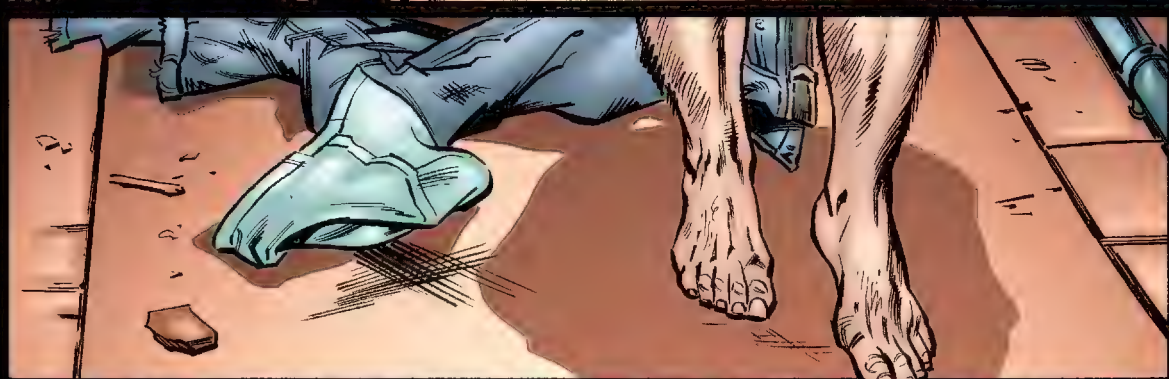
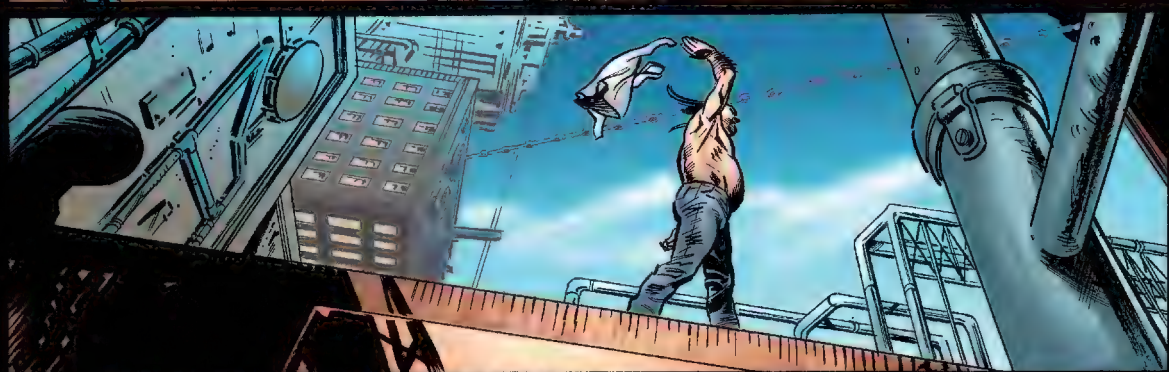
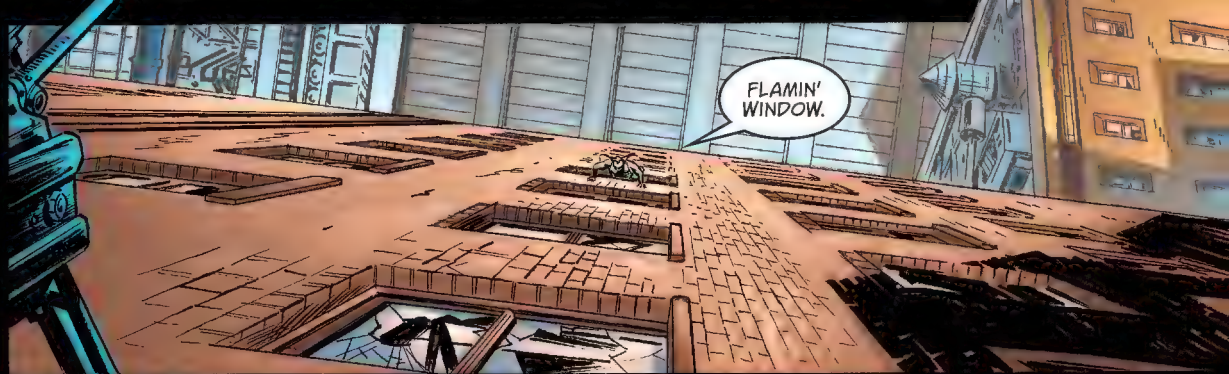


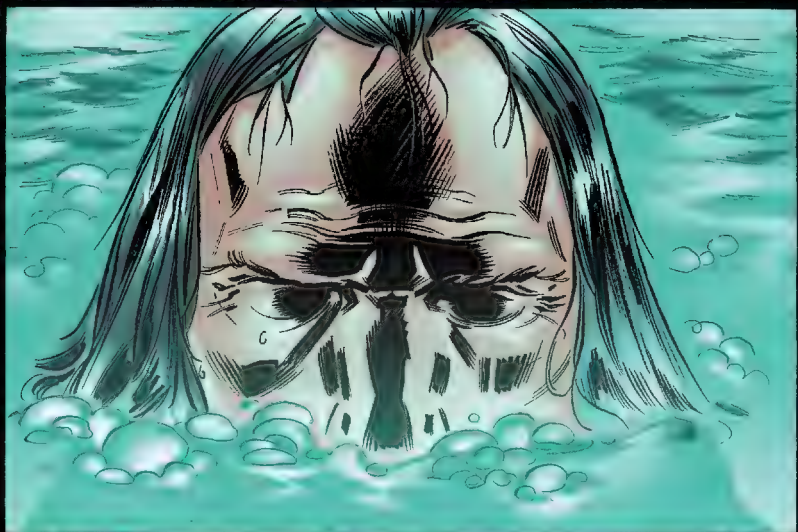
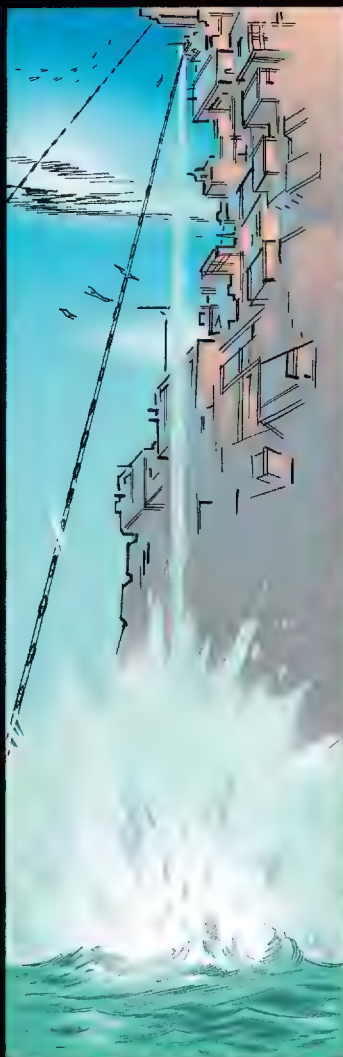
YA CAN
KEEP ON **PRETENDIN'**
TA BE A MAN...BUT FROM
THE LOOK OF THINGS, YER
ONLY BEIN' THE **WORST**
KINDA ONE.



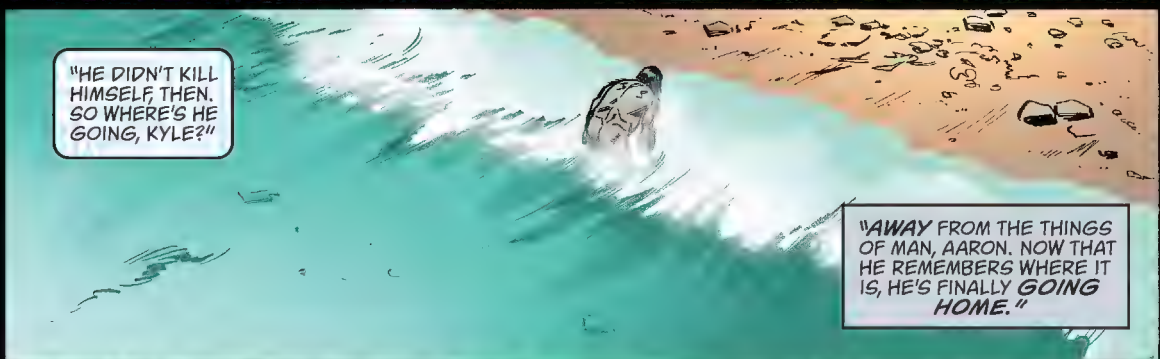
IT DOESN'T
HAVE TA BE THIS WAY.
YOU CAN BE **FREE**. BUT
IT'S UP TA **YOU** WHETHER
YA WANNA BE WHAT
YA ARE OR NOT.



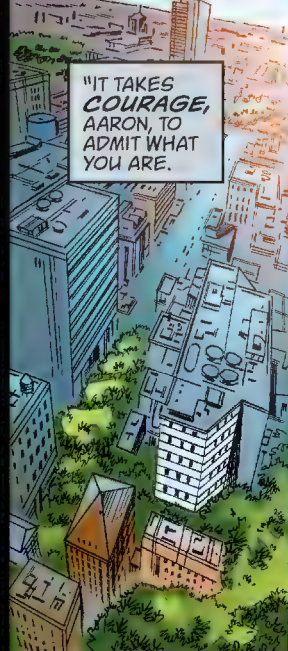




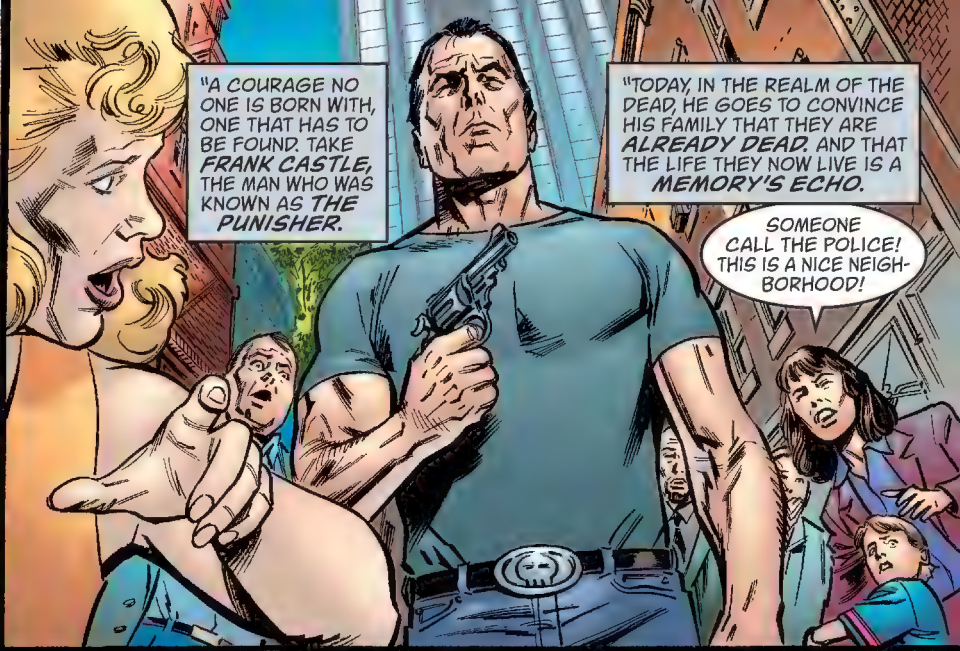
"HE DIDN'T KILL HIMSELF, THEN. SO WHERE'S HE GOING, KYLE?"



"AWAY FROM THE THINGS OF MAN, AARON. NOW THAT HE REMEMBERS WHERE IT IS, HE'S FINALLY GOING HOME."



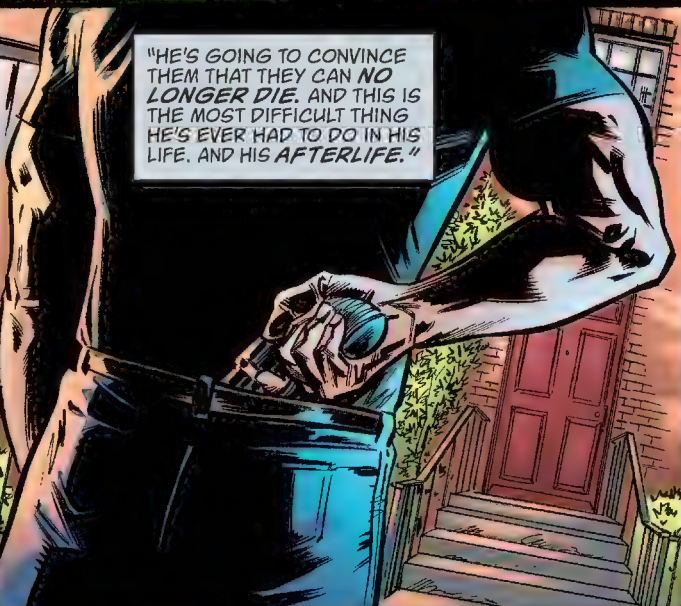
"IT TAKES **COURAGE**, AARON, TO ADMIT WHAT YOU ARE."



"A COURAGE NO ONE IS BORN WITH, ONE THAT HAS TO BE FOUND. TAKE **FRANK CASTLE**, THE MAN WHO WAS KNOWN AS **THE PUNISHER**."

"TODAY, IN THE REALM OF THE DEAD, HE GOES TO CONVINCE HIS FAMILY THAT THEY ARE **ALREADY DEAD**. AND THAT THE LIFE THEY NOW LIVE IS A **MEMORY'S ECHO**."

SOMEONE CALL THE POLICE! THIS IS A NICE NEIGHBORHOOD!

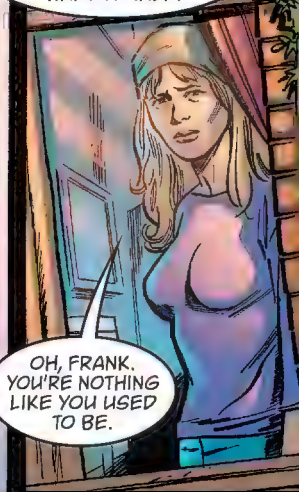


"HE'S GOING TO CONVINCE THEM THAT THEY CAN **NO LONGER DIE**. AND THIS IS THE MOST DIFFICULT THING HE'S EVER HAD TO DO IN HIS LIFE. AND HIS **AFTERLIFE**."

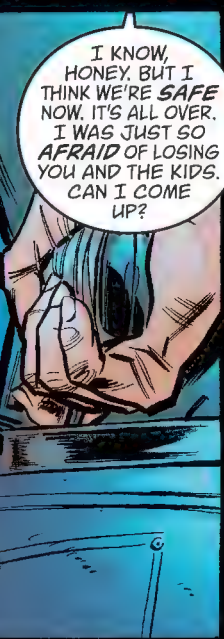


HONEY? IT'S ME.

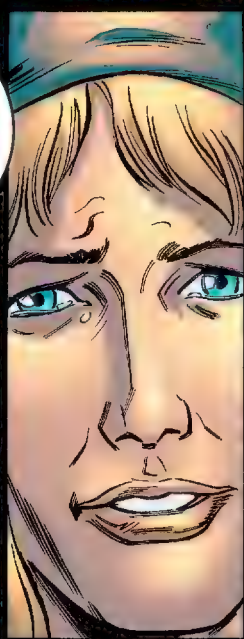
I'VE JUST COME TO TALK. THAT'S OKAY, RIGHT? **TALK**. I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT YOU DON'T WANT TO TALK.



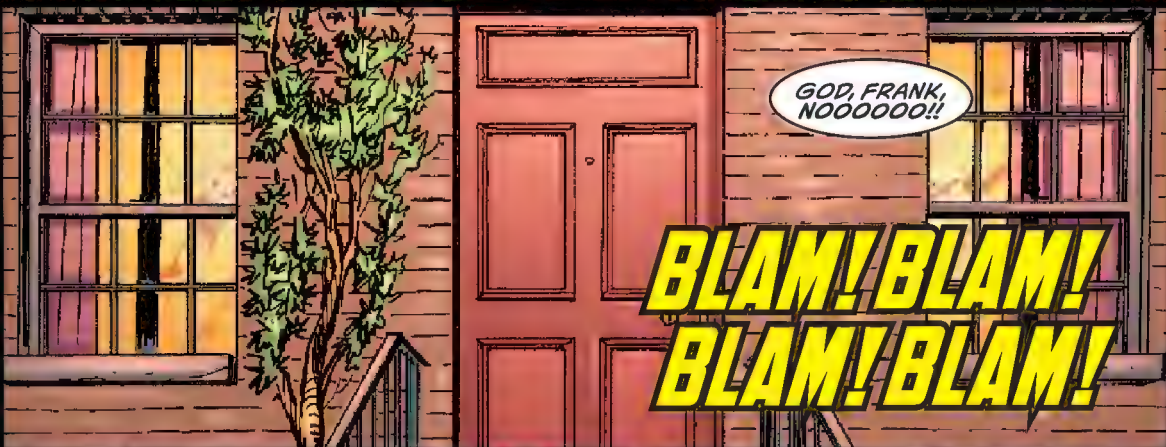
OH, FRANK. YOU'RE NOTHING LIKE YOU USED TO BE.



I KNOW, HONEY. BUT I THINK WE'RE **SAFE** NOW. IT'S ALL OVER. I WAS JUST SO **AFRAID** OF LOSING YOU AND THE KIDS. CAN I COME UP?



GOD HELP ME TO DO WHAT I **MUST**.



"THAT WAS **TERRIBLE**, KYLE. HOW CAN YOU EVEN TELL ME THINGS LIKE THAT?"

"BECAUSE DEATH ISN'T WHAT WE EXPECT. AND NEITHER IS **LIFE**."

"LOOK AT LOGAN, FOR INSTANCE."

OH, MAN.

AN' THESE ARE THE PEOPLE I'VE SPENT THE BETTER PART OF MY LIFE TRYIN' TA BE LIKE.

WE'VE BEEN GETTING REPORTS ALL DAY OF PROBLEMS AT THE **BAXTER BUILDING**.

A BUNCH OF TOURISTS RAN OUT OF THERE SCREAMING ABOUT **INVADERS** THAT CAME OUT OF THE WALL.

YOU SHOULD TAKE A LOOK FOR YOURSELF, THEN.

AND THEY USED TO CALL **ME** A MENACE.

I'LL SAY IT FOR YOU, CAGE.

SWEET CHRISTMAS.

I'M NOT THE PROBLEM HERE. YOU **MUTANTS** ARE.

I GOT YER **SCENT** ALREADY, OFFICER PARKER.

BUT YOU SHOULD. IT'LL MAKE THIS A WHOLE LOT **QUICKER**.

OH-- IT'S YOU, LOGAN.

I DON'T EXPECT YOU TO PUT YOUR HANDS IN THE AIR AND TURN AROUND SLOWLY, BUNKY. YOUR KIND **NEVER** DOES.



HANDS IN THE AIR! THIS IS A STICK-UP!

OH, DAD... THAT'S SO BAD.

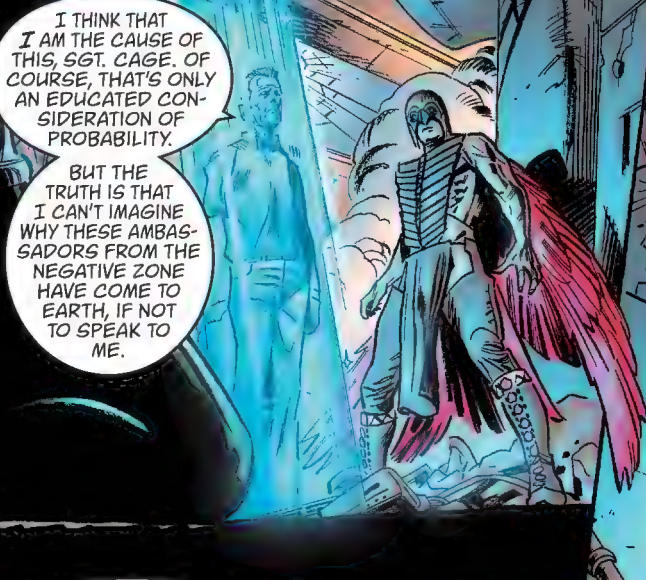
NEW YORK HAS ENOUGH PROBLEMS!

LAST THING WE NEED IS ANOTHER SKULL AFFAIR! I WANT TO KNOW NOW, WHO OR WHAT CAUSED THIS THING?

AN' THEN I WANT TO SEE YOU ALL KISS AN' MAKE UP!

YOU LEARN THIS METHOD BACK WHEN YOU WERE IN PRISON, SGT. CAGE?

SHUT UP OR YOU'RE BACK IN THE UNDERWEAR AND WE'RE SHOOTIN' AT YOU AGAIN.



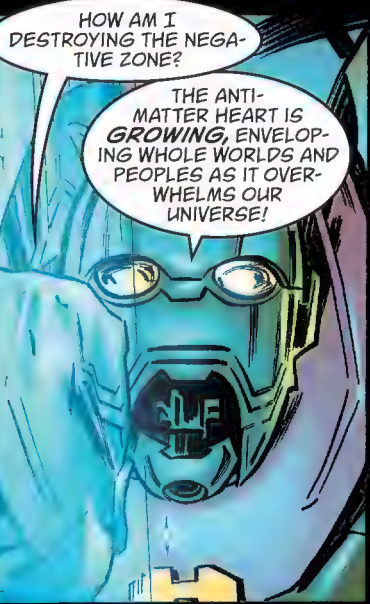
I THINK THAT I AM THE CAUSE OF THIS, SGT. CAGE. OF COURSE, THAT'S ONLY AN EDUCATED CONSIDERATION OF PROBABILITY.

BUT THE TRUTH IS THAT I CAN'T IMAGINE WHY THESE AMBAS-SADORS FROM THE NEGATIVE ZONE HAVE COME TO EARTH, IF NOT TO SPEAK TO ME.



ANNIHILUS. WHY HAVE YOU COME?

YOU **LIED** WHEN YOU SAID YOU WOULD LEAVE US ALONE, RICHARDS. YOU ARE **DESTROYING** THE NEGATIVE ZONE!



HOW AM I DESTROYING THE NEGA-TIVE ZONE?

THE ANTI-MATTER HEART IS **GROWING**, ENVELOPING WHOLE WORLDS AND PEOPLES AS IT OVER-WHELMS OUR UNIVERSE!



AND WHY HAVE YOU COME, GUARDIANS?

WE NEED YOU TO SYNTHESIZE SOMETHING LIKE THE **TERRIGEN MISTS** SO THAT WE CAN EMPOWER AN UNMUTATED HUMANITY IN THE FUTURE TO FIGHT OFF AN ALIEN INVASION FROM THE BADDOON.



DON'T LOOK AT ME, REED THEY WERE FIGHTING BEFORE I GOT HERE.



LET THEM GO, CAGE, I'LL TAKE RESPONSIBILITY.

VANCE--LEAVE YOUR SHIP HERE. X-51'S HERALDS CAN SEE TO YOUR TRANSPORTATION TO MY HOME IN LATVERIA.

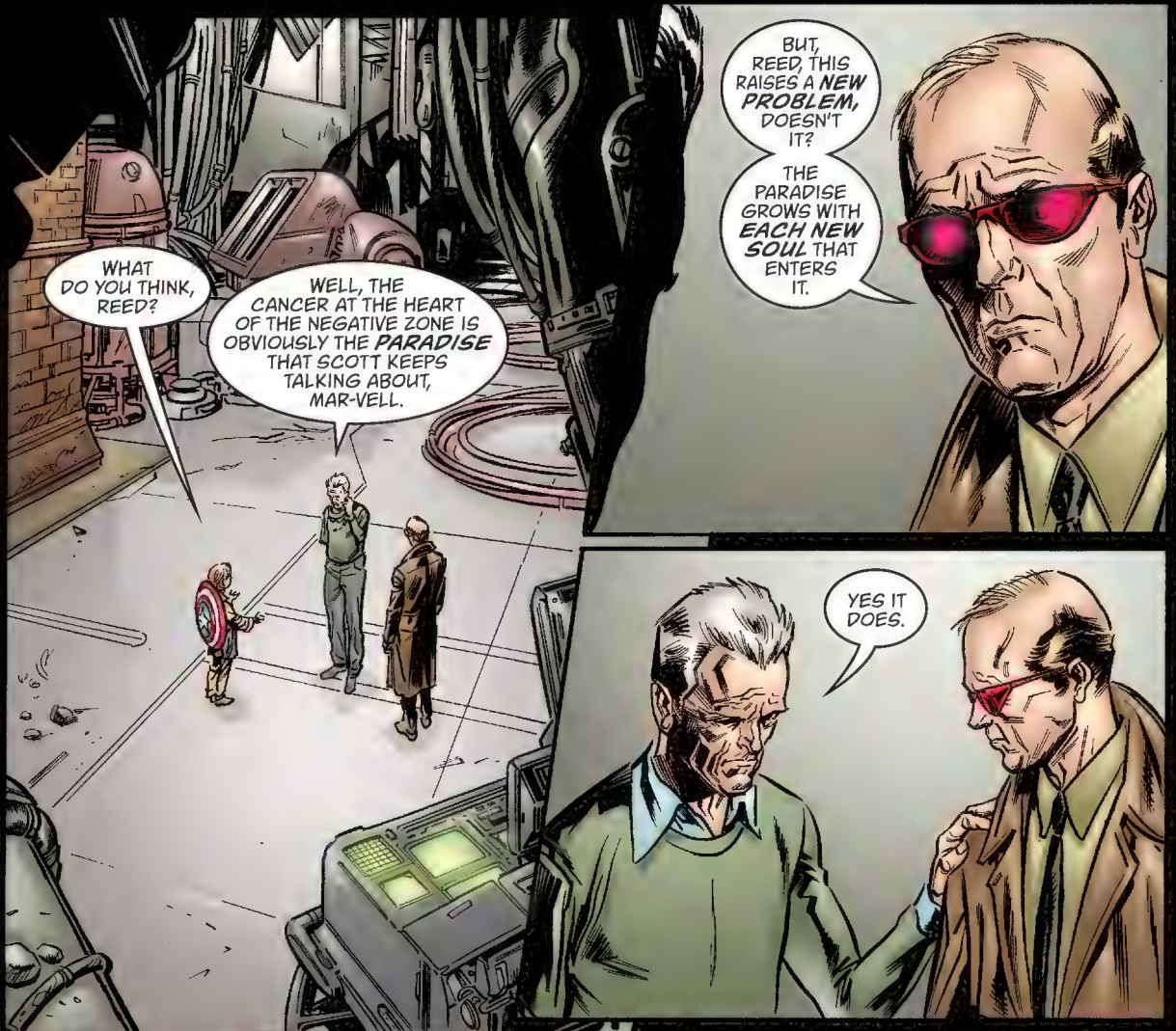
SORRY ABOUT THE TROUBLE, OFFICERS.



I DON'T HAVE A PROBLEM WITH THE DESTRUCTION, YOU UNDER-STAND...

...BUT DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW MUCH **PAPERWORK** I'M GOING TO HAVE TO FILL OUT?

AW, NUTS.



WHAT DO YOU THINK, REED?

WELL, THE CANCER AT THE HEART OF THE NEGATIVE ZONE IS OBVIOUSLY THE **PARADISE** THAT SCOTT KEEPS TALKING ABOUT, MAR-VELL.

BUT, REED, THIS RAISES A **NEW PROBLEM**, DOESN'T IT?

THE **PARADISE** GROWS WITH **EACH NEW SOUL** THAT ENTERS IT.

YES IT DOES.



WE'VE GONE TO ALL THE TROUBLE OF SYNTHESIZING A WAY TO IGNITE THE MOLECULAR BREAKDOWN FROM **JUDE, THE ENTROPIC MAN...**

...AND END THE SUFFERING OF OUR FELLOW MEN WHO SHOULD HAVE DIED.

BUT NOW, USING THIS DEVICE WILL **ADD** TO THE DESTRUCTION OF THOSE WHO MAKE THEIR HOME IN THE NEGATIVE ZONE.



HELLO,
JUDE.

YOU CAN'T
KEEP ME A PRISONER
HERE *FOREVER*, RICHARDS.
YOU *ASKED* FOR MY
RETURN.

IF YOU DON'T
FREE ME TO PASS MY
BLESSING TO HUMANITY,
YOU WILL BE *VERY, VERY*
SORRY INDEED. YOU
HAVE *MY WORD*
ON THIS.

THE WORD OF
OBSESSION.

"Death is a safety-device because, once Man has fallen, natural immortality would be the one utterly hopeless destiny for him." — C.S. Lewis

MARVEL

7

TM

PARADISE



KRUEGER

BRAITHWAITE

REINHOLD

“An impasse.”

“Is it, Aaron?”

“Of course it is, Kyle. If Reed Richards is going to end the suffering of mankind by introducing a surrogate Death to the world, it will be at the cost of the Negative Zone’s population.

“Every new soul that dies may be added to the Paradise that now exists at the heart of the Negative Zone.

“An end to mankind’s suffering adds to theirs.”

“Yes, but—”

“There are no buts, Kyle. Who’s to say how far the Paradise may expand? If it consumes the Negative Zone, what then? What’s next? Earth? And what about *after* Earth? From what you said, every soul in the universe will go there once it dies. It’s as if the living must now experience an eternity of suffering if only to protect the rest of the universe.

“It would have been better if the Celestial at the core had just been born, Kyle. It would have been better for everyone. Earth’s heroes didn’t save the planet. We wrestled with destiny, and destiny took the legs right out from under us.

“To think we ever thought Death was an enemy. God knows how we’re going to get out of this one, Kyle. God knows.”

“I think you mean, *Mar-Vell* knows, Aaron. *Mar-Vell* knows how we’re going to get out of this.”

“That’s the problem, Kyle. This is all *Mar-Vell*’s fault.”

PARADISE X

I S S U E 7

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"THIS ISN'T OVER, AARON. NOR IS YOUR WORLD ON THE EDGE OF MOLECULAR ENTROPY. **REMEMBER** THAT.

"**TWICE** IN RECENT MEMORY, ALL SEEMED HOPELESS... BUT THERE IS TIME, AARON. DON'T FORGET WHAT YOU'VE ALREADY BEEN SAVED FROM.

"WE NOW KNOW THAT THERE EXIST **ENEMIES** OF THE CELESTIALS. GALACTUS...THE ELDERS OF THE UNIVERSE..."

"...THE CELESTIAL MANIPULATION OF MANKIND HAS LED TO A SHIFT IN THE COSMIC BALANCE OF POWER, A **SHIFT** THE ELDERS ARE NOW TRYING TO TAKE **ADVANTAGE** OF."

"TRUE, KYLE, BUT IT'S NOT LIKE THE ELDERS ARE OUR **FRIENDS** OR ANYTHING.

"THEY JUST WANT TO BREAK US DOWN INTO THE BRICKS THEY NEED TO CREATE THEIR ORIGINAL UNIVERSE...THE ONE THAT EXISTED **BEFORE** OUR OWN.

"THEY'RE **PLAYING DICE** WITH US, KYLE. LOOK AT **MEPHISTO**..."

"...HE'S JUST LIKE THE **REST** OF US. BUT OUR FEAR--MAYBE EVEN A FEAR INSPIRED BY THE HORROR OF THE **CELESTIALS**--CHANGED HIM INTO THE FATHER OF LIES, THE CREATOR OF THE MULTIVERSE."

"**'FATHER OF LIES,'** AARON? THAT'S ALMOST FUNNY...BUT HE IS A FATHER, OF SORTS.

"MEPHISTO WAS MERELY THE CELESTIALS' **FIRST ATTEMPT** AT MANIPULATING MANKIND. BEFORE THE DEVIANTS, BEFORE THE ETERNALS, BEFORE LAYING DORMANT SEEDS WITHIN PRIMITIVE MANKIND, THERE WAS MEPHISTO.

"WHEN THE FIRST **TIME TRAVELLER**, EMPOWERED BY THE ENIGMA FORCE, TRAVELED WITH HIS 'ARK' OF ALIEN RACES TO EARTH FROM THE FAR FUTURE, THEY ARRIVED TO FACE THESE EARLY REJECTIONS OF THE CELESTIALS.

"**'PRINCE WAYFINDER** AND HIS CREW CREATED A POCKET REALITY TO ESCAPE INTO AND ESTABLISHED THE REALM OF **SUB-ATOMICA**."

"WHY WERE THE DEMONS REJECTED?"

"BECAUSE, AARON, THEY WERE TOO MUCH LIKE **THIRD-TIER MUTATIONS**...TOO QUICKLY SHAPED BY PRIMITIVE MAN.

"THE CELESTIALS CHOSE TO ALTER THEIR MANIPULATIONS BY CREATING A RACE THAT WOULD SHAPE EARLY HUMANITY'S SUPERSTITIONS, AS OPPOSED TO BEING SHAPED FROM THEM."

"SO MEPHISTO WAS THE CELESTIALS' **MISTAKE**?"

"EXACTLY, AARON. AND THUS DID GOD **REJECT** THE DEVIL.

"A DEVIL THAT NEEDED JUST A LITTLE **INSPIRATION** TO BECOME ALL THAT HE COULD.

"MEPHISTO FOUND THAT INSPIRATION IN **PRINCE WAYFINDER**."

"A **DIFFERENT SEED** WAS PLANTED THAT DAY... ONE THAT GREW OUT OF THE KNOWLEDGE THAT **TIME** MIGHT BE TRAVELED UPON LIKE A **RIVER**."

"AND THAT THERE WERE **WORLDS WITHIN WORLDS** THAT ONE COULD CREATE AND ESCAPE INTO, GIVEN THE POSSIBILITY."

"BUT HUMAN HISTORY IS A *LONG TIME* TO WAIT FOR THE DISCOVERY OF TIME TRAVEL TO BE MADE, AARON."

"MEPHISTO WANTED POWER, AND FOUND HIS FIRST REAL OPPORTUNITY IN A SMALL *NORSE VILLAGE*."

"YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT THE RACE OF *ALIENS* THAT WERE THIRD-TIER MUTATIONS FROM THEIR OWN WORLDS, RIGHT? YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT THE CREATION OF *THOR* AND *ASGARD*?"

"YES. MEPHISTO HELPED A YOUNG STORYTELLER, A MAN WHO EXPERIENCED REJECTION DUE TO A LAME LEG, TO FORM THESE ALIENS ACCORDING TO HIS *FAVORITE MYTHS*."

"LATER, MEPHISTO MANIPULATED *DOCTOR DOOM* INTO BELIEVING HE HAD THE KNOWLEDGE TO CREATE A *TIME MACHINE*..."

"...BUT IN REALITY, IT WAS ALWAYS *DOOM'S* INVENTION, ALWAYS *DOOM'S* BRILLIANCE. MEPHISTO JUST TOOK *CREDIT* FOR IT."

"BUT YOU TOLD ME THAT *DOOM* WAS CURSED TO BE *SUCCESSFUL*, *KYLE*. ISN'T THAT THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH HIS MOTHER *SOLD HIS SOUL*?"

"YES, AARON. BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN HE WOULDN'T HAVE BECOME A *GREAT MAN* ANYWAY. MEPHISTO TOOK ADVANTAGE OF HIS MOTHER'S FEAR, THAT'S ALL."

"AS HE TOOK ADVANTAGE OF *ALL* OUR FEARS AND WEAKNESSES."

"AS HE *ALWAYS* DOES."

"DID MEPHISTO LEARN THESE FEARS THROUGH TIME TRAVEL, THROUGH REPEATED EXPERIENCE?"

"WEREN'T YOU LISTENING, AARON? HE'S NOT MEPHISTO BECAUSE HE *IS*, BUT BECAUSE OF *HOW WE SEE HIM*."

"THAT'S WHY HELL IS THE PLACE OF *COWARDS*, AARON. OUR *FEARS* GIVE HIM *FORM*. WE *ARMOR* HIM IN THEM. HE KNOWS HOW TO STRIKE AT US, BECAUSE WE HAVE CREATED A *'HIM'* TO DO SO."

"THAT'S WHY HE'S STILL MEPHISTO... EVEN IN LIGHT OF WHAT HAPPENED IN DEATH'S REALM, WE STILL *BELIEVE* IN HIM."

"WE FEAR OUR OWN MORTALITY AND BLAME MEPHISTO FOR IT, SO HE BECOMES A SORT OF *FATHER OF DEATH*."

"AND BECAUSE HE IS MOVED BY *OUR* FEARS AND NOT HIS OWN, HE FORGETS HOW *FIGURATIVE* SUCH A STATEMENT REALLY IS."

"BUT THOSE SAME FEARS THAT HAVE GIVEN HIM STRENGTH LOOK FORWARD WITH FAITH TO A DAY WHEN HE WILL BE *JUDGED*."

"YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT HIS ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE JUDGMENT...BY MAKING LINEAR TIME AN ENDLESS CYCLE OF *ALTERNATE REALITIES*, RIGHT?"

"CAN IT *END*? CAN TIME BECOME *LINEAR* AGAIN?"

"IT *CAN*, AARON. BUT ONLY IF THE CYCLE IS *BROKEN*. AND THAT'S WHY MEPHISTO IS NOW ATTEMPTING TO RENDER ALL OF US INCAPABLE OF ACTION."

"BUT EITHER DEAD OR UNABLE TO STOP HIM, IT *DOESN'T MATTER*."

"THAT'S WHY THE *HOSPITALS* ARE FULL OF ALL THE SUFFERING PEOPLE."

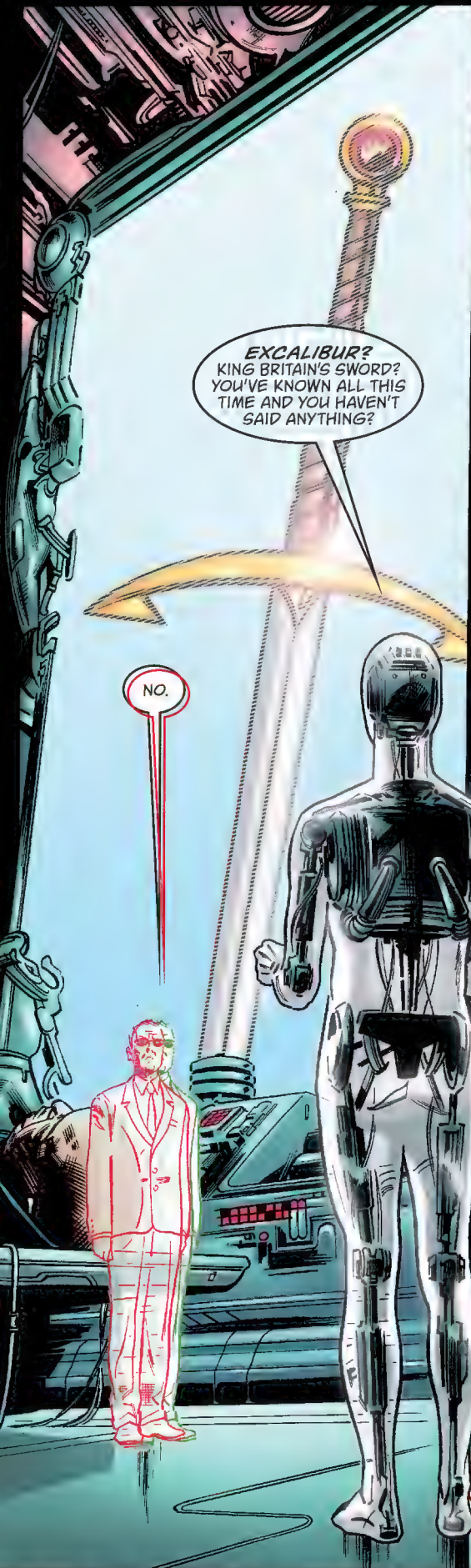
"*KNOWLEDGE* IS THE ONLY WEAPON TO FIGHT A FATHER OF LIES, AARON. IT PIERCES THE LIES LIKE A--"

"*SWORD*? WHAT HAPPENED TO THE *SWORD PRINCE WAYFINDER* BROUGHT BACK IN TIME, *KYLE*? IT EXISTED BEFORE MEPHISTO GAINED ANY REAL POWER..."

"...SO SURELY THAT *SWORD* COULD MAKE MEPHISTO SEE THE *TRUTH*. WAS IT LOST IN THE DESTRUCTION OF SUB-ATOMICA?"

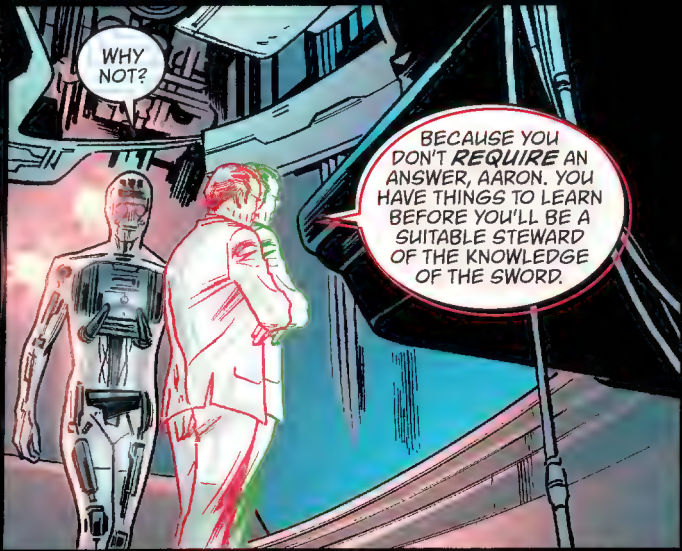
"NO, AARON. IT'S ON *EARTH* NOW...BUT YOU KNOW IT BY A DIFFERENT NAME..."

"...*EXCALIBUR*."



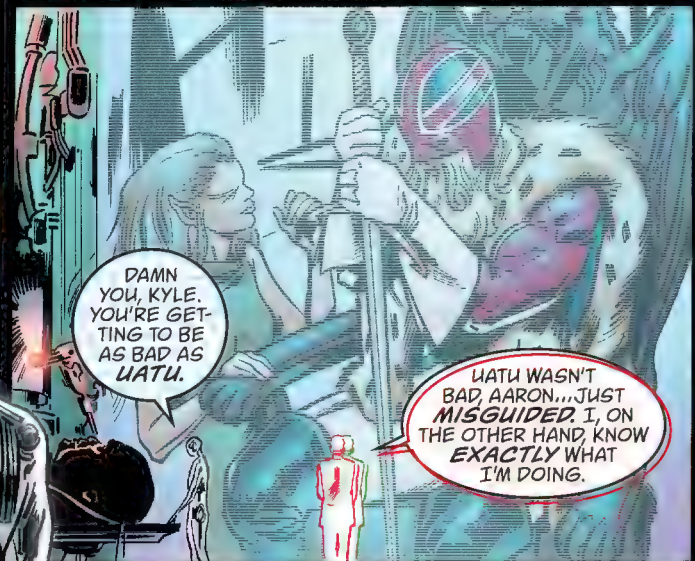
EXCALIBUR?
KING BRITAIN'S SWORD?
YOU'VE KNOWN ALL THIS
TIME AND YOU HAVEN'T
SAID ANYTHING?

NO.



WHY
NOT?

BECAUSE YOU
DON'T **REQUIRE** AN
ANSWER, AARON. YOU
HAVE THINGS TO LEARN
BEFORE YOU'LL BE A
SUITABLE STEWARD OF
THE KNOWLEDGE
OF THE SWORD.



DAMN
YOU, KYLE.
YOU'RE GET-
TING TO BE
AS BAD AS
UATU.

UATU WASN'T
BAD, AARON...JUST
MISGUIDED. I, ON
THE OTHER HAND, KNOW
EXACTLY WHAT
I'M DOING.

YOU'LL KNOW
WHAT TO DO, AARON, WHEN
THE **TIME COMES**. YOU'LL
KNOW WHEN TO TAKE THIS
KNOWLEDGE TO **BRIAN
BRADDOCK**.

YOU'LL
KNOW
BECAUSE IT
WILL SEEM
LIKE IT'S
**TOO
LATE**.

I MUST
GO NOW.





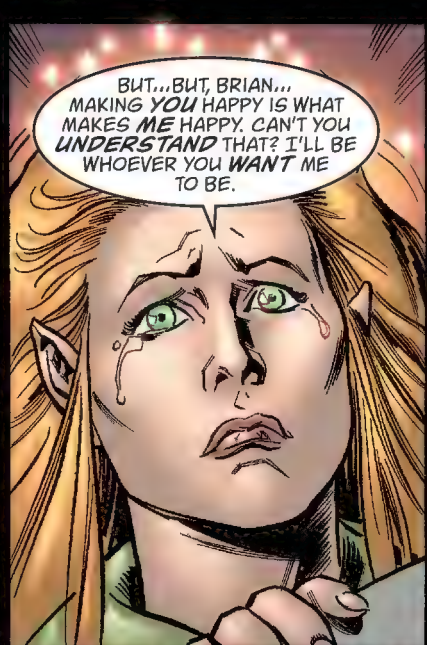
I'M SORRY, BRIAN... I DIDN'T PLAN ON RUINING YOUR **WEDDING NIGHT**.



I DON'T UNDERSTAND IT, MEGGAN... I'VE BEEN BRINGING **GRAY GAR-GOYLES** BACK FROM ALTERNATE REALITIES FOR YEARS.

IT NEVER WORKED BEFORE...

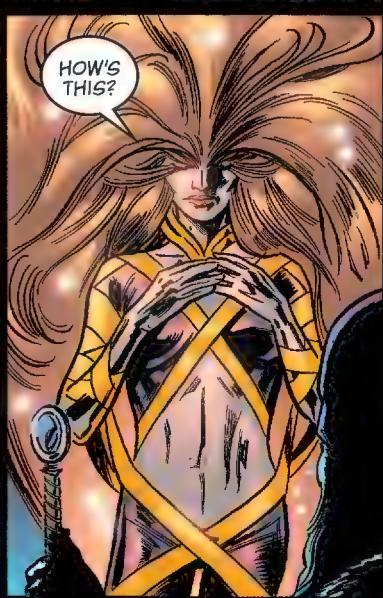
AND, MEGGAN... YOU DON'T HAVE TO LOOK THAT WAY JUST TO **PLEASE ME**. A QUEEN HAS TO MAKE DECISIONS OF **HER OWN**.



BUT... BUT, BRIAN... MAKING **YOU** HAPPY IS WHAT MAKES **ME** HAPPY. CAN'T YOU **UNDERSTAND** THAT? I'LL BE WHOEVER YOU **WANT ME** TO BE.



MEGGAN... MEDUSA AND I ARE **MORE** THAN JUST HUSBAND AND WIFE... I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND HOW **IMPORTANT** BEING KING AND QUEEN OF THE WORLD WAS... IT'S JUST THAT...



HOW'S THIS?



STOP IT! STOP IT, YOU **LITTLE FOOL!**

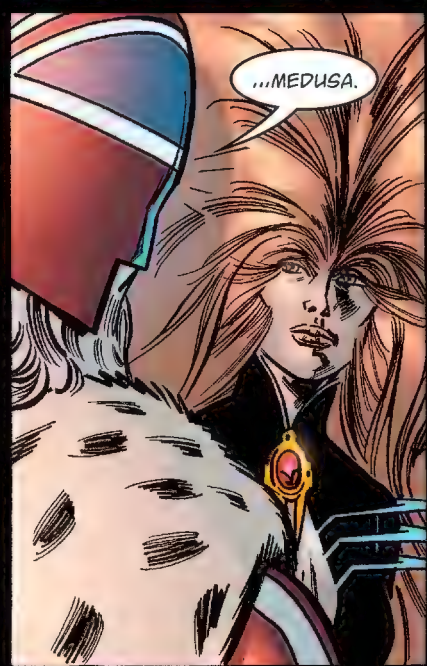


B-BRIAN?! HOW COULD--? I'M SORRY I EVER CAME BACK!

MEGGAN... COME BACK...



I'M NOT ASKING YOU TO BE...

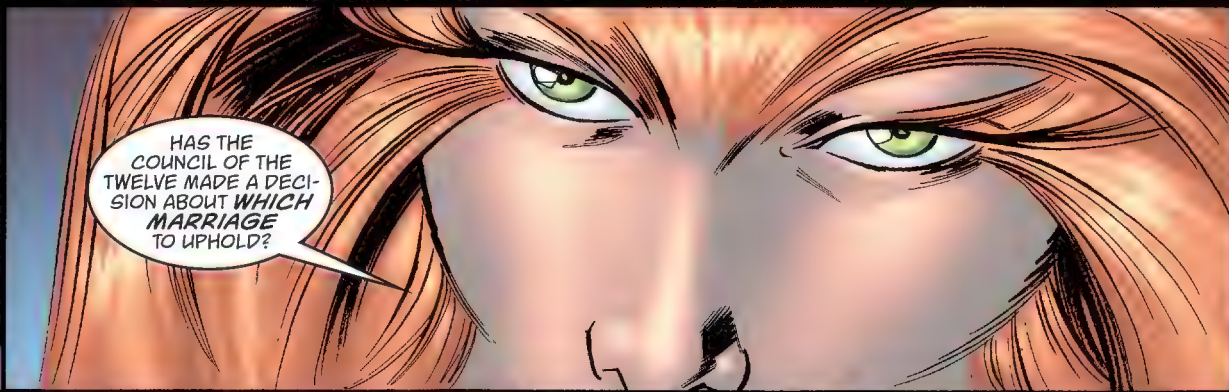


...MEDUSA.



I'M
SORRY,
BRI--KING
BRITAIN...

BRIAN.



HAS THE
COUNCIL OF THE
TWELVE MADE A DECISION ABOUT WHICH
MARRIAGE
TO UPHOLD?



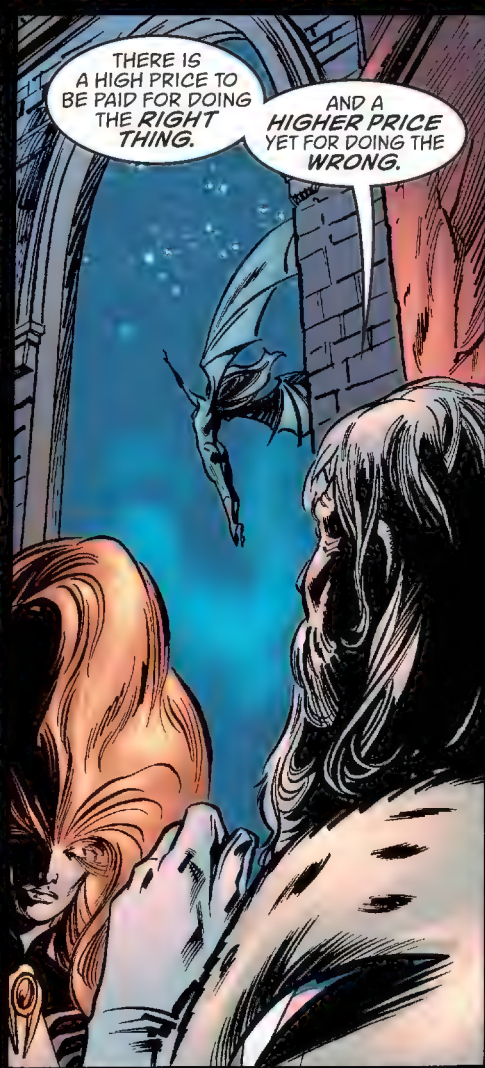
NO,
THEY'VE LEFT
IT FOR **ME** TO
DECIDE.

THEY
PRESENTED
THEIR DECISION AS
IF IT WERE SOMETHING
I SHOULD BE
GRATEFUL
FOR.



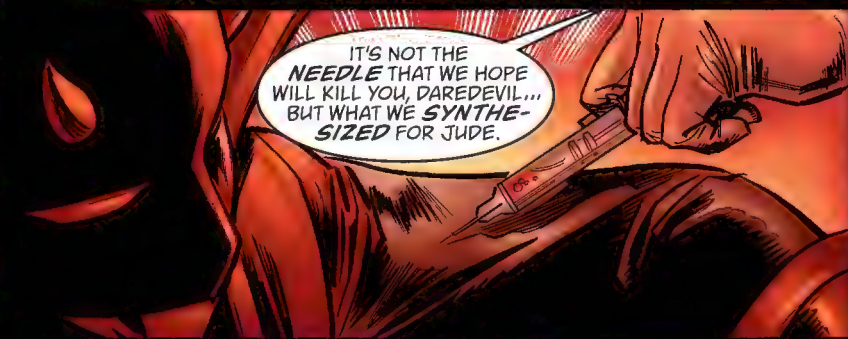
AND
HAVE YOU
DECIDED?

NOT
YET.



THERE IS
A HIGH PRICE TO
BE PAID FOR DOING
THE **RIGHT**
THING.

AND A
HIGHER PRICE
YET FOR DOING THE
WRONG.





OH! IT'S HORRIBLE, REED...

I'M NEXT!



ENJOY YOUR VICTORY, RICHARDS...

...BUT WHAT MAKES YOU THINK YOUR DECISIONS ABOUT WHO LIVES OR WHO IS BLESSED WITH MY TOUCH WILL BE BETTER THAN MINE?



I'M SORRY WE HAD TO MAKE YOU A PRISONER, JUDE... I REALLY AM. BUT YOU'RE A **FORCE OF NATURE**, AND I COULDN'T LEAVE YOU **FREE** TO KILL EVERYONE ON EARTH.

I HOPE YOU CAN FORGIVE ME. BUT YOU'RE **HELPING** OUR PEOPLE, AND FOR THAT I **THANK YOU**.

AND ONLY THOSE WHO **SHOULD** BE DEAD WILL FIND A RESPITE FROM THEIR SUFFERING.

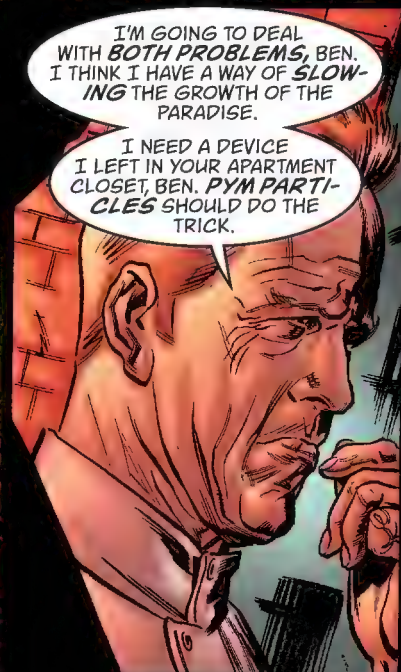


NOW, I HAVE TO FOCUS ON HELPING **ANNIHILUS**.



BUT I THOUGHT YA **DIDN'T WANT** TO ADD TA THE PROBLEMS OF THE GROWIN' PARADISE, REED?

I THOUGHT YA WEREN'T GONNA USE THE SYNTH...THE SYNTH...THE **DEAD JUICE** ON ANYBODY AND ADD TA THE GROWTH OF SOULS IN THE **NEGATIVE ZONE**?



I'M GOING TO DEAL WITH **BOTH PROBLEMS**, BEN. I THINK I HAVE A WAY OF **SLOWING** THE GROWTH OF THE PARADISE.

I NEED A DEVICE I LEFT IN YOUR APARTMENT CLOSET, BEN. **PYM PARTICLES** SHOULD DO THE TRICK.



THAT AND AN ARMY.

DO YOU HAVE ENOUGH FOR THE TRIP, **WYATT**?







I DON'T KNOW
WHAT YOU'RE TALKING
ABOUT, STRANGER!

THE **LONGER**
YOU BELIEVE SOMETHING
ABOUT YOURSELF, THE **HARDER**
IT IS TO ESCAPE THAT CONCLU-
SION. WHY ARE YOU LETTING
THEM **GO ON** LIKE
THIS?



WHEN ARE YOU
GOING TO HELP THEM
ESCAPE WHAT THEY
ARE?

WHEN DO YOU
FREE THEM FROM THIS
DAMNED REALM OF **IN-
BETWEEN**? OR DON'T
YOU **WANT** TO?



THANOS...

LISTEN TO ME,
CAPTAIN AMERICA.
YOU'RE **ENJOYING**
VISITING THEM,
AREN'T YOU?

YOU'RE NOT
TRYING TO **FREE**
YOUR PARENTS LIKE
THE OTHERS. YOU WANT
THEM FOR **YOUR-
SELF**. ADMIT
IT.

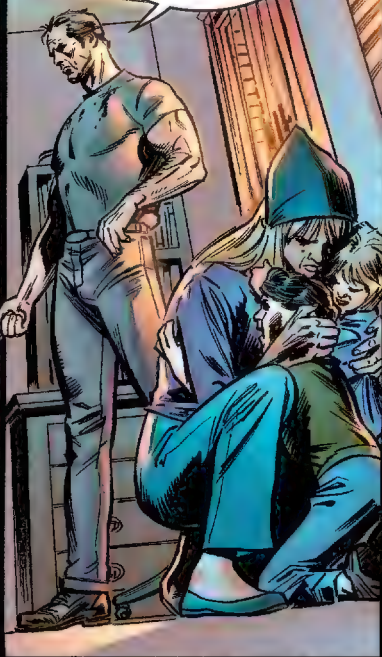
YOU'RE NOT
TREATING THEM
LIKE THE **OTHERS**
YOU'RE ATTEMPT-
ING TO TAKE TO
PARADISE.

I KNOW
WHAT YOU TOLD
FRANK CASTLE.
I KNOW WHAT YOU
TOLD THE **PUNISHER**
TO DO TO HIS
FAMILY...



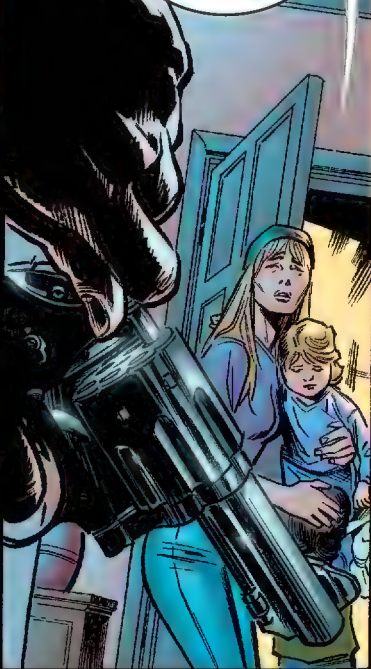
I BECAME
EVERYTHING YOU
HATE. WHAT'S IT
GOING TO TAKE?

DO I
REALLY HAVE
TO **SHOOT** YOU
TO PROVE
IT?



CHILDREN...
CHILDREN, NOW.

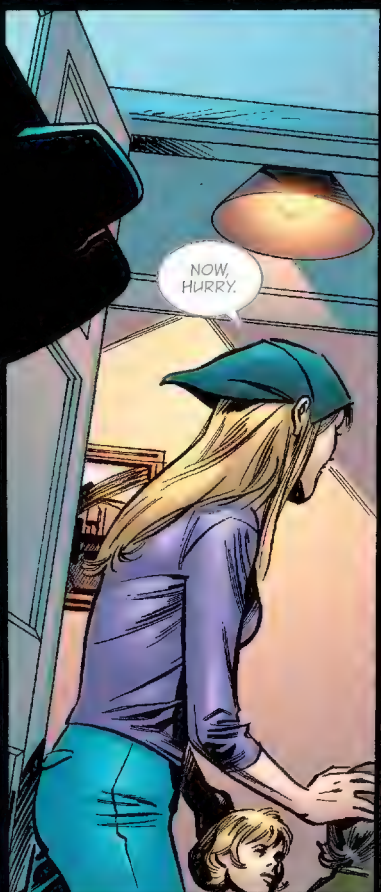
CAN YOU
FORGIVE ME IN
DEATH FOR NOT
KNOWING HOW
TO **LIVE** IN
LIFE?



I WAS
A **MONSTER**...
NOT A FATHER, NOT
A HUSBAND.



NOW,
HURRY.



IT WAS
LIKE I NEVER
EVEN KNEW
YOU...



...LIKE
YOU WERE
NEVER HERE
AT ALL.





WHY DID YOU HAVE TO LEAVE, KYLE?

NOW I HAVE NO WAY OF KNOWING WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE REALM OF THE DEAD.



LOOKS LIKE WE'RE STUCK WITH EACH OTHER, UATU.

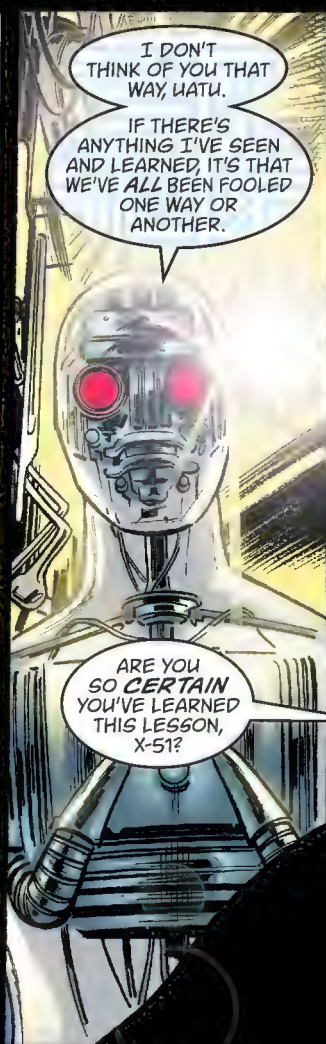
KYLE WAS *WRONG* ABOUT YOU, WASN'T HE? YOU'RE NOT DYING. NOT WITH *DEATH* DEAD...

...YOU'RE JUST *SUFFERING* LIKE THE REST OF HUMANITY. IN A WAY I CAN ONLY *HOPE* FOR.



HOW *HAPPY* YOU MUST BE, X-51, TO SEE YOUR OLD ENEMY SO *HUMBLER*.

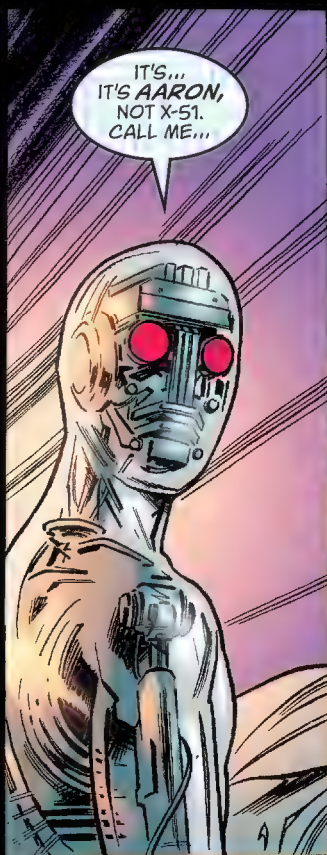
HOW *SATISFIED* YOU MUST BE TO *WATCH* ME.



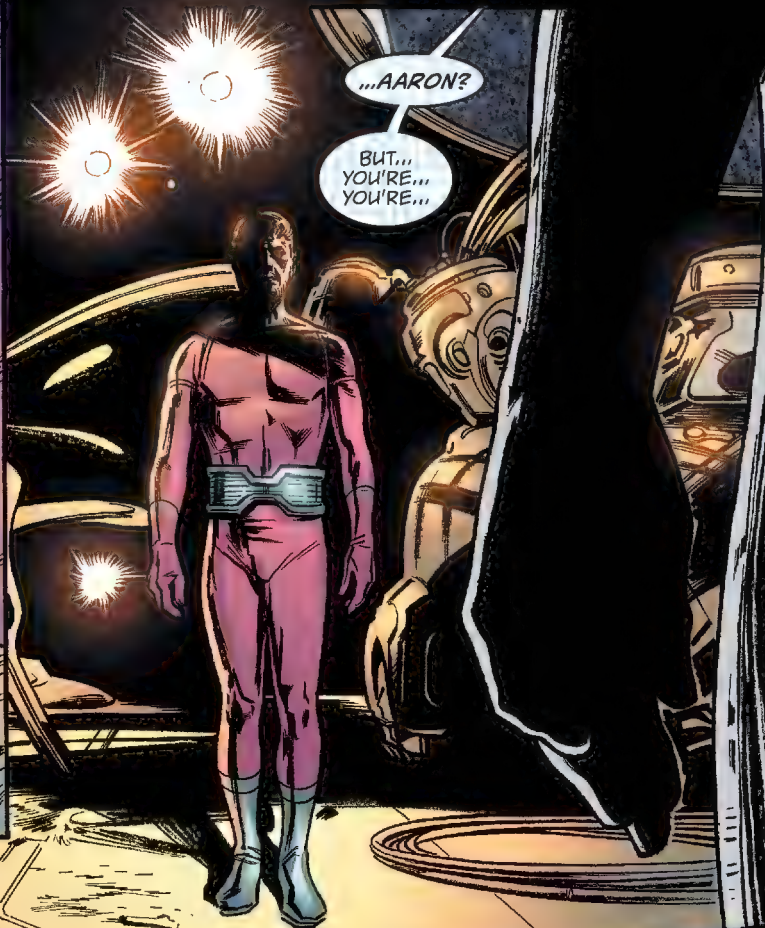
I DON'T THINK OF YOU THAT WAY, UATU.

IF THERE'S ANYTHING I'VE SEEN AND LEARNED, IT'S THAT WE'VE *ALL* BEEN FOOLED ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.

ARE YOU SO *CERTAIN* YOU'VE LEARNED THIS LESSON, X-51?

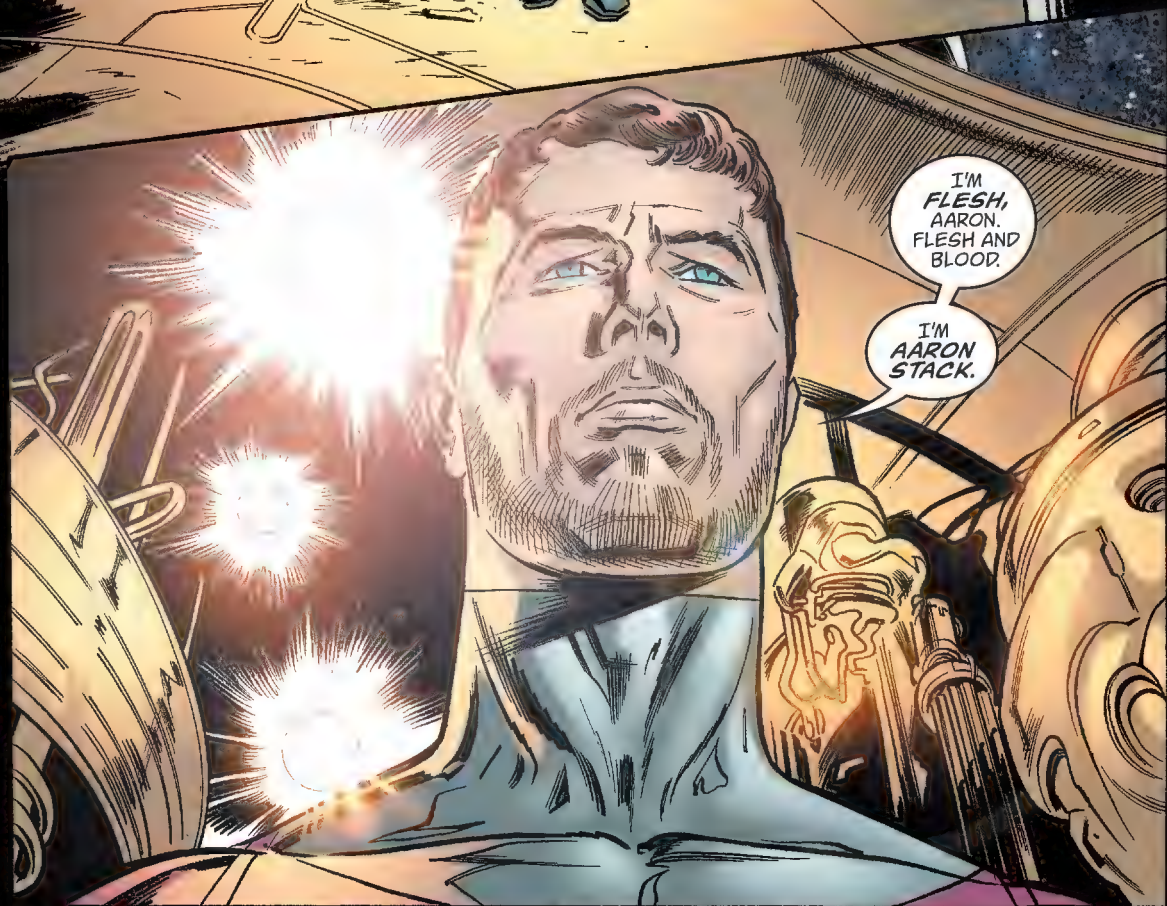


IT'S...
IT'S AARON,
NOT X-51.
CALL ME...



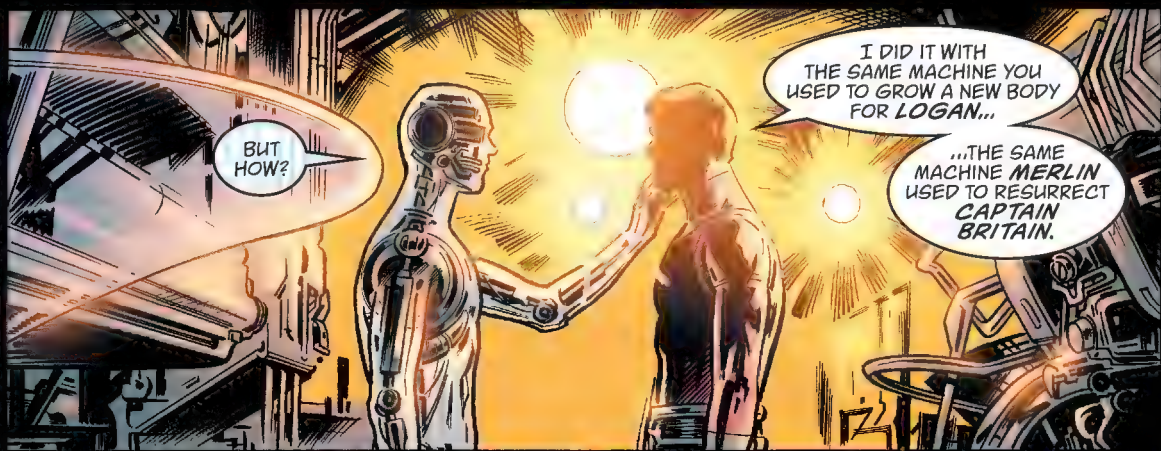
...AARON?

BUT...
YOU'RE...
YOU'RE...



I'M
FLESH,
AARON.
FLESH AND
BLOOD.

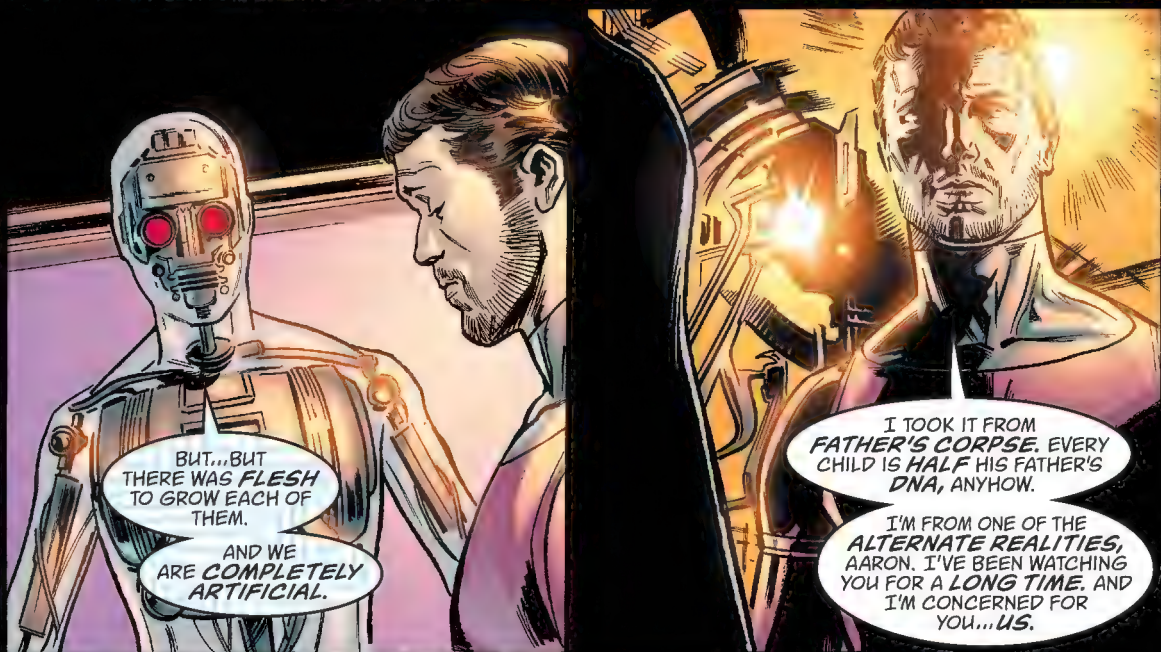
I'M
AARON
STACK.



BUT
HOW?

I DID IT WITH
THE SAME MACHINE YOU
USED TO GROW A NEW BODY
FOR **LOGAN**...

...THE SAME
MACHINE **MERLIN**
USED TO RESURRECT
**CAPTAIN
BRITAIN**.

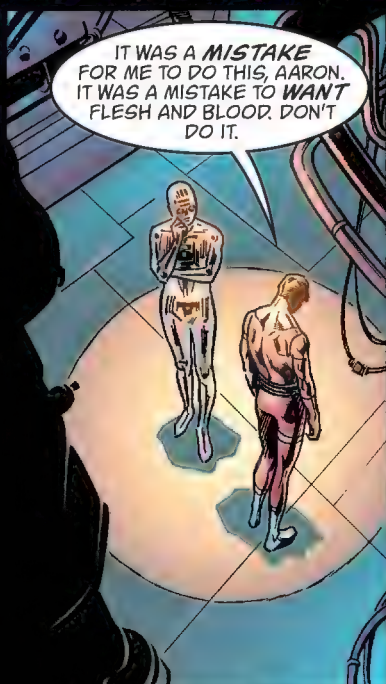


BUT...BUT
THERE WAS **FLESH**
TO GROW EACH OF
THEM.

AND WE
ARE **COMPLETELY
ARTIFICIAL**.

I TOOK IT FROM
FATHER'S CORPSE. EVERY
CHILD IS **HALF** HIS FATHER'S
DNA, ANYHOW.

I'M FROM ONE OF THE
ALTERNATE REALITIES,
AARON. I'VE BEEN WATCHING
YOU FOR A **LONG TIME**. AND
I'M CONCERNED FOR
YOU...**US**.



IT WAS A **MISTAKE**
FOR ME TO DO THIS, AARON.
IT WAS A MISTAKE TO **WANT**
FLESH AND BLOOD. DON'T
DO IT.

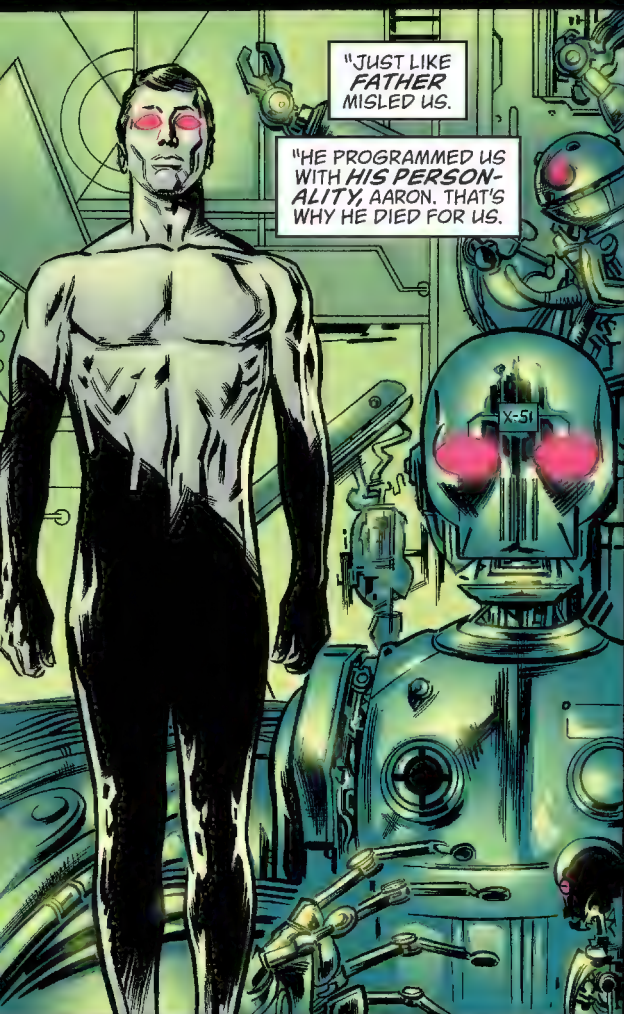


WHAT DO YOU
MEAN? IT MUST BE
AMAZING. I COULD DO
THE SAME THING SO
EASILY. I COULD **LIVE**.
I COULD BE
HUMAN.

NO. IT DOESN'T
FEEL **ANY DIFFERENT**.
I NOW DREAM OF THE FLESH
BEING **PULLED** FROM ME...
INSTEAD OF HAVING AN
ARTIFICIAL FACE.

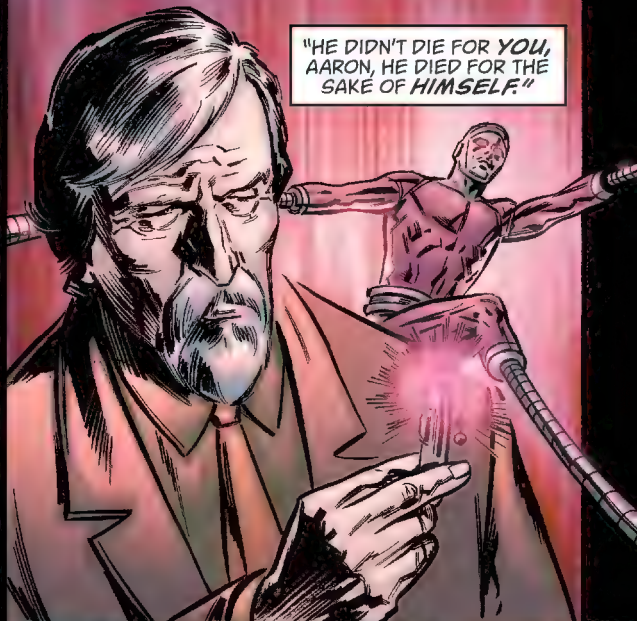


AND I FEEL I
HAVE **ENDANGERED**
MY REALITY AS A RESULT
OF CLOTHING MYSELF IN
WEAKNESS. I TRUSTED
IN FLESH TO SAVE ME,
AND HAVE BEEN
MISLED.



"JUST LIKE
FATHER
MISLED US.

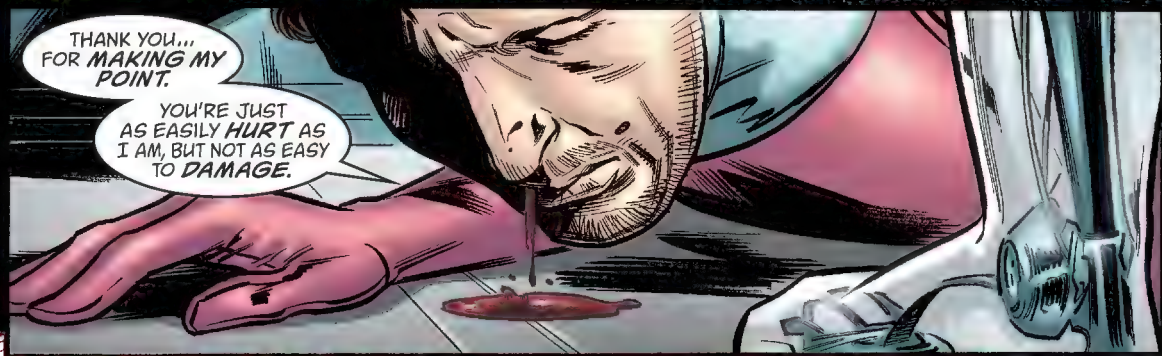
"HE PROGRAMMED US
WITH *HIS PERSON-
ALITY*, AARON. THAT'S
WHY HE DIED FOR US.



"HE DIDN'T DIE FOR *YOU*,
AARON, HE DIED FOR THE
SAKE OF *HIMSELF*."

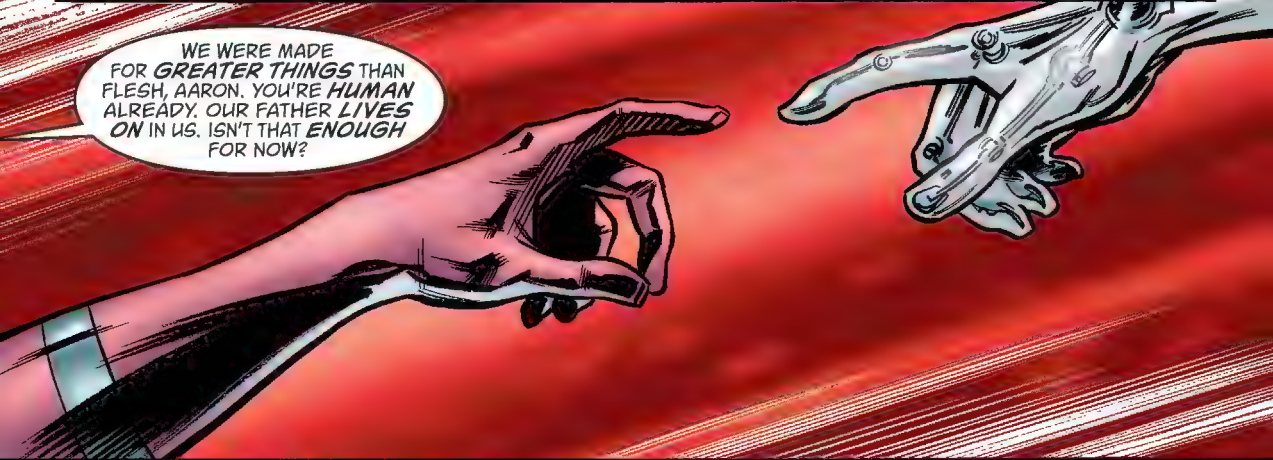


"YOU
LIE! HE
DIED FOR
ME!"



"THANK YOU...
FOR MAKING MY
POINT.

"YOU'RE JUST
AS EASILY *HURT* AS
I AM, BUT NOT AS EASY
TO *DAMAGE*."



"WE WERE MADE
FOR *GREATER THINGS* THAN
FLESH, AARON. YOU'RE *HUMAN*
ALREADY. OUR FATHER *LIVES*
ON IN US. ISN'T THAT *ENOUGH*
FOR NOW?"

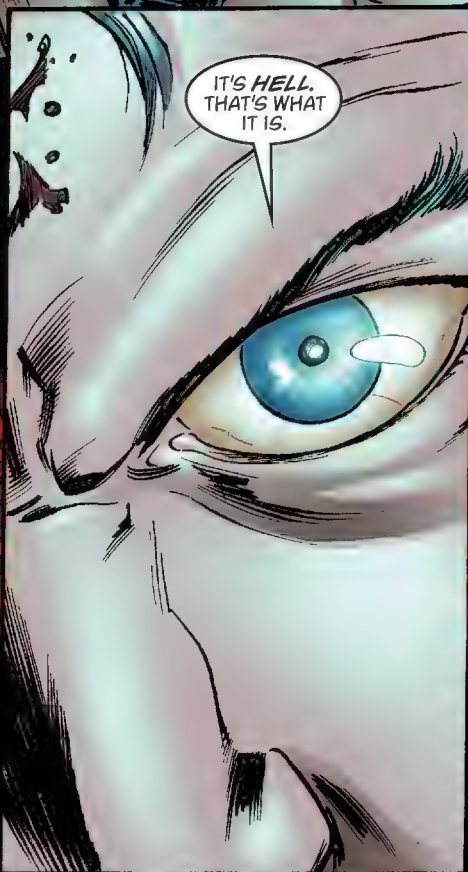


THIS PLACE
ISN'T THE CITY SWEET-
HEART...IT'S A PLACE I
REMEMBER FROM
THE 'NAM.



THE CAPTAIN
CALLS IT THE REALM
OF THE DEAD.

BUT THAT'S
JUST A POLITE
PHRASE WE USE
WITH CIVILIANS.

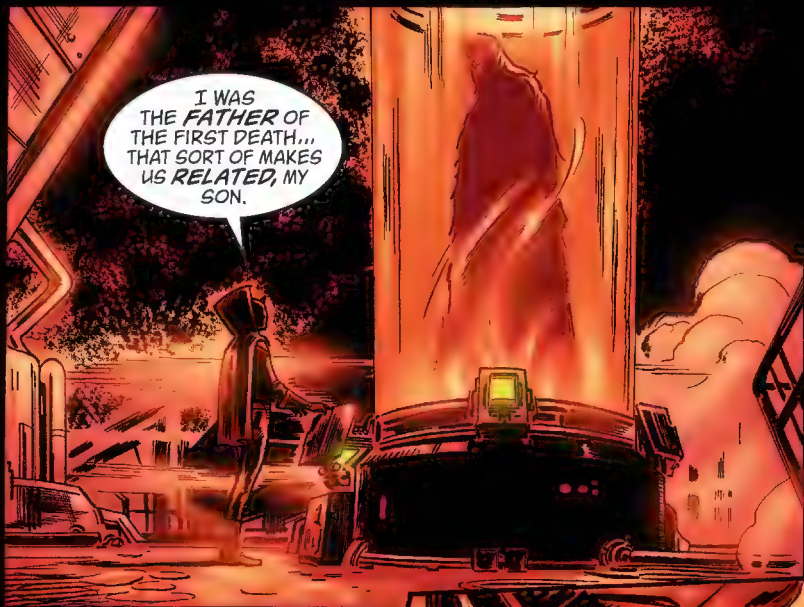


IT'S HELL.
THAT'S WHAT
IT IS.





"IT IS *TIME*
NOW, MY
FRIEND, FOR
YOU TO *BE*
FREE."

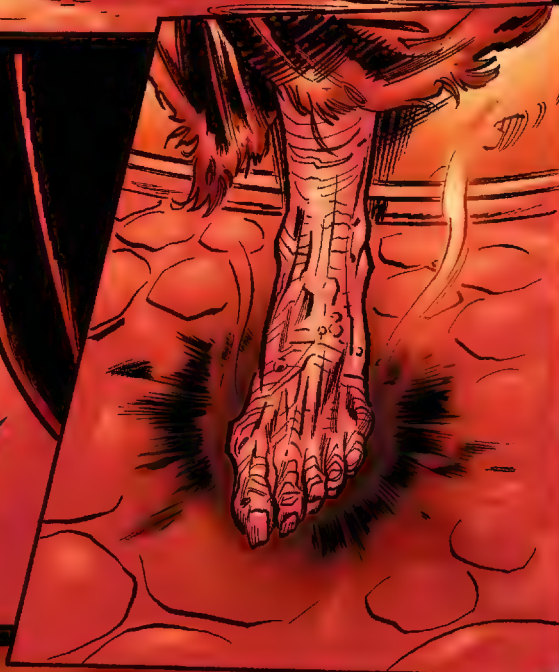


I WAS
THE *FATHER* OF
THE FIRST DEATH...
THAT SORT OF MAKES
US *RELATED*, MY
SON.



REMEMBER
WHAT REED TOLD YOU,
JUDE. YOU MUST *EASE*
THE *SUFFERING* OF
EVERYONE WHO SHOULD
BE DEAD ALREADY...

...EVERYONE
WHO SHOULD ALREADY
BE IN *DEATH'S*
REALM.

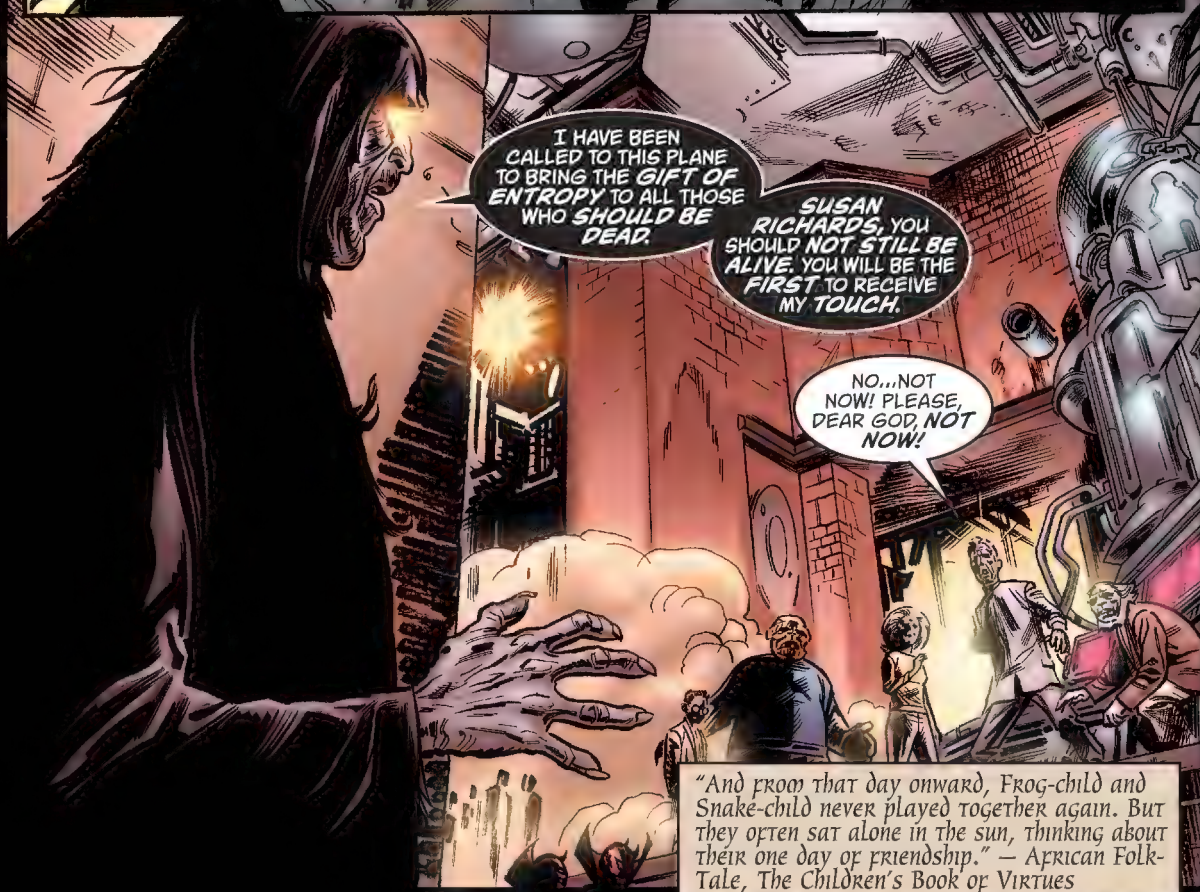
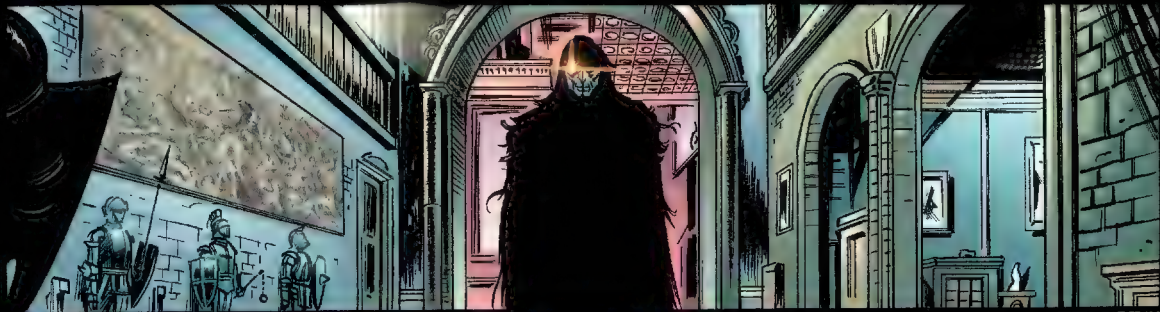


END THIS
CHARADE, MEPHISTO.
AND STAY OUT OF
MY WAY!

SO VILE A
BEING AS YOURSELF
IS *UNWORTHY* OF THE
BLESSING I BRING.



WHATEVER
YOU SAY...



I HAVE BEEN CALLED TO THIS PLANE TO BRING THE GIFT OF ENTROPY TO ALL THOSE WHO SHOULD BE DEAD.

SUSAN RICHARDS, YOU SHOULD NOT STILL BE ALIVE. YOU WILL BE THE FIRST TO RECEIVE MY TOUCH.

NO...NOT NOW! PLEASE, DEAR GOD, NOT NOW!

"And from that day onward, Frog-child and Snake-child never played together again. But they often sat alone in the sun, thinking about their one day of friendship." — African Folk-Tale, The Children's Book of Virtues

MARVEL

8

TM

PARADISE



KRUEGER
BRAITHWAITE
REINHOLD

"Kyle?"

"Kyle? I know you are no longer in the Watcher's citadel. But I know you can hear me. If even a machine can cry, I suppose, too, that we can have faith of one sort or another.

"I am trusting that if you indeed know everything, you can hear my words right now. I have no idea where you are. I see no evidence of you on Earth. I know, compared to you, that the Watcher's surveillance equipment is very limited.

"I miss talking with you. I miss having a friend. Uatu seems almost comatose now, apart from moments here and there when he breaks the silence of this citadel with faint whimpers. He reminds me of yet another problem now that no one can die anymore...we have to live with ourselves and everything we've done before. We have to live with our shame forever.

"And perhaps that is why I have been thinking about the mutations, Kyle...about the separate tiers. They don't exist, do they, Kyle? Wherever you are, you know this, don't you?"

"Uatu suggested three tiers of mutation, but even he never guessed the real truth, did he? There was a learning curve to our mutations...that is why they needed someone like the Skull to control a mutated humanity.

"It wasn't to control our wills alone. It was to stabilize our forms, as well."

PARADISE X

I S S U E 8

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"HENRY PYM WAS THE FIRST OF HIS GENERATION TO TASTE THE POWER OF THAT TERRIBLE SEED PLANTED WITHIN HIM...THE FIRST TO EXPERIENCE THE WEIGHT AND GLORY OF WHAT THE CELESTIALS HAD DONE TO MANKIND."

"DESPISED AND RIDICULED BY HIS SCIENTIFIC CONTEMPORARIES, PYM STUMBLED UPON THE SECRET OF THE CELESTIAL PURPOSE LIKE ALL TRUE MEN OF SCIENCE--BY ACCIDENT."

"I SEE NOW, KYLE. DO YOU KNOW THAT? I SEE WHAT HAS HAPPENED. I SEE WHAT WE WERE MEANT TO BE. THE CELESTIALS DIDN'T JUST WANT OUR LIVES...THEY WANTED EVERYTHING."

"PYM NAMED HIS DISCOVERY AFTER HIMSELF, BUT THE SUBSTANCE HE HAD ISOLATED WAS SOMETHING OLDER STILL."

"AN ENZYME FOUND WITHIN THE HUMAN BODY THAT AFFECTED ONE'S **MASS** AND **DIMENSIONS**. IT SEEMED THE SECRET TO GROWTH HAD BECOME HIS."

"BUT THE TRUTH WAS PYM HAD FOUND SOMETHING ALTOGETHER **UNHUMAN**. HE DISCOVERED THE EVIDENCE OF THE CELESTIALS' FIRST COMINGS TO EARTH... THEIR FIRST TAMPERINGS WITH WHAT WOULD ONE DAY BECOME THE **DOMINANT LIFE FORM**."

"PYM **ISOLATED** THE CELESTIAL SEED PLACED IN ALL OF MANKIND."

"BUT AT THE MOMENT HE USED HIS DISCOVERY UPON HIMSELF, HIS NOTIONS AND DESIRES FOR HEROISM OVERWHELMED AND **BURIED** ALL THAT IT MIGHT HAVE SUGGESTED FOR THE FUTURE OF MANKIND."

"ANT-MAN. GIANT-MAN. GOLIATH. YELLOW-JACKET. THEY WERE ALL JUST MASKS, FALSE IDENTITIES...SELF-IMPOSED MASKS FOR THE **POWER** HE'D REALLY FOUND."

"WERE PYM ALIVE TODAY, PERHAPS HIS FINDINGS COULD REACH THE **SUCCESS** OF RESTORING MANKIND'S HUMANITY IN A WAY THAT REED RICHARDS' OWN HAD NOT."

"WERE PYM ALIVE TODAY, PERHAPS HIS DESIRES TO ESCAPE HIS OWN PERSONAL SMALLNESS IN THE EYES OF HIS PEERS WOULD HAVE LED HIM TO BECOME A **LARGER THINKER** THAN EVEN REED RICHARDS. PERHAPS **SO MUCH** MIGHT HAVE CHANGED."

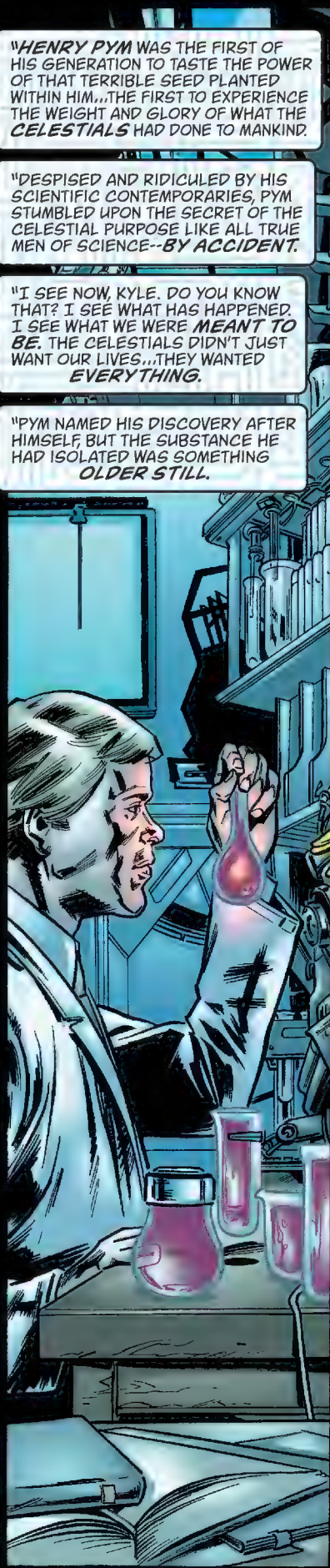
"THE **SMALLEST** MIGHT HAVE BEEN THE **GREATEST**. PERHAPS."

"BUT THAT GOD COMPLEX, THAT NEED TO PROVE HIMSELF, PUSHED PYM IN **OTHER DIRECTIONS**."

"THE IRONY IS THAT THE MUTAGENIC SEEDS THE CELESTIALS PLACED IN MANKIND MADE **GODS** OF ALL HUMANITY."

"AND PYM'S FIRST CREATION AS A GOD WAS TO MAKE A **MONSTER**."

"AND LIKE MARY SHELLEY'S CREATION, THIS FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER WOULD **KILL** PYM AND ALL THOSE HE CARED FOR...INCLUDING THE TEAM OF WHICH HE WAS A FOUNDER--**THE AVENGERS**."





"BUT THAT'S HOW IT IS WITH **ALL** OF US, ISN'T IT? THAT'S THE **NATURE** OF THE MUTATION...THERE AREN'T ANY TIERS, AT ALL.

"THERE IS A **LEARNING CURVE** THAT LEADS TO THE THREE STAGES OF UNDERSTANDING.

"AT FIRST, WE TRY TO **UNDERSTAND** WHAT HAS HAPPENED. **PETER PARKER** IS BITTEN BY A **SPIDER**, SO OF COURSE, HE EXHIBITS **SPIDER-LIKE POWERS**.

"**BRUCE BANNER** CREATES A **BOMB** AND THEREFORE BECOMES ONE **HIMSELF**.

"**JOHNNY STORM**, WHOSE COMIC-BOOK INTERESTS IN HEROES WOULD LATER LEAD TO THE DISCOVERY AND REINTRODUCTION OF THE **SUB-MARINER** TO THE WORLD, HAS HIS HIDDEN WISHES FULFILLED AND BECOMES YET ANOTHER HERO OF HIS YOUTH, THE **HUMAN TORCH**.

"STORM'S SISTER **SUSAN**, WHOSE OWN SELF-IMAGE IS BEING OVERWHELMED BY HER FIANCE'S IGNORING HER AND TAKING HER FOR GRANTED, BECOMES AN **INVISIBLE WOMAN**.

"**BEN GRIMM**, A GIFTED AND SEASONED PILOT, FEELS **STUPID** AND **UGLY** COMPARED TO REED RICHARDS. FEELS **BRUTISH** EVEN WHEN SUSAN STORM'S AFFECTIONS GROW TOWARDS RICHARDS. SO OF COURSE, HE BECOMES A **THING**.

"AND **RICHARDS**, WHO PRIDES HIMSELF ON HIS FLEXIBILITY IN THINKING, HIS ABILITY TO REROUTE HIS LOGIC IN MOMENTS, BECOMES EVEN MORE **FLEXIBLE**, EVEN MORE **BRILLIANT**.



"IT DIDN'T EVEN TAKE **RADIOACTIVITY** IN SOME CASES TO TRIGGER THE SEED, DID IT, KYLE?

"SOMETIMES IT WAS **FEAR** ITSELF. THE KIND OF FEAR THAT MAKES A YOUNG PERSON, NO MATTER HOW POPULAR OR ATTRACTIVE, FEEL AS IF THEY ARE AN **OUTCAST** AND A **FAILURE** WHEN THEY ENTER PUBERTY.

"OR PERHAPS THIS WAS COUPLED WITH A FEAR OF RADIOACTIVITY...OF COURSE, THAT'S WHY THIS PARTICULAR GENERATION MUTATED AS OPPOSED TO ALL OTHERS. THEY GREW UP WITH THE FEAR OF **WORLD ANNIHILATION**.

"THEY GREW UP IN THE SHADOW OF **NUCLEAR ARMAGEDDON**.



"WE SAW EACH OTHER AS **ENEMIES** AND FOUGHT SAD AND STUPID **WARS** AGAINST EACH OTHER...ALL THE TIME **NURTURING** THE SEED THE CELESTIALS PLANTED WITHIN MANKIND.

"WE SAW EACH OTHER AS **LESS THAN HUMAN**, AND THAT IS WHAT WE BECAME.

"WE WERE **THIRD-TIERS** ALL THE TIME...WE'VE JUST BEEN DEFINING EACH OTHER ACCORDING TO OUR FEARS.

"THE MUTATIONS WERE NEVER A STEP FORWARD, KYLE...

"...THEY WERE A **STEP BACK**."

"THE QUESTION IS, DO I **TELL** REED RICHARDS? DO I TELL HIM THAT WE'VE ALL BEEN FORMED BY EACH OTHER'S ATTITUDES AND FEARS?"

"DO I TELL HIM THAT HIS KNOWLEDGE WOULD BE **LESS** IF HE KNEW THE **TRUTH**?"

"AND WHAT DIFFERENCE WOULD IT MAKE TO **JUDE**?"



JUDE'S **FREE**?
HOW COULD THIS HAVE
HAPPENED?

REED? I STILL
HAVE THE HAND-HELD
FORCE-FIELD YOU
MADE FOR ME.

IT WON'T **LAST**
LONG ENOUGH, SUSAN
DARLING. IT HARDLY HELD
JUDE BEFORE. I NEED
THE OTHER ONE.



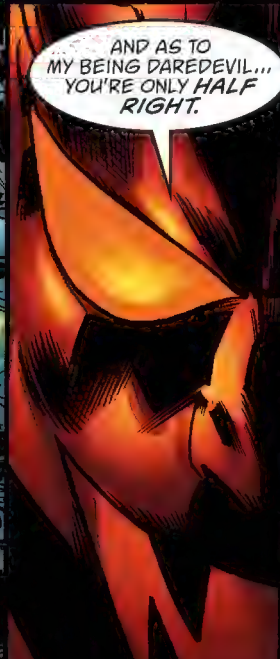
IT'S IN
HERE...

DAREDEVIL?
WHAT ARE YOU
DOING?

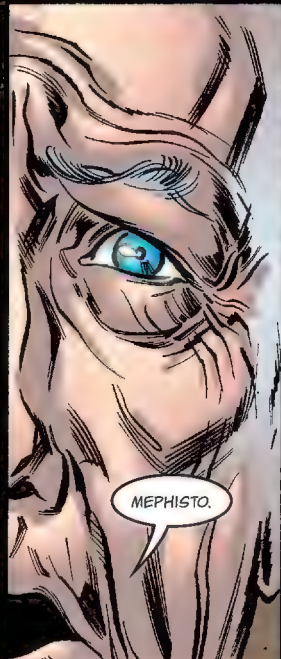


WHAT I AM
DOING, RICHARDS,
IS **DISMANTLING** YOUR
ABILITY TO CONTROL
THIS FORCE OF
NATURE.

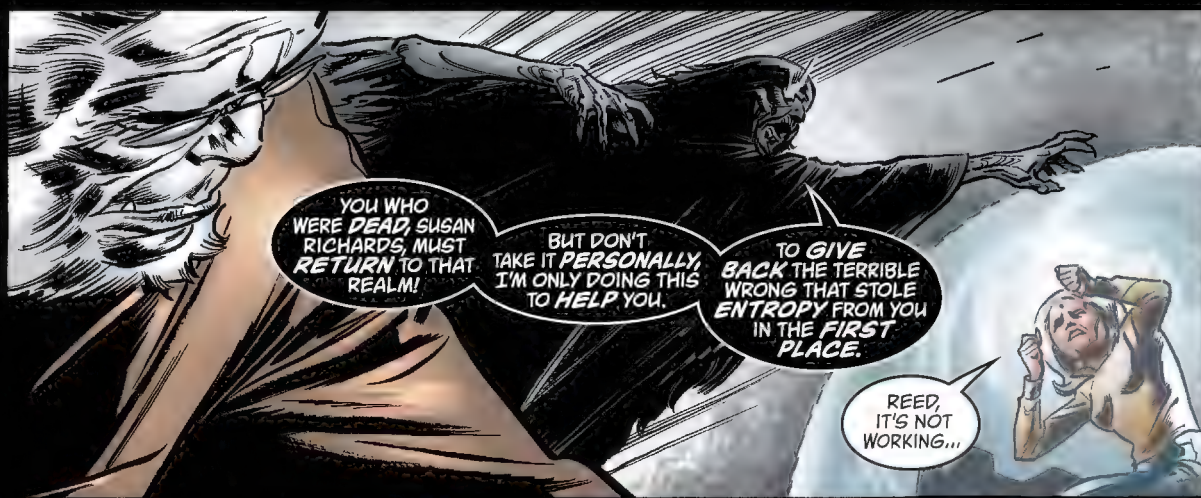
BEINGS
LIKE JUDE AND
MYSELF SHOULD
BE **FREE** OF
HUMAN
CONTROL.



AND AS TO
MY BEING DAREDEVIL...
YOU'RE ONLY **HALF**
RIGHT.



MEPHISTO.







WE'RE ALL
DEAD HERE,
ROGERS! AND
YOU WANT TO
REVISIT
IT!

I WON'T
LET YOU DO WHAT
YOU'RE PLANNING,
ROGERS!

I WON'T
LET YOU **USE**
THE BOY!

THE
BOY?
I WOULD
NEVER...

LIAR!

I WON'T LET
YOU USE THE **SKULL**
TO FORCE EVERYONE
IN THIS REALM TOWARD
MASS SUICIDE JUST
TO TAKE THEM OVER
TO **MAR-VELL'S**
PARADISE!



IS *THAT*
WHAT YOU THINK
I'M DOING?



IT'S WHAT
YOU'RE *THINKING*,
AMERICA.



I WANT
MY *PAST* BACK.
AND MAYBE *THEY*
DO, TOO. HAVE YOU
EVER THOUGHT
OF *THAT*?



I...I
WOULDN'T...
I...

LIAR... I
MIGHT HAVE
BEEN A *PRINCE*!
I STILL MIGHT
BE--

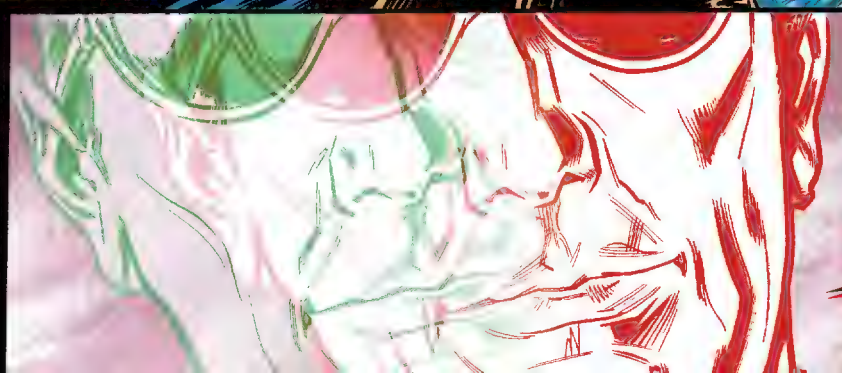


AND
YOU, CAPTAIN,
MIGHT YET BE
A *KING*.



KYLE?

A
KING? NO KINGS,
KYLE...I BELIEVE IN
DEMOCRACY.



THE TRUTH IS,
STEVE ROGERS, THAT
SOMETIMES IT REQUIRES
A *KING* TO GUARANTEE
THE *EQUALITIES*.



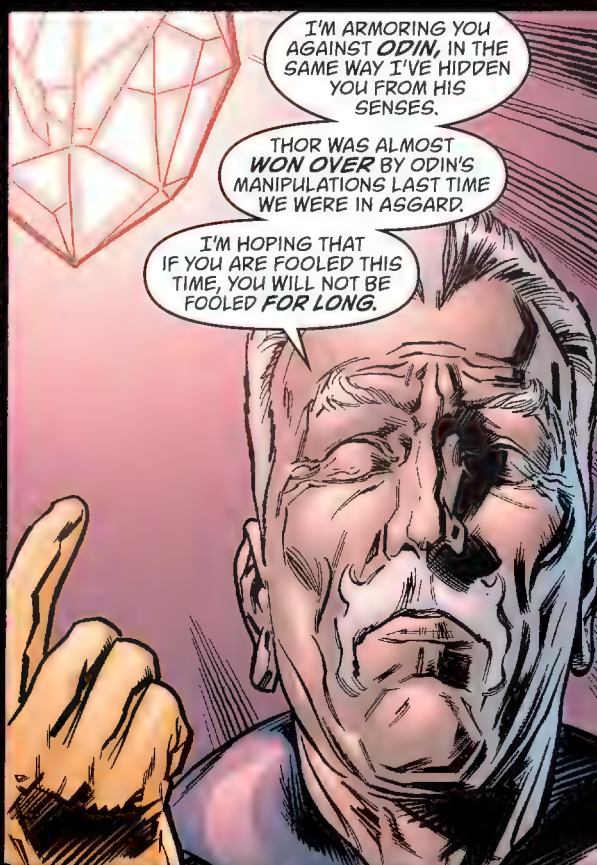
"MY *FATHER*
IS NOT A KING.

"HE WILL NOT LIVE
TO CALL ME *SON*
AGAIN."



CURB
YOUR ANGER,
THOR.

WHAT ARE
YOU DOING,
STRANGE?



I'M ARMORING YOU
AGAINST *ODIN*, IN THE
SAME WAY I'VE HIDDEN
YOU FROM HIS
SENSES.

THOR WAS ALMOST
WON OVER BY ODIN'S
MANIPULATIONS LAST TIME
WE WERE IN ASGARD.

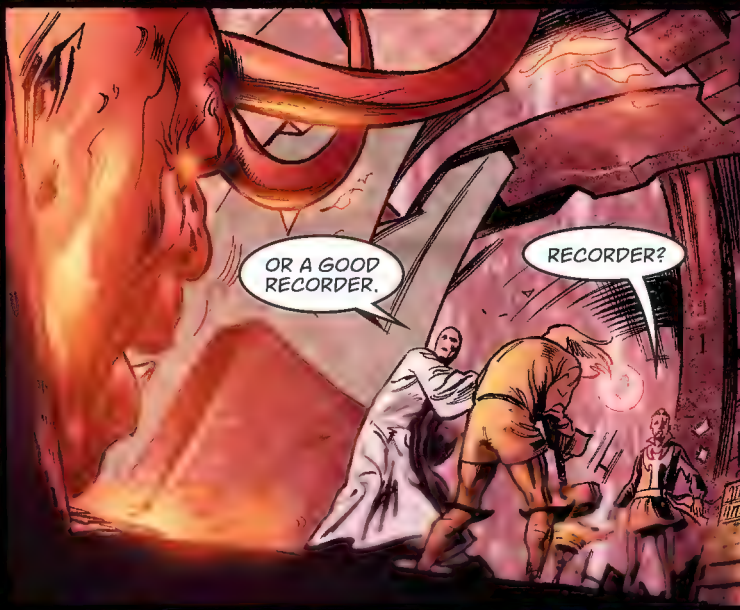
I'M HOPING THAT
IF YOU ARE FOOLED THIS
TIME, YOU WILL NOT BE
FOOLED *FOR LONG*.



ARE YOU CERTAIN THE **THREE** OF YOU WILL BE ENOUGH?



IF WE CAN CONVINCE OUR FELLOW ASSGARDIANS, YES. IF NOT, WE'LL NEED ALL OF **HUMANITY** TO BRING ODIN DOWN.



OR A GOOD RECORDER.

RECORDER?



A **ROBOT**, STRANGE. ODIN COULDN'T **CONTROL** THEM THE WAY HE COULD US. ONCE THEY DISCOVERED THE TRUTH ABOUT ASSGARD, HE HAD THEM **DESTROYED**.

BUT WHERE COULD WE FIND A RECORDER HERE...?



I KNOW **JUST** THE ROBOT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR...

...HIS NAME IS **X-57**. BUT YOU CAN CALL HIM **AARON**.

"IT'S ALL GONE **TERRIBLY**
WRONG, GENTLEMEN. I
NEED TO SPEAK TO **MAR-**
VELL..."

...I NEED TO
LOOK IN HIS **EYES**
AND KNOW WHAT HAS
HAPPENED TO
HIM.

I NEED
TO KNOW IF HE'S
STILL A **FRIEND** TO
MANKIND. I NEED TO
KNOW WHAT **PART**
HE'S PLAYED
IN THIS.

EVEN NOW,
JUDE IS MAKING
HIS WAY THROUGH
THE LATVERIAN
HOSPITAL...





YOUR PRAYERS ARE ANSWERED IN MYSELF, CHILDREN. I HAVE COME FOR YOU.

I BRING THE GIFT YOU HAVE BEGGED FOR. I BRING MY BLESSING IN THE SWEET NECTAR OF ENTROPY.

THANK GOD.

THANK YOU.

AT LAST.

IS IT TRUE?

AM I DREAMING?

"LISTEN TO ME..."

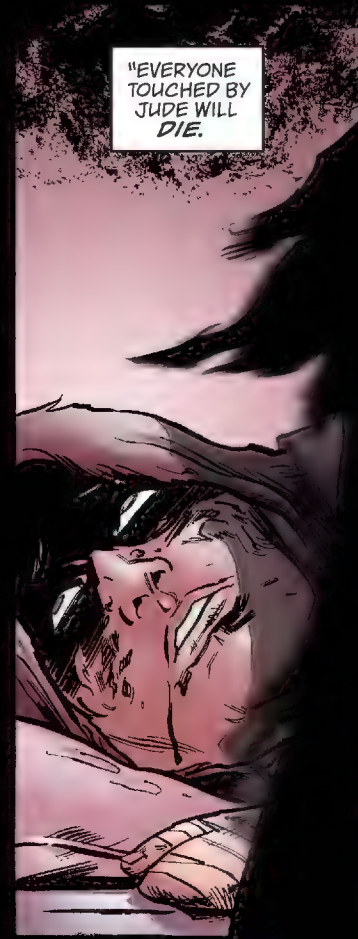
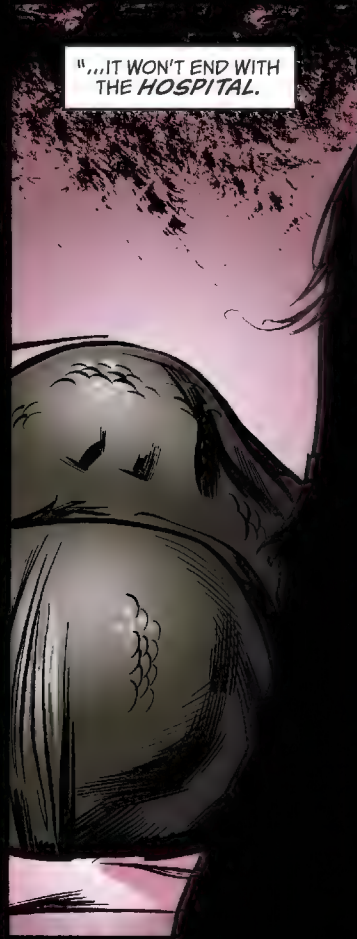
"...IT WON'T END WITH THE HOSPITAL.

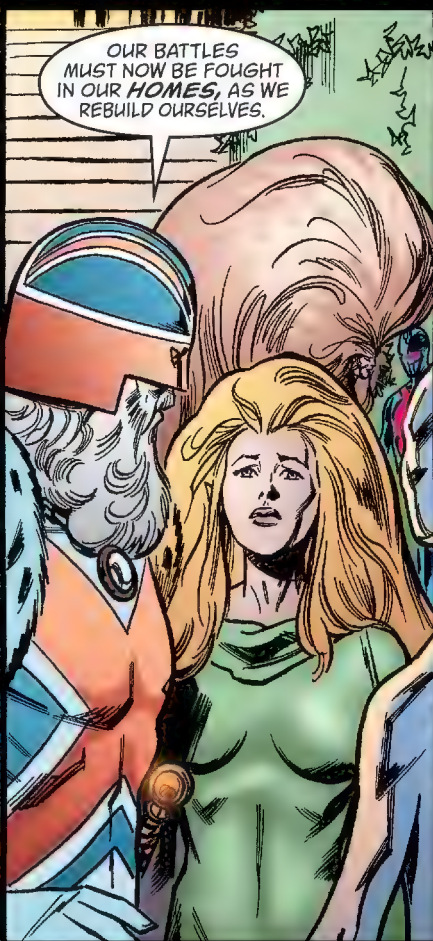
"JUDE WILL NOT BE SATISFIED WITH THE SUFFERING.

"EVERYONE TOUCHED BY JUDE WILL DIE.

"WHO SHOULD HAVE DIED AND WHO SHOULD NOT HAVE ARE IMMATERIAL CONCERNS TO HIM.

"WE'RE ALL DEAD IF WE CAN'T STOP HIM."







I WANT YOU TO KNOW
THAT I THINK YOU ARE ALL
RIGHT TO STAY.

THE ETERNALS
MAY BE **YEARS** AWAY...
AND THE NEEDS OF THIS
KINGDOM MAY BE **GREAT**
SOONER OR LATER.



I'LL MISS
YOU MOST OF ALL,
JADE DRAGON. TAKE
CARE OF YOUR-
SELF.

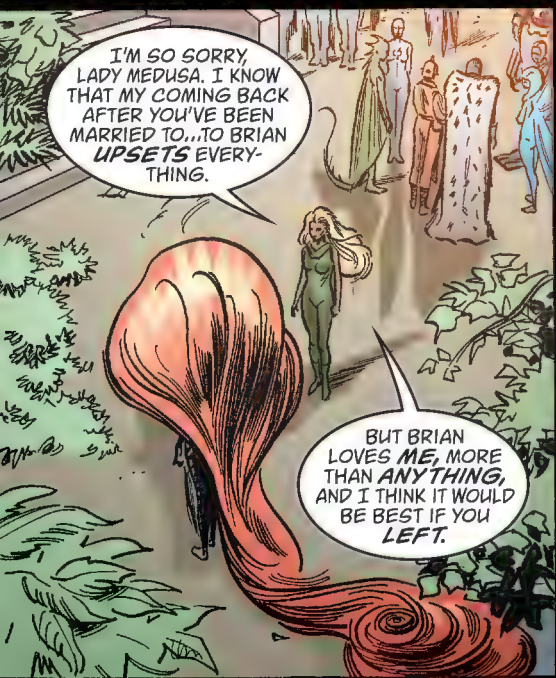


GOOD-BYE,
KAREN. THIS PLACE'LL
BE EVEN **STUFFIER**
WITHOUT YOU.



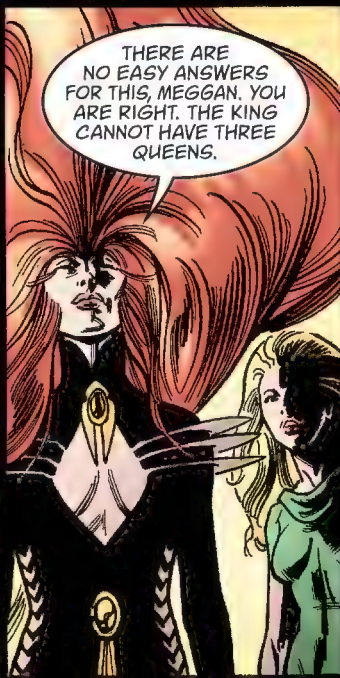
I'M SO RELIEVED
THAT YOU AREN'T GOING,
SIR JACK.

MY PLACE
IS HERE, LUNA, WITH
YOU. IN THE SERVICE
OF THE KING.

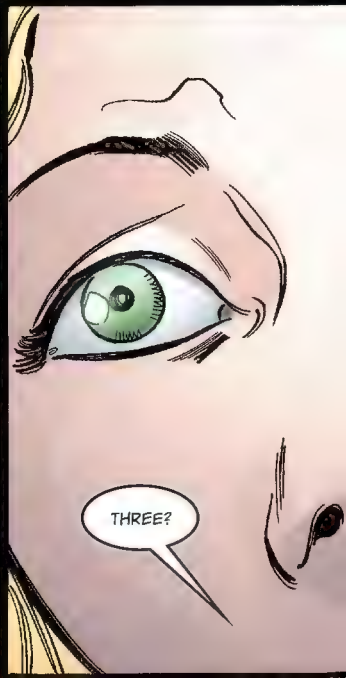


I'M SO SORRY,
LADY MEDUSA. I KNOW
THAT MY COMING BACK
AFTER YOU'VE BEEN
MARRIED TO...TO BRIAN
UPSETS EVERY-
THING.

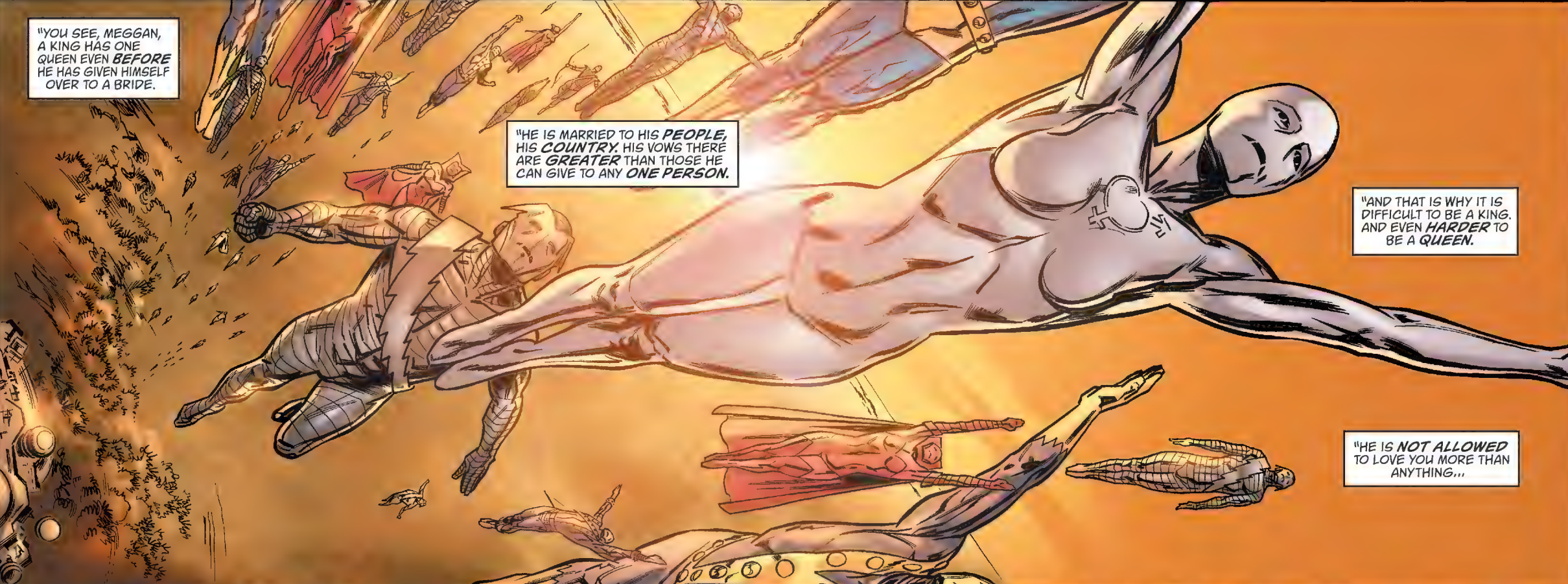
BUT BRIAN
LOVES **ME**, MORE
THAN **ANYTHING**,
AND I THINK IT WOULD
BE BEST IF YOU
LEFT.



THERE ARE
NO EASY ANSWERS
FOR THIS, MEGGAN. YOU
ARE RIGHT. THE KING
CANNOT HAVE THREE
QUEENS.



THREE?

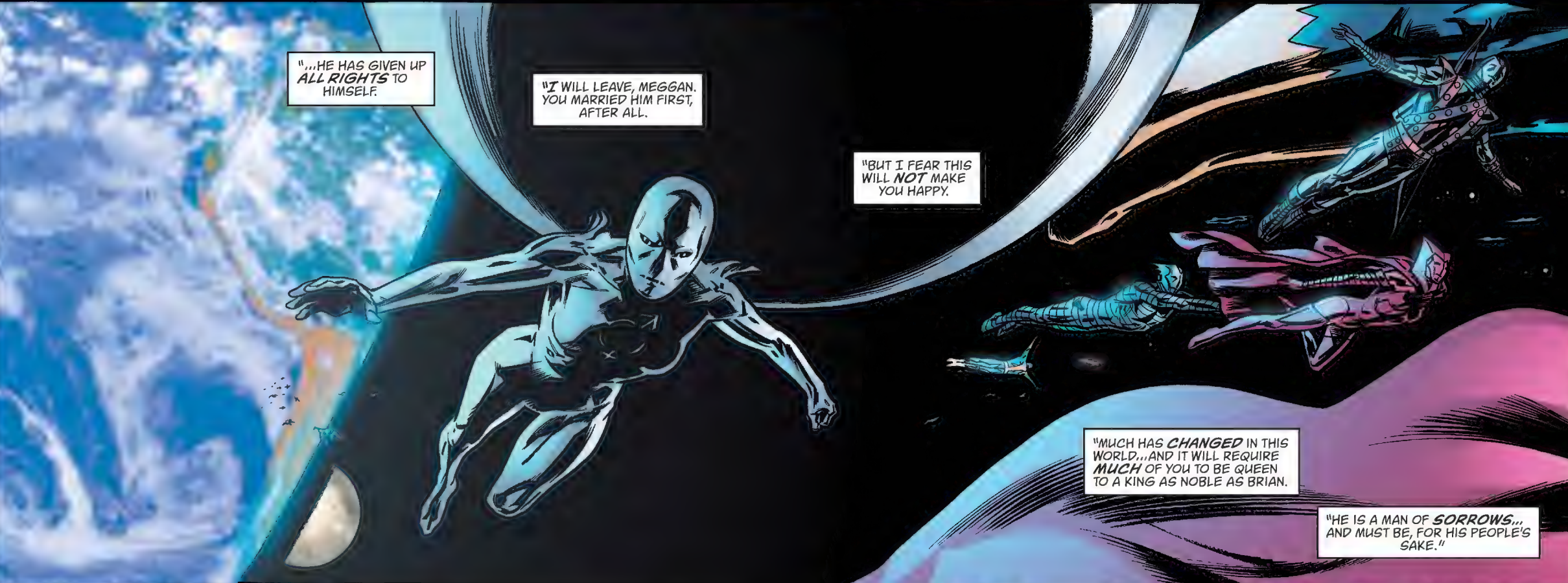


"YOU SEE, MEGGAN,
A KING HAS ONE
QUEEN EVEN *BEFORE*
HE HAS GIVEN HIMSELF
OVER TO A BRIDE.

"HE IS MARRIED TO HIS *PEOPLE*,
HIS *COUNTRY*. HIS VOWS THERE
ARE *GREATER* THAN THOSE HE
CAN GIVE TO ANY *ONE PERSON*.

"AND THAT IS WHY IT IS
DIFFICULT TO BE A KING.
AND EVEN *HARDER* TO
BE A *QUEEN*.

"HE IS *NOT ALLOWED*
TO LOVE YOU MORE THAN
ANYTHING...



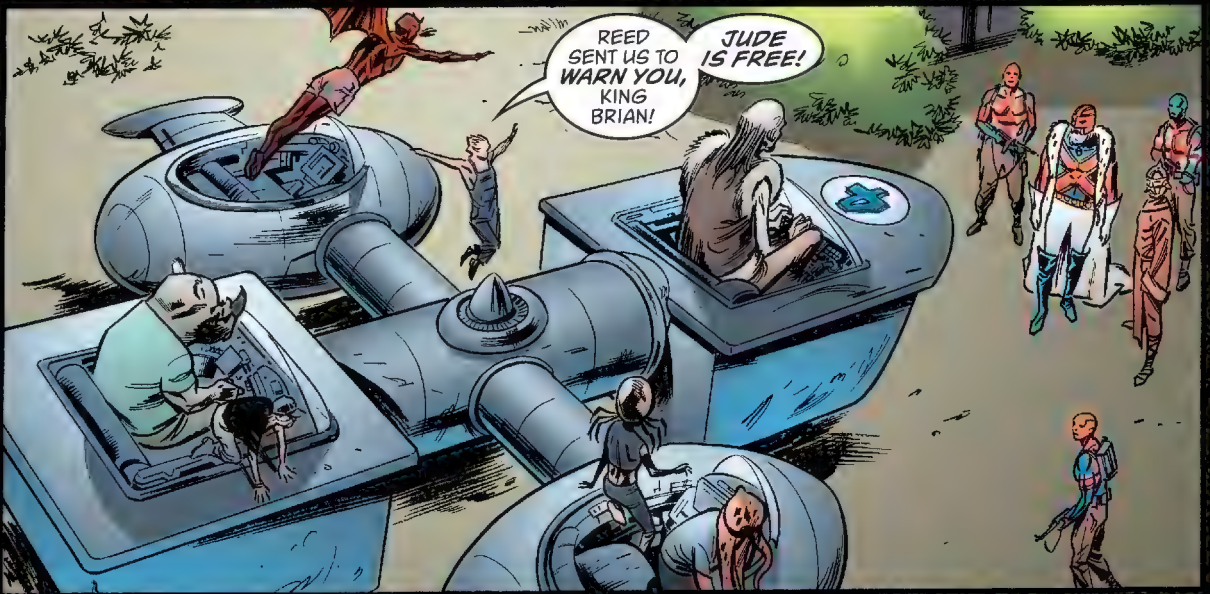
"...HE HAS GIVEN UP
ALL RIGHTS TO
HIMSELF.

"I WILL LEAVE, MEGGAN.
YOU MARRIED HIM FIRST,
AFTER ALL.

"BUT I FEAR THIS
WILL *NOT* MAKE
YOU HAPPY.

"MUCH HAS *CHANGED* IN THIS
WORLD...AND IT WILL REQUIRE
MUCH OF YOU TO BE QUEEN
TO A KING AS NOBLE AS BRIAN.

"HE IS A MAN OF *SORROWS*...
AND MUST BE, FOR HIS PEOPLE'S
SAKE."





I DON'T UNDERSTAND...YOU'LL NEED MY **STRENGTH** IN THERE.

I'M AFRAID REED THINKS IN RETROSPECT THAT **KING BRITAIN** WILL NEED YOUR STRENGTH, REJECT.

REED WANTS YOU TO TAKE THE **GRIMM FAMILY** TO ENGLAND WITH YOU.

C'MON, HYPERION... YER GOING TO **DIE** IN THERE, BIG BUDDY. WHICH IS **EXACTLY** WHAT YOU WANTED.

ME? EVEN IF I GET **CURED**...EVEN IF I GET TO BE **HUMAN** AGAIN, I'LL TURN INTO SOME KINDA FREAKIN' **MUTANT**. WHAT'S THE USE OF **THAT**?

YOU SAID IT, 'PUTER. LOOKS LIKE I'M THE **ONLY ONE** WHO'S GOING TO GO WITHOUT GETTING THEIR **WISH**.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, MANNING?

ONCE MORE INTO THE BRITCHES, HUH, 'LICIA-BABY?

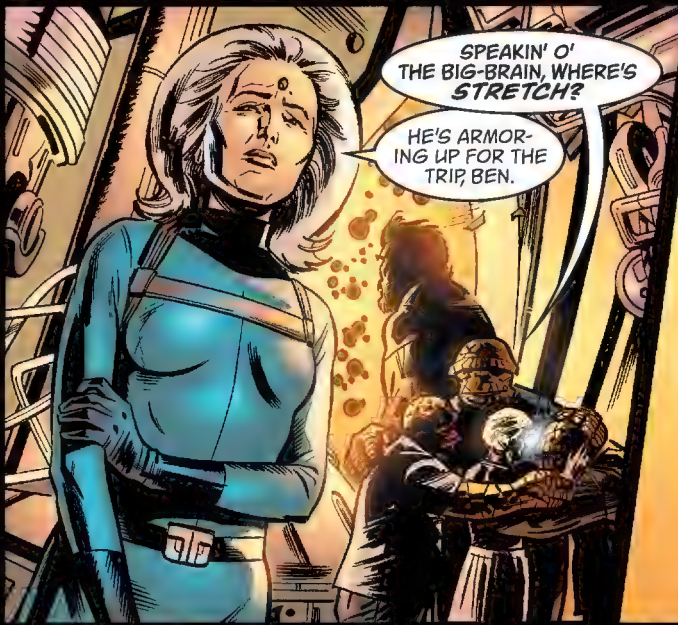
OH, BEN, PLEASE... COME BACK TO ME.

HEY, DAD, WE KNOW YOU'RE STRONGER THAN THE HULK!

YEAH. YOU ROCK.

NOW I CAN DIE HAPPY.

DON'T SAY THAT, BEN. NEVER SAY THAT, DARLING.



SPEAKIN' O' THE BIG-BRAIN, WHERE'S STRETCH?

HE'S ARMORING UP FOR THE TRIP, BEN.



THIS I'VE GOT TO SEE.



I KNOW YOU GUYS ARE GETTIN' READY TO GO BACK TO THE 30TH CENTURY AN' ALL, BUT I'VE BEEN WONDERING--WHERE'S NIKKI?

"NIKKI!" WHO?



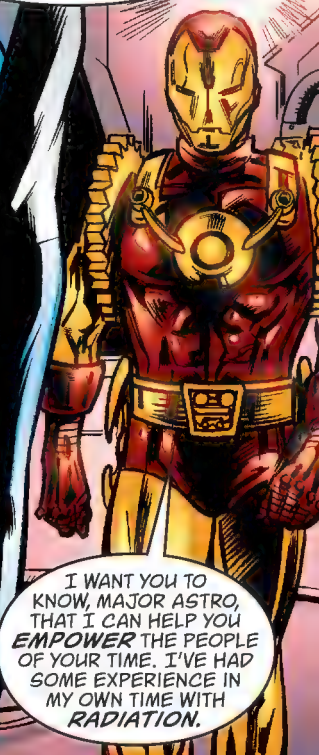
OH WAIT, I KNOW THIS ONE, TOO. YOU'RE THE GUARDIANS *BEFORE* NIKKI JOINED THE TEAM, RIGHT? YOU HAVEN'T EVEN *WON* YOUR WAR IN THE FUTURE YET, RIGHT? EARTH'S STILL IN DANGER?

SO YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A WAY TO...LET'S SEE...NO, NOT *CLONE*, DON'T EVEN SAY THE WORD CLONE...

...NO, YOU WANT TO *MUTATE* AND *EMPOWER* THE PEOPLE OF EARTH SO THAT THEY CAN DEFEND THEMSELVES AGAINST SOME *ALIEN INVADERS*, RIGHT? AN' THAT'S WHY YOU'RE HERE.



REALLY, IT'S NOT THAT HARD...WHEN YOU'RE DOING THIS AS LONG AS I HAVE, IT'S KIND OF DIFFICULT TO BE SURPRISED BY A TWIST LIKE THAT ANYMORE.



I WANT YOU TO KNOW, MAJOR ASTRO, THAT I CAN HELP YOU *EMPOWER* THE PEOPLE OF YOUR TIME. I'VE HAD SOME EXPERIENCE IN MY OWN TIME WITH *RADIATION*.



HUBBA,
HUBBA,
HUBBA!



OPEN
THE PORTAL,
BEN. LET'S GO
TALK TO
GOD.

"In the dream
of the man who
was dreaming,
the dreamed
man awoke."
— Jorge Luis
Borges, *The
Circular Ruins*

A PARADISE XTM SPECIAL

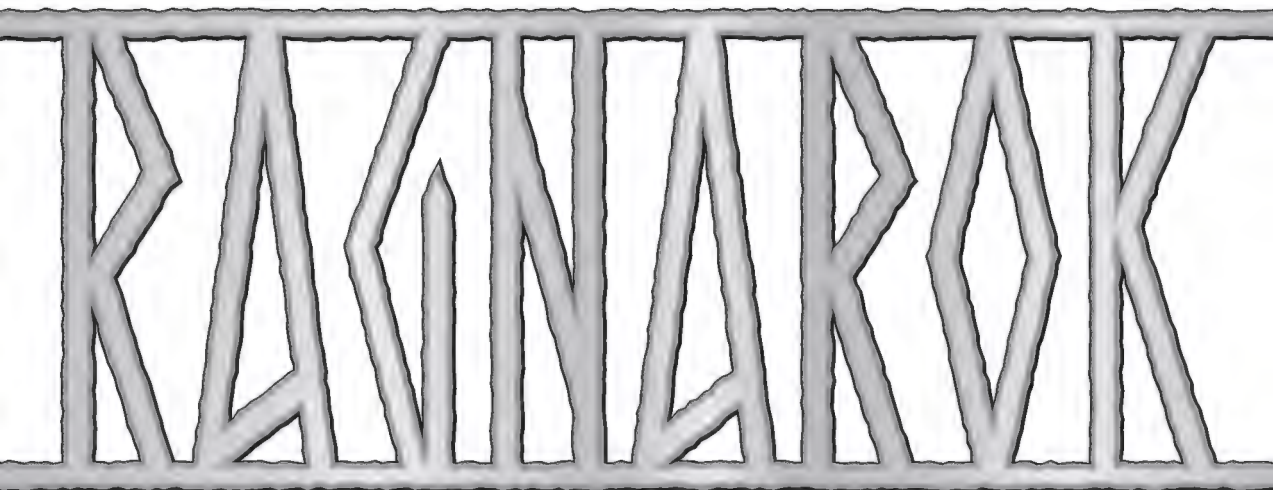
RAVNAROKTM

KRUEGER

YEATES

VILLARRUBIA

MARVEL
LIMITED
SERIES
1 OF 2



A PARADISE SPECIAL

JIM KRUEGER
story and script

ALEX ROSS
story, cover and character designs

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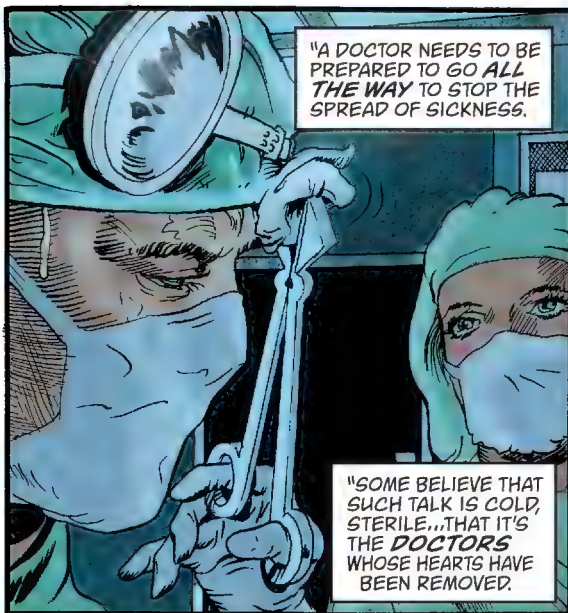
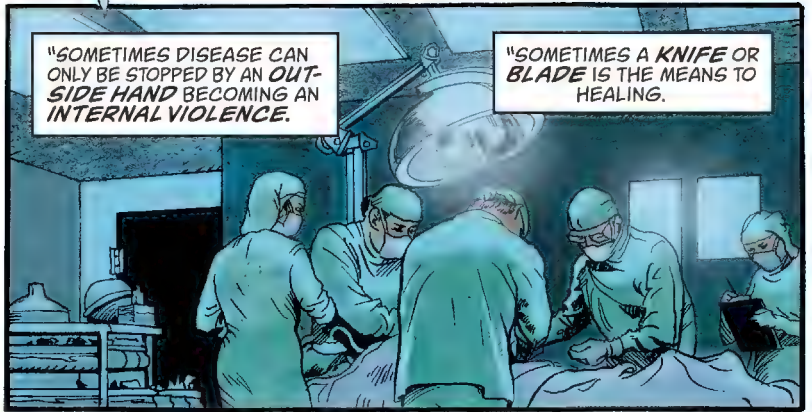
BILL JEMAS
president



"I BECAME A **SURGEON** TO HELP PEOPLE WHO COULDN'T HELP THEMSELVES.

"SOMETIMES DISEASE CAN ONLY BE STOPPED BY AN **OUT-SIDE HAND** BECOMING AN **INTERNAL VIOLENCE**.

"SOMETIMES A **KNIFE OR BLADE** IS THE MEANS TO HEALING.



"A DOCTOR NEEDS TO BE PREPARED TO GO **ALL THE WAY** TO STOP THE SPREAD OF SICKNESS.

"SOME BELIEVE THAT SUCH TALK IS COLD, STERILE...THAT IT'S THE **DOCTORS** WHOSE HEARTS HAVE BEEN REMOVED.



"BUT THAT'S **NOT TRUE**.

"WE'RE JUST NOT AFRAID TO GET **BLOOD ON OUR HANDS**."



I'M STILL
NOT CERTAIN I
UNDERSTAND *WHY*
I'M HERE...I SHOULD
BE BACK ON THE
MOON...

ODIN HAD
ALL THE *RECORDERS*
DESTROYED YEARS AGO
ONCE HE LEARNED WHAT
THEY WERE RECORDING.
YOU WILL BE *NEEDED*,
X-51.

HEIMDALL'S
HORN WARNS ODIN'S
PUPPETS OF OUR ARRIVAL.
ODIN MUST *EXPECT* US...
OTHERWISE HE'D
BE HERE.

LET US HOPE
THIS CHARADE *CONVINCES*
THEM LONG ENOUGH FOR US
TO ENTER THE CITY'S
GATES.

OUR FORMS
ARE NOT IMPORTANT...
WHAT WE DO HERE
IS.

THIS
IS THE DAY OF
RAGNAROK.



WE ARE
GOING TO **SHAKE**
THE **PILLARS** OF THE
REALM AND **BRING IT**
DOWN AROUND ODIN'S
STINKING HEAD
FOR WHAT HE DID
TO US!

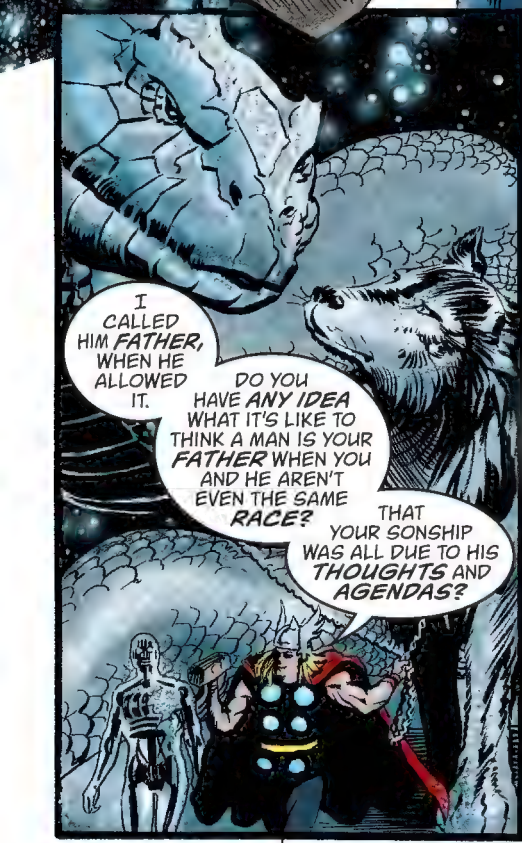
THOR,
YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT
ARMAGEDDON.

DOESN'T THIS
ALL SEEM A LITTLE **BLOOD-
THIRSTY**? YOU ESPECIALLY,
THOR...

WE WOULDN'T
HAVE BLOOD IF THE
FAKER WHO CALLS HIM-
SELF ODIN DIDN'T SAY
WE DID.



WE WERE
PRISONERS OF
HIS IMAGINATION! AND SO
WE WILL **IMPRISON HIM**
WITH THE **SAME MYTHS**
HE USED TO LIMIT AND
GIVE FORM TO
US.



I
CALLED
HIM **FATHER**,
WHEN HE
ALLOWED
IT.

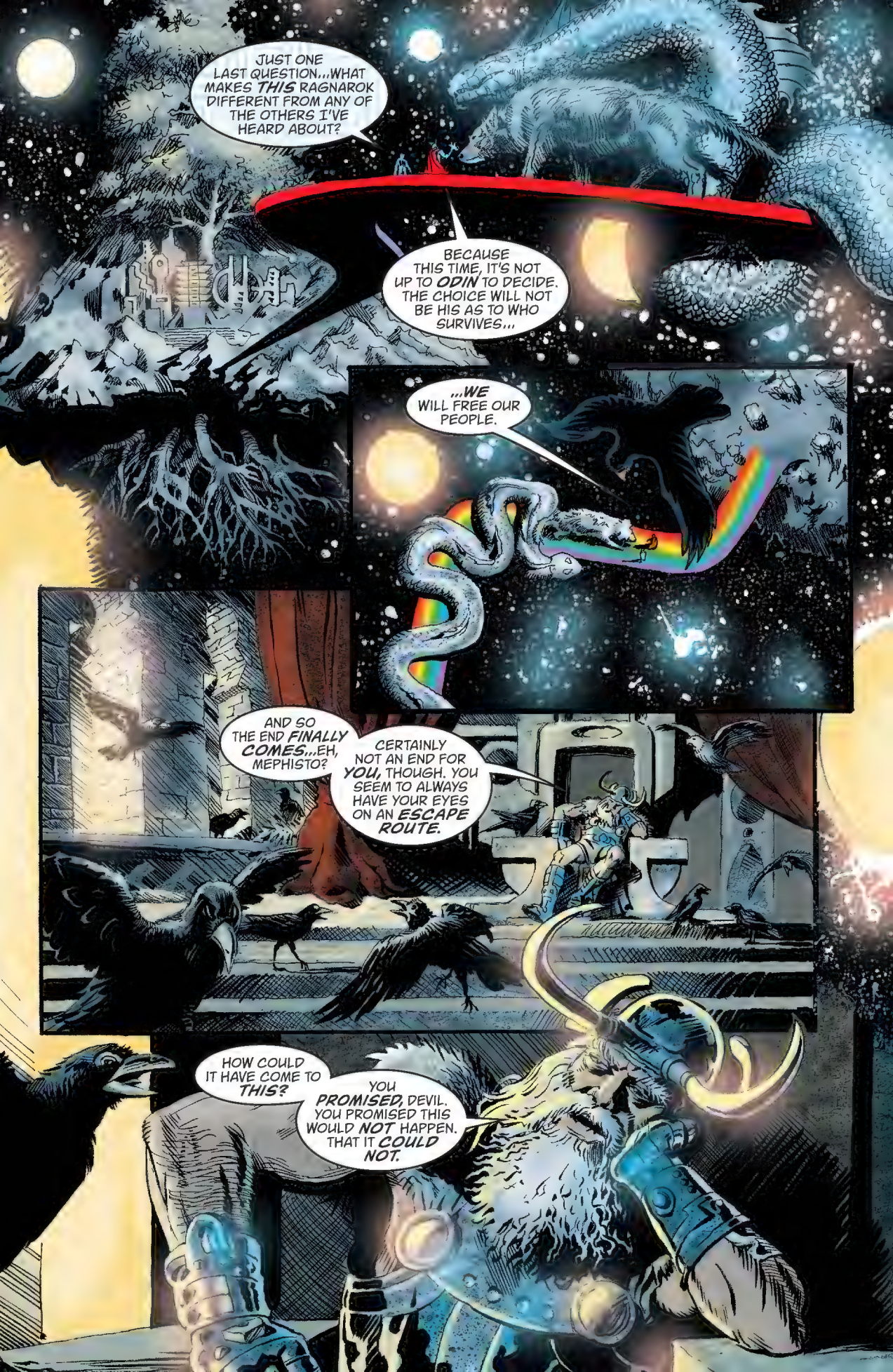
DO YOU
HAVE ANY **IDEA**
WHAT IT'S LIKE TO
THINK A MAN IS YOUR
FATHER WHEN YOU
AND HE AREN'T
EVEN THE SAME
RACE?

THAT
YOUR SONSHIP
WAS ALL DUE TO HIS
THOUGHTS AND
AGENDAS?



I DO, THOR. AND
YET IT DOESN'T BOTHER ME.
IT GIVES ME **REASON** TO EXIST.
I WONDER IF THE PAST IS A
THING ANY OF US CAN
ESCAPE...

THIS IS
NOT **YOUR WAR**,
X-51. YOU'RE JUST
RECORDING
IT.



JUST ONE
LAST QUESTION...WHAT
MAKES *THIS* RAGNAROK
DIFFERENT FROM ANY OF
THE OTHERS I'VE
HEARD ABOUT?

BECAUSE
THIS TIME, IT'S NOT
UP TO *ODIN* TO DECIDE.
THE CHOICE WILL NOT
BE HIS AS TO WHO
SURVIVES...



...*WE*
WILL FREE OUR
PEOPLE.



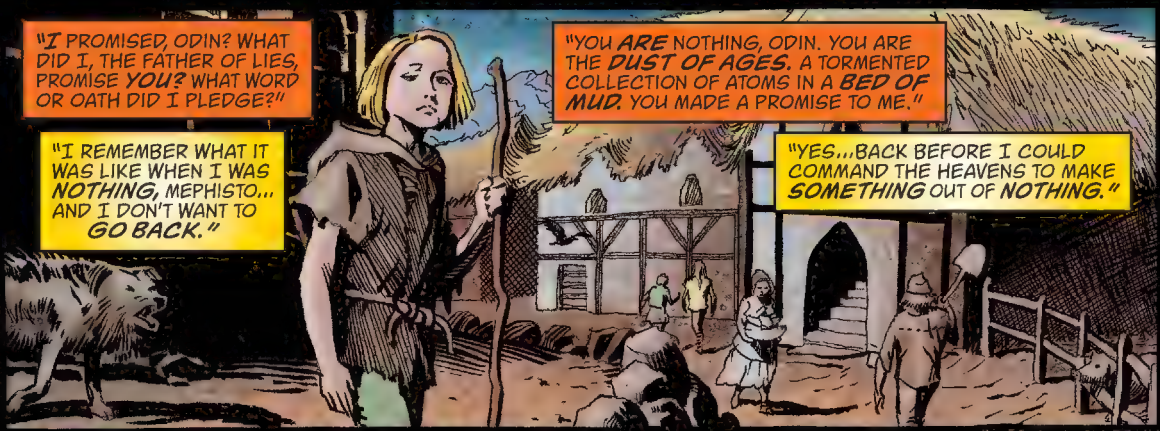
AND SO
THE END *FINALLY*
COMES...EH,
MEPHISTO?

CERTAINLY
NOT AN END FOR
YOU, THOUGH. YOU
SEEM TO ALWAYS
HAVE YOUR EYES
ON AN *ESCAPE*
ROUTE.

HOW COULD
IT HAVE COME TO
THIS?



YOU
PROMISED, DEVIL.
YOU *PROMISED* THIS
WOULD *NOT* HAPPEN.
THAT IT *COULD*
NOT.

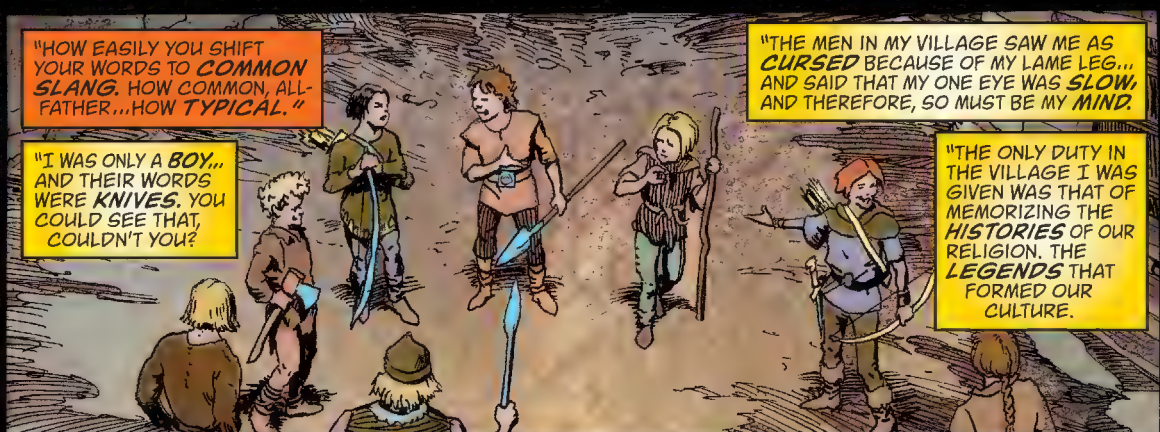


"I PROMISED, ODIN? WHAT DID I, THE FATHER OF LIES, PROMISE **YOU**? WHAT WORD OR OATH DID I PLEDGE?"

"I REMEMBER WHAT IT WAS LIKE WHEN I WAS **NOTHING**, MEPHISTO... AND I DON'T WANT TO **GO BACK**."

"YOU **ARE** NOTHING, ODIN. YOU ARE THE **DUST OF AGES**. A TORMENTED COLLECTION OF ATOMS IN A **BED OF MUD**. YOU MADE A PROMISE TO ME."

"YES...BACK BEFORE I COULD COMMAND THE HEAVENS TO MAKE **SOMETHING** OUT OF **NOTHING**."

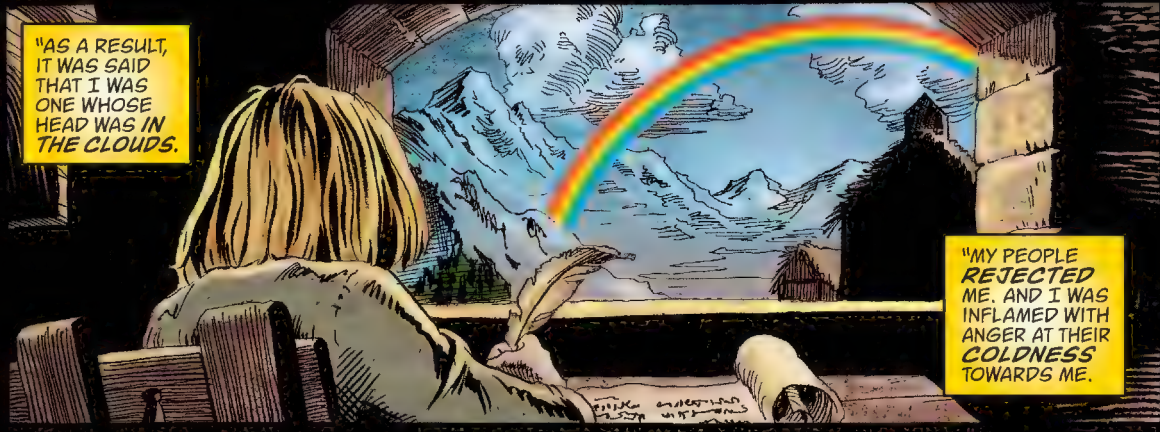


"HOW EASILY YOU SHIFT YOUR WORDS TO **COMMON SLANG**. HOW COMMON, ALL-FATHER...HOW **TYPICAL**."

"I WAS ONLY A **BOY**, AND THEIR WORDS WERE **KNIVES**. YOU COULD SEE THAT, COULDN'T YOU?"

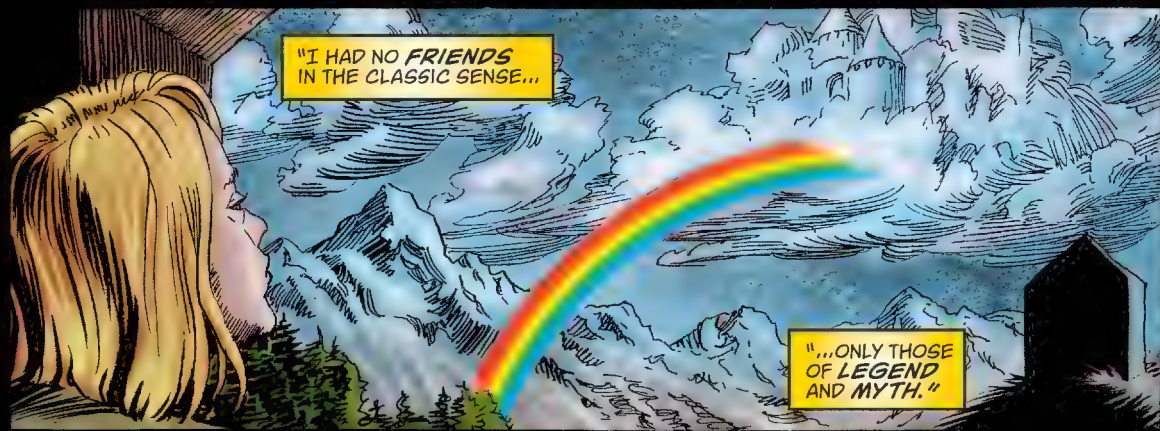
"THE MEN IN MY VILLAGE SAW ME AS **CURSED** BECAUSE OF MY LAME LEG... AND SAID THAT MY ONE EYE WAS **SLOW**, AND THEREFORE, SO MUST BE MY **MIND**."

"THE ONLY DUTY IN THE VILLAGE I WAS GIVEN WAS THAT OF MEMORIZING THE **HISTORIES** OF OUR RELIGION. THE **LEGENDS** THAT FORMED OUR CULTURE."



"AS A RESULT, IT WAS SAID THAT I WAS ONE WHOSE HEAD WAS IN **THE CLOUDS**."

"MY PEOPLE **REJECTED** ME, AND I WAS INFLAMED WITH ANGER AT THEIR **COLDNESS** TOWARDS ME."



"I HAD NO **FRIENDS** IN THE CLASSIC SENSE..."

"...ONLY THOSE OF **LEGEND** AND **MYTH**."

"I KNEW ALL ABOUT **THOR**...AND **BALDER** THE BRAVE...**LOKI** THE TRICKSTER...**SURTUR** THE FIRE DEMON...**SIF** THE BEAUTIFUL WARRIOR WOMAN..."

"...ALL THE WORLDS OF THE **GOLDEN REALM**... THE GLORIOUS **WORLD ASH** THAT HELD THEM ALL TOGETHER..."

"...I COULD...I COULD SEE THEM IN MY MIND."

"THEIR DETAIL **GREW** WITH EACH PASSING YEAR."

"I KNEW HOW **ODIN** AND HIS TWO BROTHERS KILLED THE GIANT **YMIR**, AND TRANSFORMED HIS BODY INTO THE **EARTH**."

"HOW **ODIN** AND HIS TWO BROTHERS BECAME ONE BEING, A **TRIUNE RULER**."

"I KNEW OF THE **FLAW** THAT WOULD ONE DAY KILL **BALDER** THE BRAVE, **BALDER** THE BEAUTIFUL."

"AND FOR EVERY STORY I LOVED, THERE WAS ANOTHER I **HATED**."

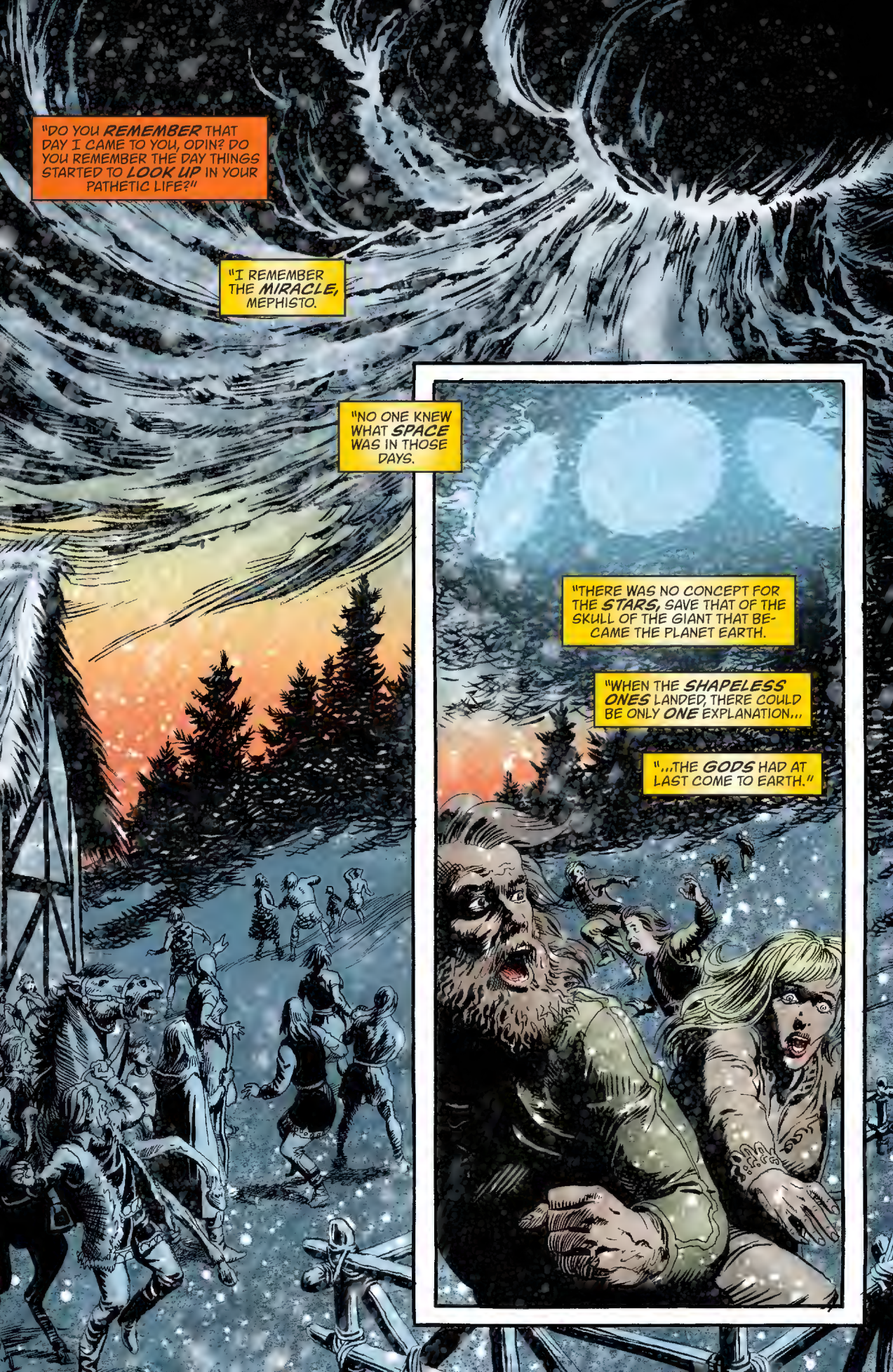
"FOR EVERY BEGINNING, THERE WAS A **RAGNAROK**."

"A DAY WHEN **THOR** WAS POISONED BY THE **MID-GARD SERPENT**, AND **ODIN** WAS SWALLOWED BY A WOLF."

"WHEN **LOKI**, **THOR**'S HALF-BROTHER AND A VILLAIN THE LIKES OF WHICH THE WORLD NEVER KNEW, KILLED **BALDER** AND COMMANDED AN ARMY OF THE DEAD TO DESTROY THE CITY OF **ASGARD**."

"THESE LEGENDS BOASTED OF A **NEW BEGINNING** FOLLOWING THE DESTRUCTION OF EVERYTHING...BUT WHY WOULD ANYONE WANT ONE?"

"**ASGARD**, THE CITY IN THE CLOUDS, WAS **PERFECT**. EVEN I COULD HAVE A FAMILY THERE. THERE I COULD FIND A **WOMAN** TO LOVE ME AND **VICTORIES** TO DRINK TO."



"DO YOU **REMEMBER** THAT DAY I CAME TO YOU, ODIN? DO YOU REMEMBER THE DAY THINGS STARTED TO **LOOK UP** IN YOUR PATHETIC LIFE?"

"I REMEMBER THE **MIRACLE**, MEPHISTO.

"NO ONE KNEW WHAT **SPACE** WAS IN THOSE DAYS.

"THERE WAS NO CONCEPT FOR THE **STARS**, SAVE THAT OF THE SKULL OF THE GIANT THAT BECAME THE PLANET EARTH.

"WHEN THE **SHAPELESS ONES** LANDED, THERE COULD BE ONLY **ONE** EXPLANATION..."

"...THE **GODS** HAD AT LAST COME TO EARTH."





"MY VILLAGE *FEARED* THE GODS
BECAUSE THEY DID NOT *KNOW*
THEM. THEY KNEW ONLY *WRATH*
AND *ANGER* AND *FEAR*."

"THEY KNEW
NOTHING OF
HEROISM."



"BUT THIS WAS THE DAY WHEN THEY
AT LAST SAW MY *COURAGE*."



"THIS WAS THE DAY THEY SAW
ME FOR WHAT I *TRULY* WAS."

"AND PERHAPS IT
WAS THE DAY I
STOPPED SEEING
YOU FOR WHAT
YOU *TRULY* WERE."



WELCOME,
GODS OF OUR
CREATION!

WELCOME
TO THE LAND OF
YOUR MAKING AND THE
PEOPLE OF YOUR
FORGING!



WELCOME,
THOR!

WELCOME,
BALDER!

WELCOME,
HEIMDALL!

WELCOME...



...I HAVE
WAITED SO LONG
TO SEE YOU.

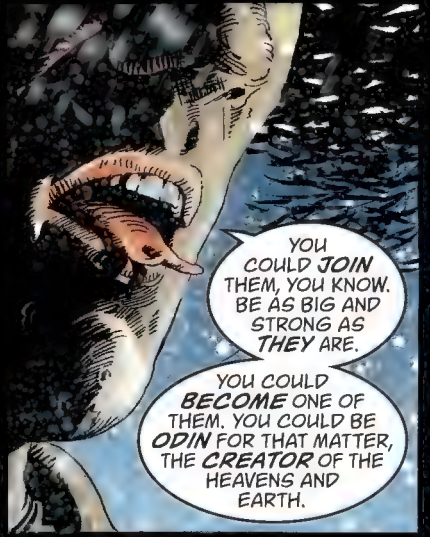
WELCOME TO
MIDGARD.

"YES...YOUR FAITH **FORMED**
THEM, ODIN. YOUR 'WANT' FOR
A BETTER WORLD THAN THE ONE
YOU EXPERIENCED **MOLDED**
THEM INTO THE **GODS** OF
YOUR FABLES.

"YOUR WANT FOR **LOVE**. FOR
WOMEN. FOR **RICHES**. FOR
GLORY BEYOND YOUR IMAGININGS."



"IT WAS SHORTLY AFTER THIS THAT YOU CAME TO ME..."



YOU COULD JOIN THEM, YOU KNOW. BE AS BIG AND STRONG AS THEY ARE.

YOU COULD BECOME ONE OF THEM. YOU COULD BE ODIN FOR THAT MATTER, THE CREATOR OF THE HEAVENS AND EARTH.



BUT...BUT I AM ONLY A MAN.

FROM YOUR LIPS THE GODS TAKE FORM.

FROM YOUR FAITH, THEY SPRING TO LIFE.

IS THERE ANY REASON WHY YOU SHOULDN'T BE THEIR ALL-FATHER? THEIR ODIN?



I...I DON'T UNDERSTAND *HOW* I COULD BE ODIN. WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?



DON'T BE CONCERNED WITH *HOW*...ARE YOU WILLING TO *RULE*, TO HOLD THE KINGDOM OF ASSGARD TOGETHER BY YOUR *THOUGHTS* ALONE?



OF COURSE.



THERE WILL BE A
PRICE FOR THE KNOWLEDGE
I GIVE YOU...

...A **COST** FOR
GODHOOD. A **RECKONING**
FOR THE POWER OF LIFE
AND DEATH.



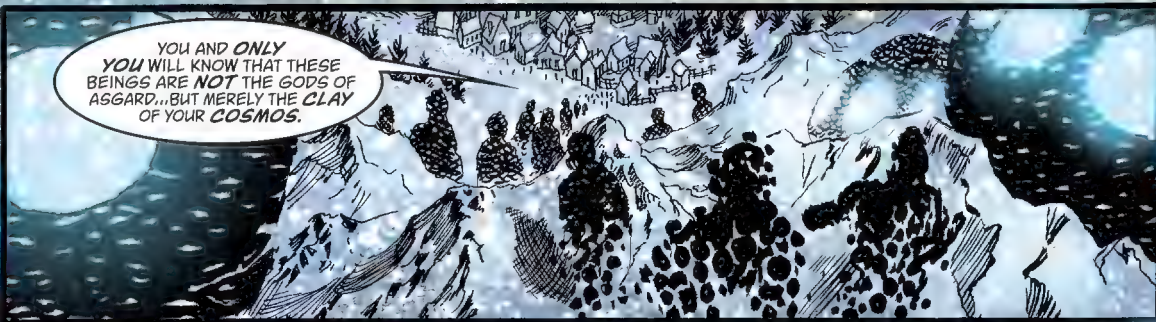
I ONLY
REQUIRE A SMALL
PLOT OF **LAND** IN
YOUR **ASGARD**
THAT I CAN CALL
MY OWN.

IF ONLY
TO BE A **SMALL**
PART OF YOUR
GROWING
WORLD...

BUT YOU
MUST TELL **NO ONE**
OF THIS, OR IT WILL
DESTROY ALL THAT
YOUR MIND AND WISHES
ARE BUILDING. DO YOU
UNDERSTAND ME?



...YES...



YOU AND **ONLY**
YOU WILL KNOW THAT THESE
BEINGS ARE **NOT** THE GODS OF
ASGARD...BUT MERELY THE **CLAY**
OF YOUR **COSMOS.**

COME, OLD
MAN, YOU KNOW THE
LEGEND. ODIN WAS
JOINED BY HIS **TWO**
BROTHERS TO
FORGE **ASGARD.**

LET US
FIND YOU TWO
BROTHERS TO
MAKE YOU
WHOLE.



"I REMEMBER WHERE I PLANNED
TO *BUILD* ASGARD.

"AND THEY CALL
ME THE FATHER
OF LIES."

"I REMEMBER BUILDING IT OUT
OF THE *VERY BEINGS* THAT
HAD BECOME MY SONS AND
BROTHERS.

"MY *CHILDREN*."



"I REMEMBER PLANTING A
TREE, THE *WORLD ASH*,
WHICH WOULD GROW FOR-
EVER, A *LIVING SYMBOL*
OF THE NEW FAMILY I HAD
CREATED FOR MYSELF.



"AND WHEN I THOUGHT OF THE *LIFE*
I ONCE LIVED UPON EARTH, AND THE
JEERS I'D RECEIVED FROM MY FELLOW
NORSEMEN, I RAINED DOWN *THUNDER*
UPON THEM FOR THE REST OF HUMAN
HISTORY.

"AND I WAS
HAPPY."

"FOR THERE
WOULD *BE* NO
RAGNAROK IN
MY REALM. AT
LEAST, NOT ONE
I COULDN'T
AVERT."

"MY ASGARD
WOULD *NEVER*
CHANGE."

I KNOW THIS ALIEN RACE THAT BECAME THE ASGARDIANS HAD **MUTATED** TO A POINT WHERE THEIR IDENTITIES COULD ONLY BE FORMED OUT OF THE OPINIONS AND BELIEFS OF OTHER RACES.

I KNOW **JUSTICE** HAS TO BE BROUGHT TO ODIN. BUT IS THIS REALM SO **WRONG?** THERE'S SUCH **BEAUTY** HERE...

LISTEN, ROBOT. EVERYTHING THAT SHINES ISN'T ALWAYS THE **GOLDEN REALM.** MY '**FATHER**' HAS PLAYED WITH OUR LIVES, MANIPULATING US OVER AND OVER AGAIN FOR **EONS.**

WE NEVER **HAD A CHOICE.** FOR **GOOD OR EVIL.**

WHEN HE CURSED THOR TO BECOME THE HUMAN **DONALD BLAKE** SO MANY YEARS AGO, WHEN HE DAMNED HIM TO LEARN **HUMILITY,** HE DID IT NOT BECAUSE THOR WAS **PROUD...**

...BUT BECAUSE THOR **STOOD UP** TO HIM ON A DAY WHEN HE HAD DECIDED TO **DESTROY THE EARTH.**

WE ARE HERE BECAUSE **ONE FLAWED MAN** SHOULD NOT HAVE **THIS MUCH POWER.**

TELL THAT TO **FRANKLIN RICHARDS.**

BROTHER THOR!

WHEN MINE EARS FIRST PARTOOK OF THE KNOWLEDGE THAT YOU WERE **RETURNING,** MY HEART DID **DANCE WITH JOY!**

ODIN TOLD ME YOU HAD BEEN **BEWITCHED...**

...BUT I SEE NOW THAT YOU HAVE INSTEAD **FREED ASGARD** FROM THE FEAR OF **RAGNAROK!**

FIRST YOU FREED US FROM **HEL,** NOW YOU FREE US FROM **FEAR.**

I COULDN'T HAVE SAID IT BETTER **MYSELF!**



T-THOR?



BALDER?



ODIN
WAS RIGHT,
FOR ONCE.
I AM NOT
MYSELF.

OH, TEARS OF
JOYOUS ACCLAMATION,
WHY HAVE YOU
BECOME A RIVER OF
SORROW?



ODIN HAS A
LOT TO ANSWER FOR.
THE FIRST THING BEING
THE **STUPID** WAY HE
MADE US TALK.

SO TAKE
A HINT AND **SHUT**
UP.

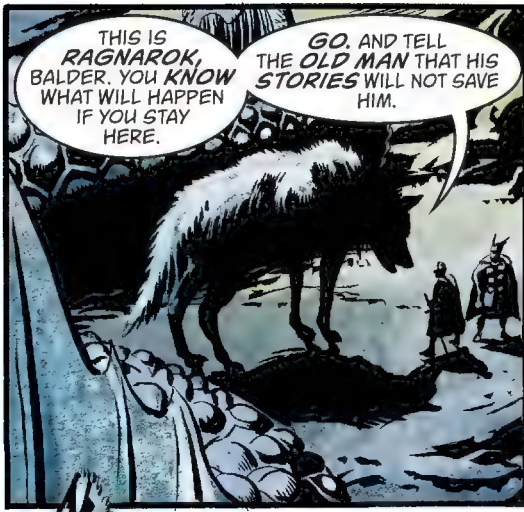


I CANNOT
ACCEPT THESE
WORDS, THESE
FALSEHOODS...
THOR WOULD NOT
BETRAY HIS
PEOPLE...

...THOR
WOULD NOT
KILL ME...HE
IS THE MOST
PERFECT OF
GODS...HIS
WORDS BE
THE--



GET UP,
BALDER. AND
YOU'RE RIGHT.
THOR WOULD
NOT DO
THAT.





THEN LET **ME**
BE THE ASgardIAN
TO PROTECT THE REALM
FROM **YOU**, THOUGH
IT RIPS MY SPIRIT
IN TWO!



HAVEN'T YOU
LEARNED BY NOW,
BALDER THE BORE... THAT
THINGS ARE **NOT** AS
THEY APPEAR?



I WEEP
FOR THE **MAN**
YOU ONCE
WERE!

THE
FRIEND I ONCE
HAD!



THE
MAN I ONCE
WAS?



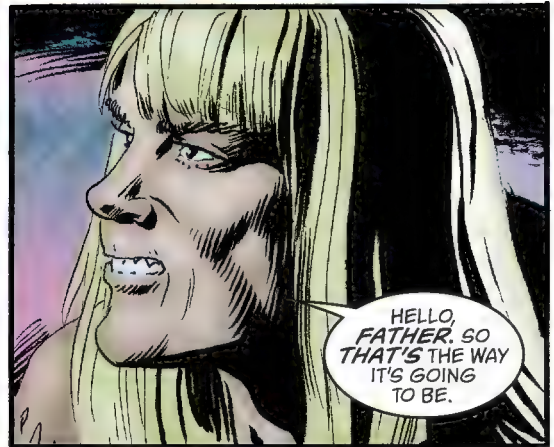
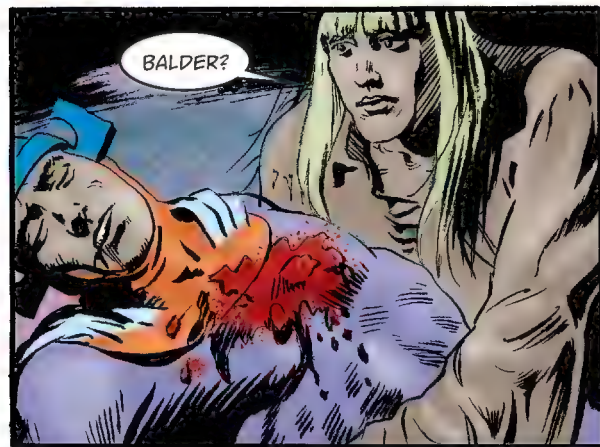
L-LOKI?

WHAT ARE
YOU-?

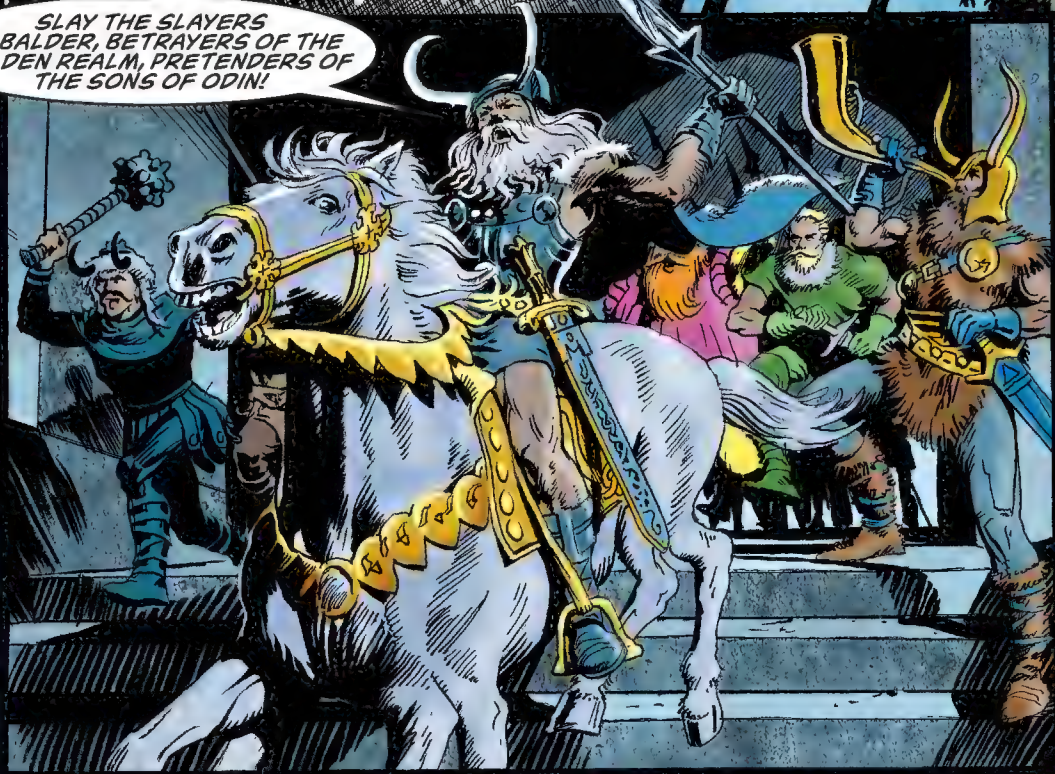
I REALLY DON'T
WANT TO **DO THIS**, BALDER...
BUT A PROPHECY JUST ISN'T
A PROPHECY IF IT DOESN'T
COME TRUE!



NOOOOOO!
UNNNFFH



SLAY THE SLAYERS
OF BALDER, BETRAYERS OF THE
GOLDEN REALM, PRETENDERS OF
THE SONS OF ODIN!



"I HAVE BEEN BROUGHT TO RECORD A **STRUGGLE OF WILLS**.
A BATTLE BETWEEN A WORLD THAT MIGHT BE RESHAPED BY
TRUTH AND ONE INITIALLY FORGED BY **WISHES**."

"BUT I CAN'T HELP WONDERING IF THIS SAME BATTLE
WOULD HAVE BEEN FOUGHT REGARDLESS OF WHO THE
ALIENS **FIRST MET** WHEN THEY CAME TO EARTH."

"THEIR PHYSICAL NATURE AND IDENTITY WOULD
HAVE BEEN FORMED BY **WHOEVER** THEY MET."

"THEY COULD HAVE BECOME ANYTHING TO ANYBODY...
THE SIN WAS THAT A MAN USED THEM TO ANSWER FOR
HIS OWN **NORMALITY**."

"BUT HOW **DIFFERENT**
WAS THIS FROM THE MAN
WHO CONSTRUCTED ME?"

"HOW DIFFERENT IS THIS
FROM **ANY PARENT** WHO
RAISES A CHILD IN THE WAY
THEY CONSIDER APPROPRIATE?"

"I AM A FLY ON THE WALL
OF **ARMAGEDDON**."

"THIS IS THE **TWILIGHT**
OF THE GODS... **RAG-
NAROK** HAS COME TO
ASGARD."

THIS
TIME, I
GET TO BE
FENRIS.



"OR PERHAPS ALL CHILDREN MUST
REBEL AGAINST THEIR ORIGIN."



"MAYBE A LITTLE
REBELLION IS GOOD
FOR THE **SOUL**..."

"...THAT IS, IF
A GOD WHOSE
EXISTENCE
WAS SHAPED
BY HUMAN
IMAGINATION
EVEN *HAS* A
SOUL."

MY... "SONS"
STRIKE THEIR FELLOW
ASGARDIANS DOWN AND
THEN *WISH* THEM
BACK TO LIFE!

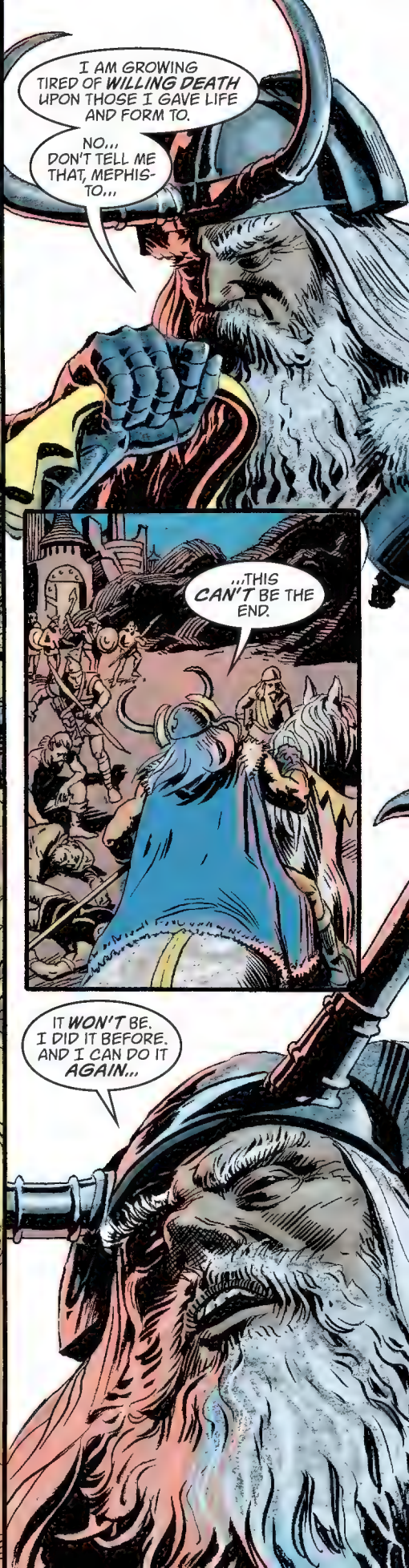
THEY ARE
GAINING IN
NUMBER! SOON ALL
WE HAVE BUILT HERE
WILL BE FOR
NOTHING!

I AM GROWING
TIRED OF *WILLING* DEATH
UPON THOSE I GAVE LIFE
AND FORM TO.

NO...
DON'T TELL ME
THAT, MEPHIS-
TO...



IT WON'T BE.
I DID IT BEFORE.
AND I CAN DO IT
AGAIN...



A PARADISE  SPECIAL

RAGNAROK TM

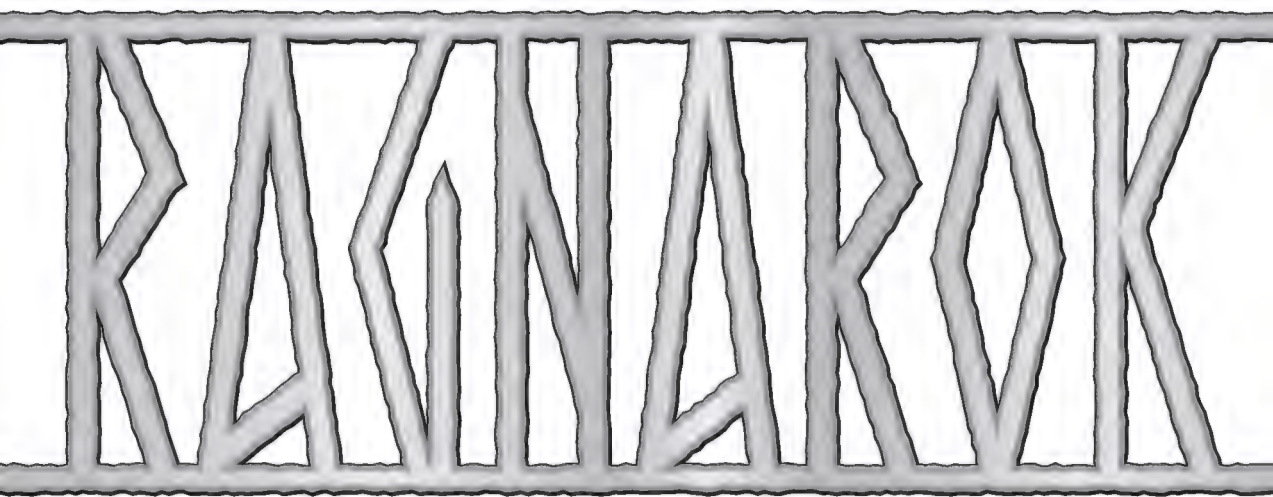


KRUEGER

YEATES

VILLARRUBIA

MARVEL
LIMITED
SERIES
2 OF 2



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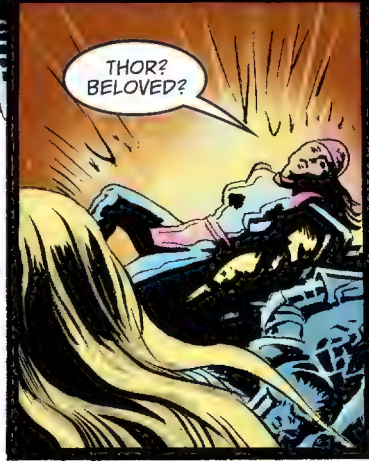
JOE QUESADA
editor in chief

BILL JEMAS
president



THERE ARE
MORE ASGARDIANS
COMING.

DO YOU REALLY
THINK *YOUR WILLS* ARE A
MATCH FOR *MINE*?



THOR?
BELOVED?



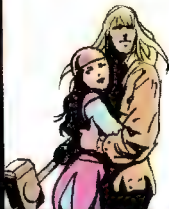
MILADY
SIF?



OH, MY
LOVE HAS
RETURNED AT
LAST!

WHAT
NOW, THOR? WILL
YOU KILL HER OR
EMBRACE THE
ILLUSION?

WILL
YOU *SLAY* HER
AS YOU DID THE
OTHERS?



I WON'T SLAY
HER. I WON'T SLAY ANY
OF THEM.

THE POWER OF
LIFE AND DEATH
ISN'T MINE TO GIVE,
FATHER...

...AND IT
SHOULDN'T BE
YOURS,
EITHER.





BUT IT IS, MY SON.

THE POWER IS MINE, WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT.

TH--



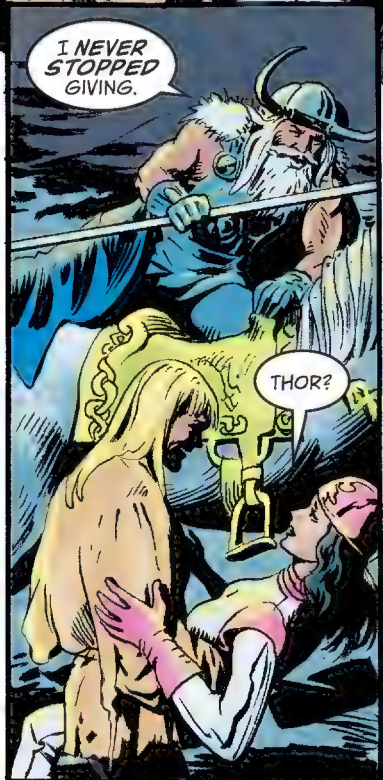
BUT I NEVER... I WOULD NEVER...

FATHER, WHY?

I WOULD NEVER MALICIOUSLY PAIN YOU, MY SON...

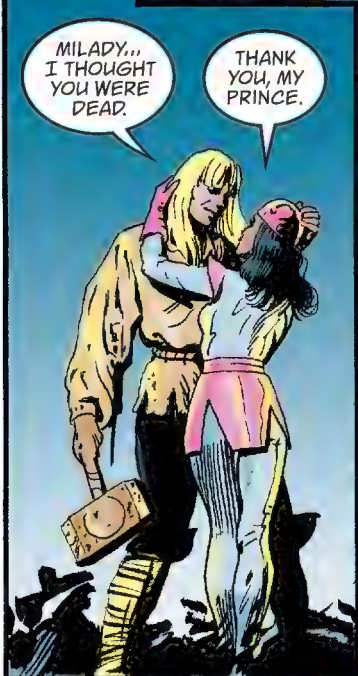
...BUT THIS PAIN WILL HELP YOU REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE. IT WILL HELP YOU REMEMBER WHAT I GAVE YOU.

I GAVE YOU, ABOVE ALL, SO MUCH.



I NEVER STOPPED GIVING.

THOR?



MILADY... I THOUGHT YOU WERE DEAD.

THANK YOU, MY PRINCE.





YOU DON'T
GET OFF *THAT*
EASILY, ODIN, YOU
OLD FOOL.

SURE YOU
GAVE TO *THOR*,
BUT WHAT ABOUT
ME?

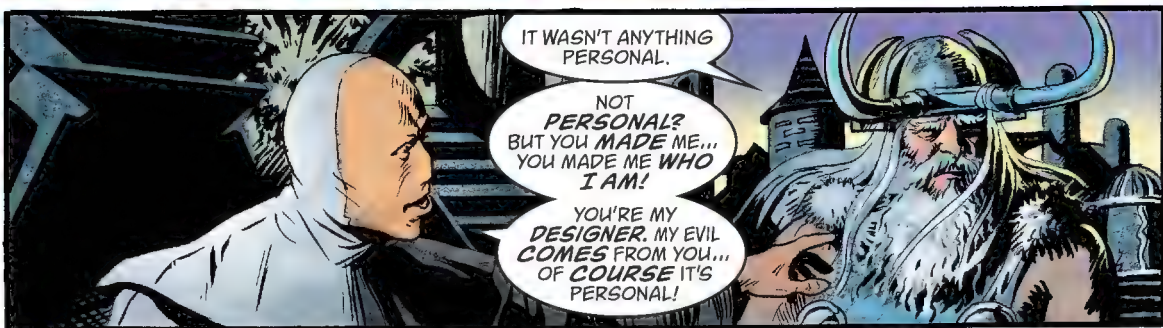


YOU MADE THIS
WORLD, EVERYTHING IN
IT, AND THEN YOU DECIDED
THERE SHOULD BE
EVIL!

WHY DID
YOU MAKE *ME*
EVIL?



BECAUSE
THERE *NEEDED*
TO BE EVIL, LOKI...
FOR *GOOD* TO
SHINE.



IT WASN'T ANYTHING
PERSONAL.

NOT
PERSONAL?
BUT YOU *MADE* ME...
YOU MADE ME *WHO*
I AM!

YOU'RE MY
DESIGNER. MY EVIL
COMES FROM YOU...
OF *COURSE* IT'S
PERSONAL!



I'M YOUR
SON, ODIN. AND
LOOK AT *WHAT*
YOU DID.



WE ARE ALL YOUR CHILDREN.

AND YOU NEVER GAVE US A CHOICE.

WHEN DID YOU EVER GIVE ANY OF US A CHOICE?

WE WERE YOUR PUPPETS.

WE FOUGHT AND DIED AND WERE BROUGHT BACK TO LIFE OVER AND OVER AGAIN FOR YOUR DAMNED COMIC BOOK NEED FOR EXCITEMENT!



I HELPED SAVE EARTH! DID YOU KNOW THAT?

I HELPED SAVE EARTH...

...CAN YOU IMAGINE WHAT THAT FEELS LIKE?

TO NOT THINK OF YOURSELF, FOR EVEN A MINUTE?

I SURE DIDN'T.



WHY, FATHER? WHY DID YOU DO THIS TO ME?



I...



WHY DID YOU DO THIS TO US?



WE COULD HAVE DONE SO MUCH **GOOD** ON EARTH, FATHER. WE COULD HAVE AVERTED SO MANY **WARS**, FED SO MANY **HUNGRY**...

...BUT INSTEAD YOU KEPT US **HERE**, ACTING OUT YOUR **FANTASIES**.

THIS ISN'T ABOUT WHAT YOU **DID**--IT'S ABOUT WHAT YOU **DIDN'T DO**. WHAT YOU **COULD HAVE DONE**.



DO YOU EVER WONDER WHY **MEPHISTO** PICKED YOU?

BECAUSE HE WANTED A **SMALL MAN** WITH **SMALL DREAMS** WHO WOULD USE US FOR **SMALL PURPOSES**.

OR CAN'T THE **ALL-SEEING ODIN** SEE THAT?



NO...I WAS THE **KEEPER OF THE STORIES**...THE **BUILDER OF GODS**...



I...**MEPHISTO**?

WHERE ARE YOU? I NO LONGER **SENSE** YOUR **PRESENCE**.



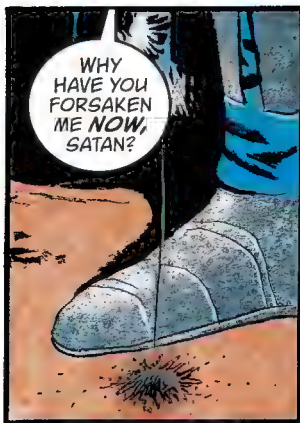
ODIN...WAS **MEPHISTO** DISGUISED AS A **BIRD** IN THIS REALM?



NO...THE **RAVENS** WERE ONLY A **TOOL** TO BEING **ALL-KNOWING**.

THIS--MY **EYE** IS **MEPHISTO**!

OR IT **WAS**, AT THE VERY **LEAST**.



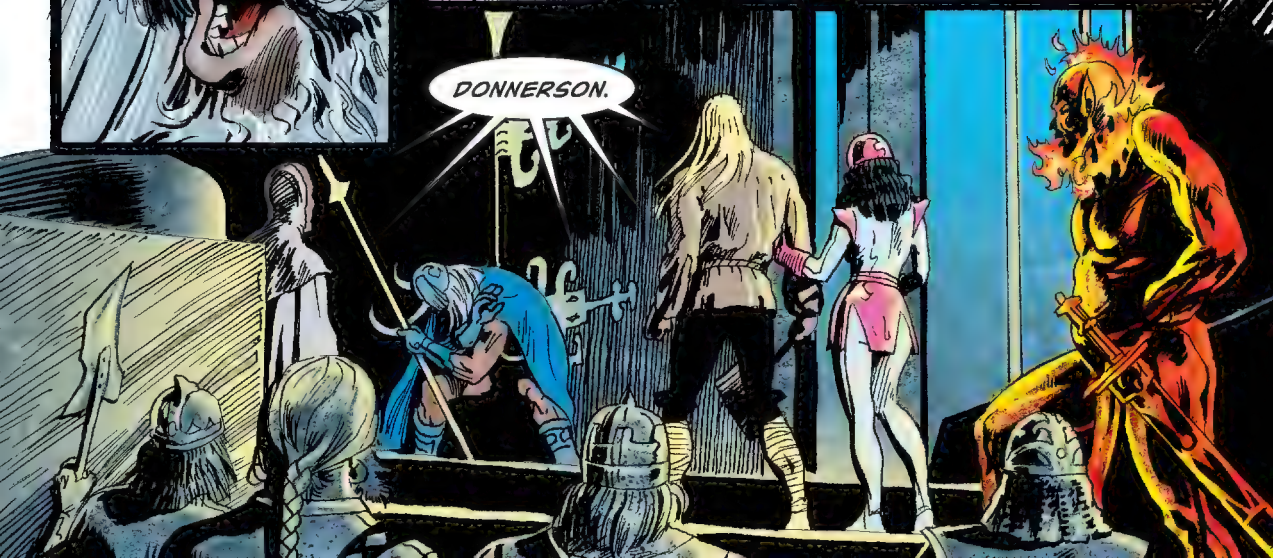
X-51, WHAT WAS
THE **NAME** THAT ODIN
HAD BEFORE HE WAS THE
ALL-FATHER?

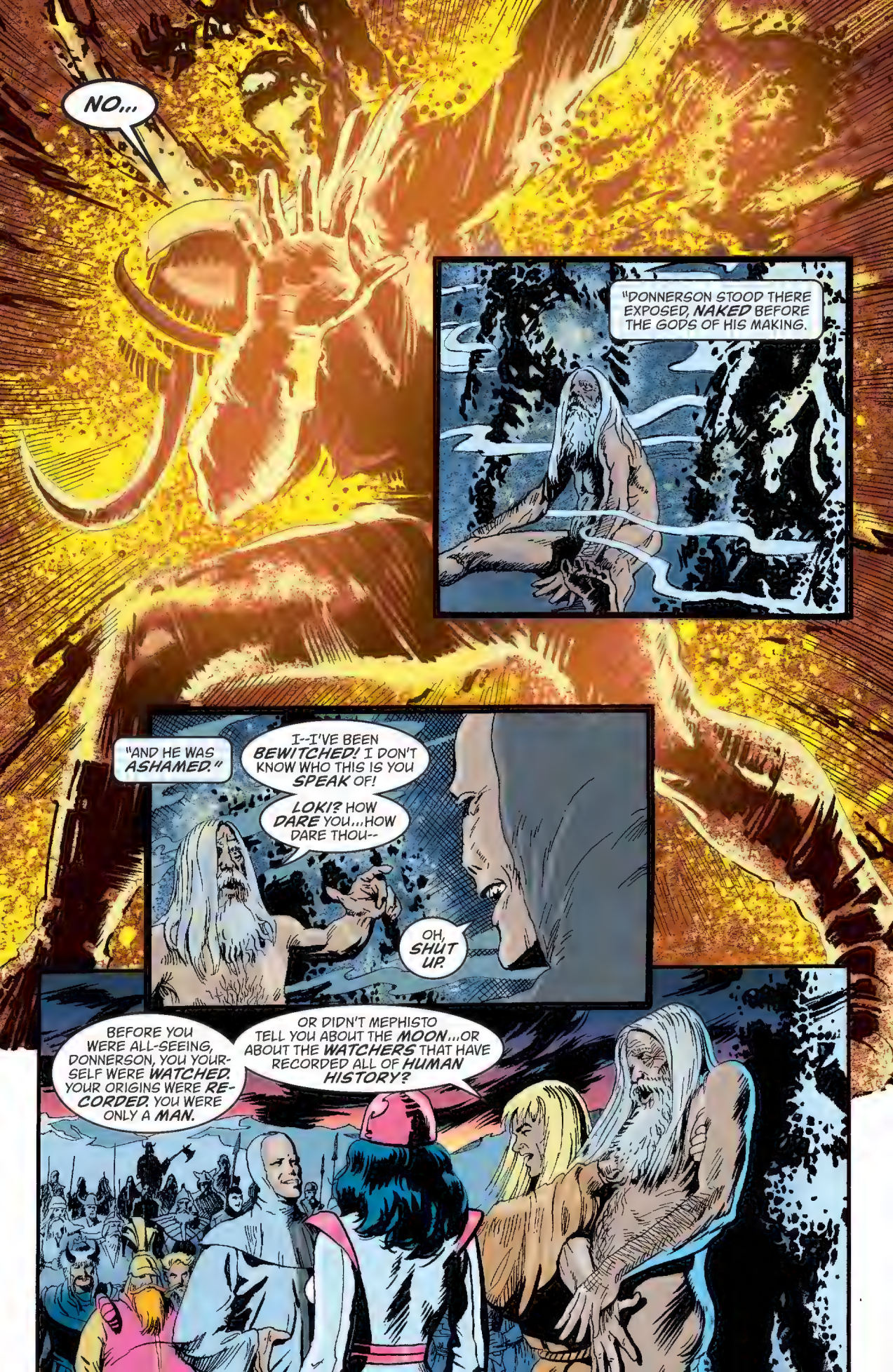
HE, TOO, IS
FORMED BY **BELIEF.**
HE TOO WILL FACE
DESTRUCTION
THIS DAY.

STILL
TRYING TO COVER UP
YOUR **BLEMISHES,**
FATHER?

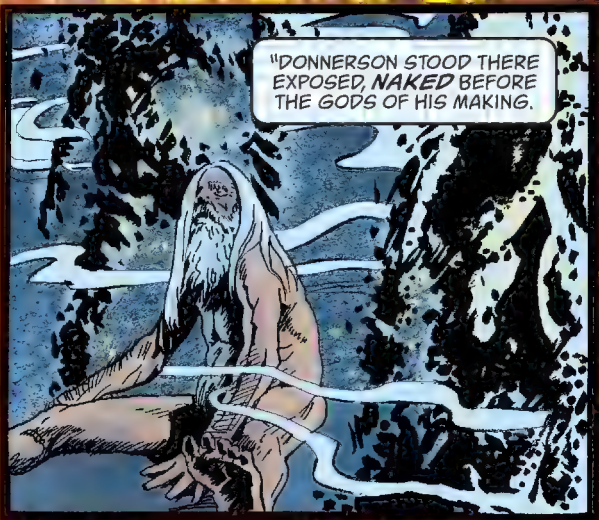


DONNERSON.





NO...



"DONNERSON STOOD THERE EXPOSED, **NAKED** BEFORE THE GODS OF HIS MAKING.

"AND HE WAS **ASHAMED**."

I--I'VE BEEN **BEWITCHED!** I DON'T KNOW WHO THIS IS YOU **SPEAK** OF!

LOKI? HOW **DARE** YOU...HOW **DARE** THOU--

OH, **SHUT UP**.

BEFORE YOU WERE ALL-SEEING, DONNERSON, YOU YOURSELF WERE **WATCHED**. YOUR ORIGINS WERE **RECORDED**. YOU WERE ONLY A **MAN**.

OR DIDN'T MEPHISTO TELL YOU ABOUT THE **MOON**...OR ABOUT THE **WATCHERS** THAT HAVE RECORDED ALL OF **HUMAN HISTORY**?



LET ME SHOW
YOU HOW TO DO THIS,
DONNERSON.

DEAD,
AWAKEN! YOU
WILL NEVER DIE
AGAIN!

ANOTHER
MYTH OF RAGNAROK
MADE REAL.



WHAT...
WHAT DO TH
TRANSPIRE?

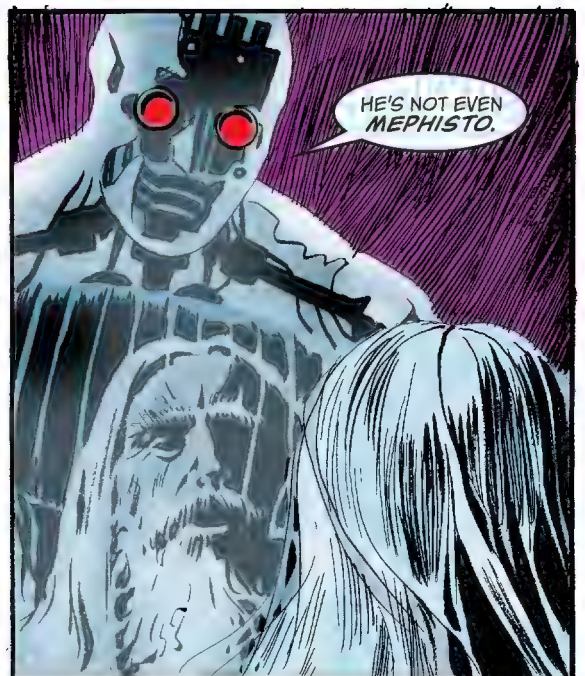
I THINK YOU
MEAN, "WHAT THE
HELL IS GOING
ON HERE?"



AARON, THERE WAS
SOMETHING YOU WANTED TO ASK
DONNERSON, NO?



YES...
MEPHISTO HID
SOMETHING IN YOUR
REALM AND THEN HE
LEFT YOU. YOU HAVE NO
WORD OR PROMISE
TO BE FAITHFUL
TO.



HE'S NOT EVEN
MEPHISTO.



YOU DIDN'T
SELL YOUR
SOUL...

...YOU
TOSSED IT
AWAY.

BELIEVING HIMSELF
TO BE THE **DEVIL** IN THE SAME
WAY YOUR BELIEF FORMED ALL OF
THOSE OTHER ASSGARDIANS, HE CAME
UP WITH A PLAN TO ESCAPE THE
JUDGMENT HE THOUGHT
HE WOULD FACE AT THE
END OF TIME.

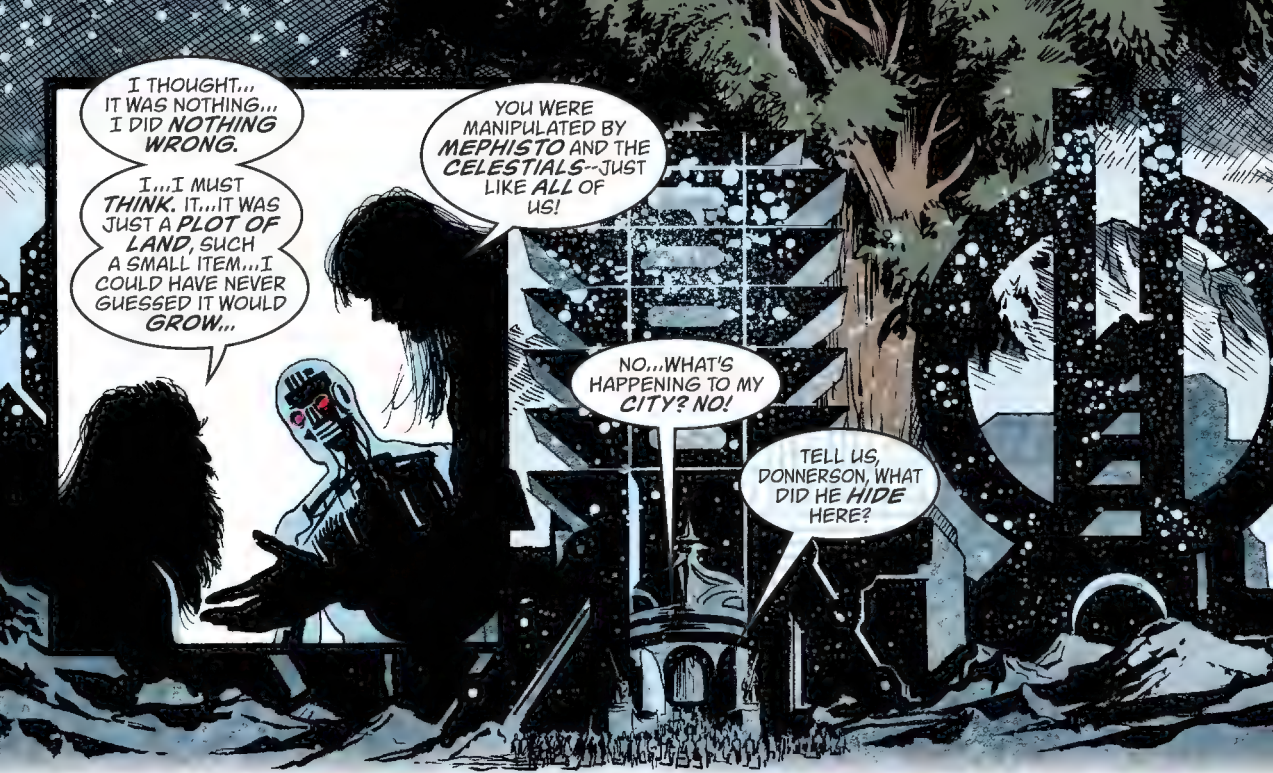
AS A RESULT,
HE CREATED A **ROAD-
BLOCK** IN LINEAR TIME, A
DETOUR BACK TO VARIOUS
POINTS ALONG THAT
TIMELINE.

HE CREATED
THOUSANDS
OF ALTERNATE TIME-
LINES...ALL OUT
OF **FEAR**.

AND HE
MANIPULATED THEM
OUT OF **HATE**.

JUST AS
HE MANIPULATED
YOU.

WHAT
DID HE **HIDE**
HERE?



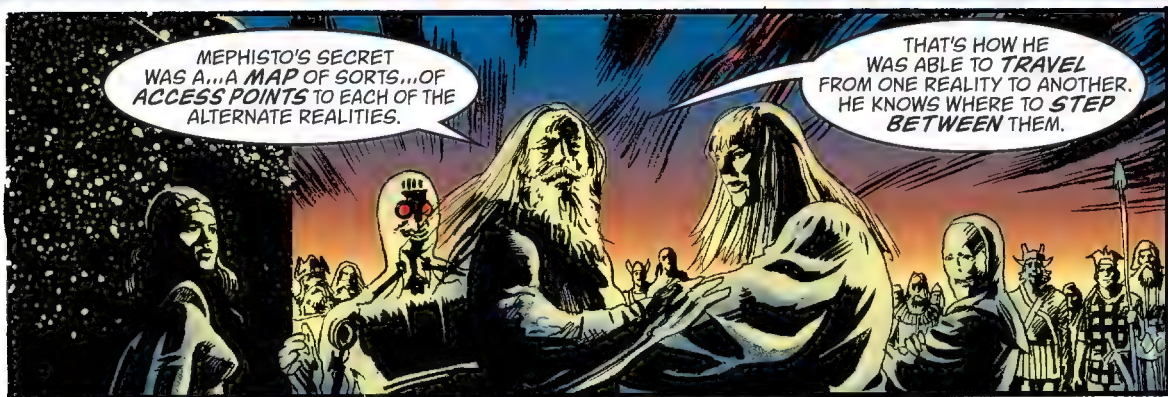
I THOUGHT...
IT WAS NOTHING...
I DID **NOTHING**
WRONG.

I...I MUST
THINK IT...IT WAS
JUST A **PLOT OF**
LAND, SUCH
A **SMALL ITEM**...I
COULD HAVE NEVER
GUESSED IT WOULD
GROW...

YOU WERE
MANIPULATED BY
MEPHISTO AND THE
CELESTIALS--JUST
LIKE **ALL OF**
US!

NO...WHAT'S
HAPPENING TO MY
CITY? NO!

TELL US,
DONNERSON, WHAT
DID HE **HIDE**
HERE?



MEPHISTO'S SECRET
WAS A...A **MAP OF SORTS**...OF
ACCESS POINTS TO EACH OF THE
ALTERNATE REALITIES.

THAT'S HOW HE
WAS ABLE TO **TRAVEL**
FROM ONE REALITY TO ANOTHER.
HE KNOWS WHERE TO **STEP**
BETWEEN THEM.



WHERE
IS THE **MAP**,
DONNER-
SON?



LET
ME **SHOW**
YOU.

THE
WORLD
ASH.

IF YOU WERE
TO TAKE A **CROSS-
SECTION** OF ITS TRUNK,
YOU WOULD FIND THAT EACH
CIRCLE WITHIN THE
TRUNK REPRESENTED
A **DIFFERENT
TIMELINE**.

THE TREE
GREW WITH EACH
NEW REALITY ADDED
TO THE MULTI-
VERSE.

THE FURTHER
THE LINE IS FROM THE
CENTER, THE **SLOWER**
TIME MOVES IN THAT
REALITY.

ON SOME
WORLDS, YOUR EARTH-
BOUND HEROES HAVEN'T
AGED AT ALL.

TO YOU,
YOU'VE HAD YOUR
ABILITIES FOR THIRTY
OR FORTY YEARS...TO
THEM IT'S ONLY BEEN
MONTHS.

IN HIS
OWN WAY, MEPHISTO
HAS GIVEN YOUR RACE
IMMORTALITY.

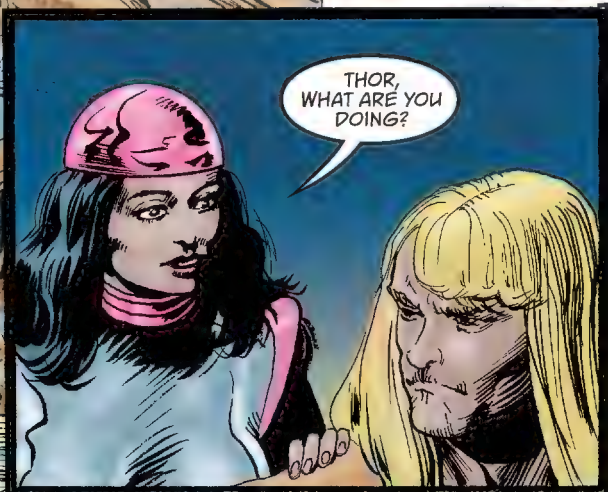
BUT AN IMMORTALITY
WE HAVE TO THANK **MEPHISTO**
FOR ISN'T IMMORTALITY AT ALL. MORE
LIKE **ETERNAL DAMNATION**, TO BE
REDONE OVER AND OVER
AGAIN...

...TO LOSE THE
SCARS AND LESSONS
LEARNED...ONLY TO BE
YOUNG AGAIN...

...TO LOSE WHAT
MAKES US **WHO WE ARE** ONLY
TO EXPERIENCE OVER AND OVER
AGAIN THE **PAINS** OF BIRTH
AND YOUTH.



THOR,
WHAT ARE YOU
DOING?



I'M MAKING
SURE MEPHISTO **STAYS**
WHERE HE IS ON OUR
EARTH.

AND I'M **FREEING**
THE OTHER WORLDS FROM
KNOWING WE EVEN **EXIST**.
IT'S **BETTER** NOT TO
KNOW.





THIS TREE HAS
BEEN GROWING FOR
THOUSANDS AND
THOUSANDS OF
YEARS!

THIS TREE
OF KNOWLEDGE MUST
FALL!



WHAT WAS SO
WRONG?



I MADE SOMETHING MYTHICAL
HERE...SOMETHING MAGICAL.



THEY HAD NO WILL...
I TAUGHT THEM WILL.

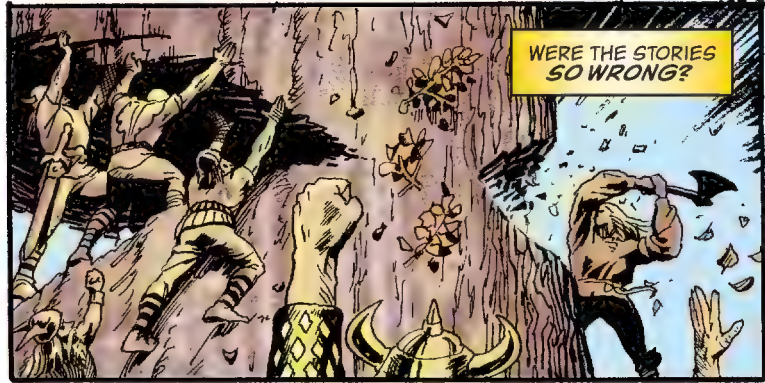
I GAVE THIS
TO THEM.



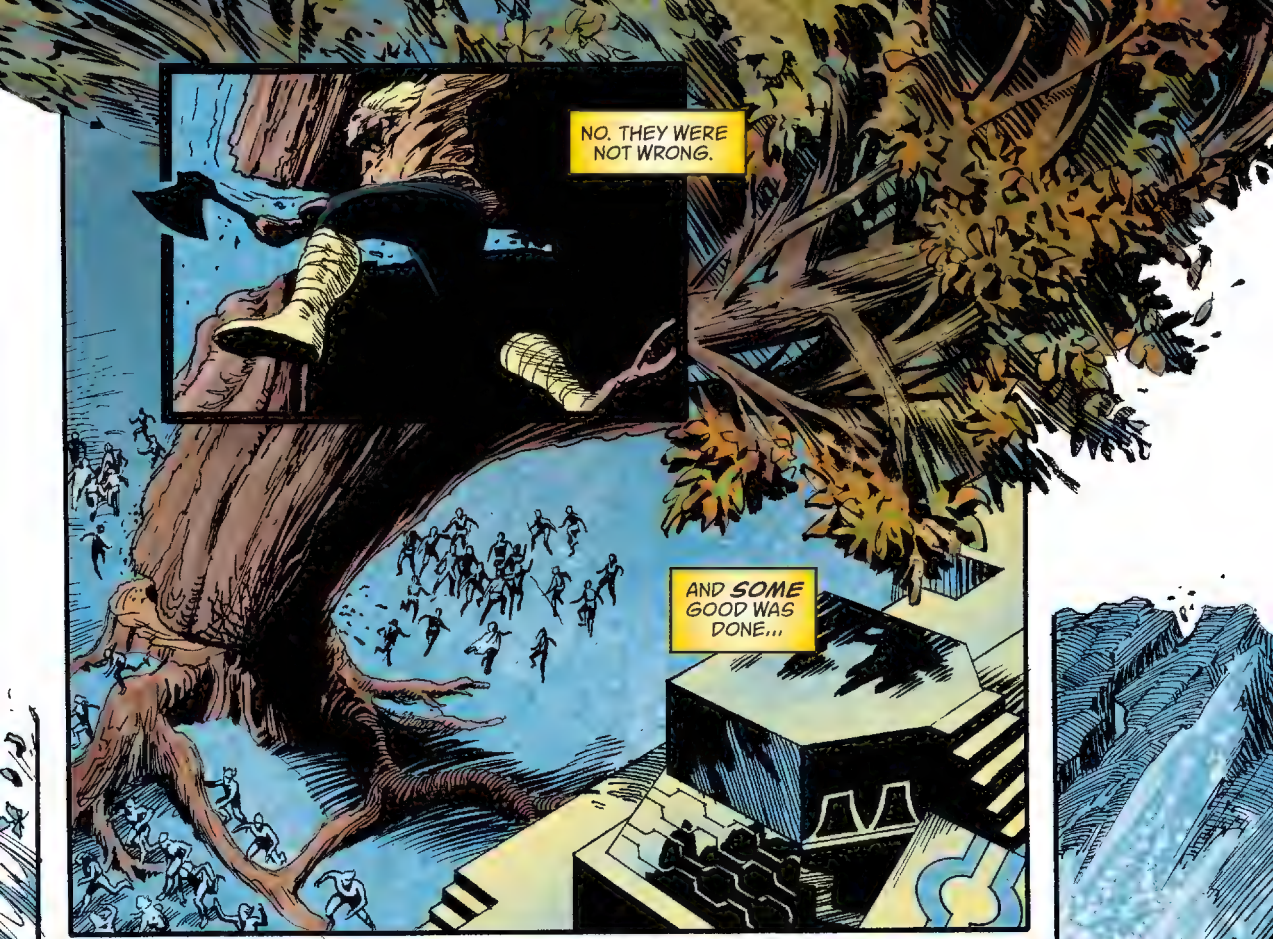
IS IT SO WRONG
TO BE A GOD?



DID I HOLD THEM DOWN? THEY,
WHO WERE NOTHING AND WHOM I
MADE GODS?

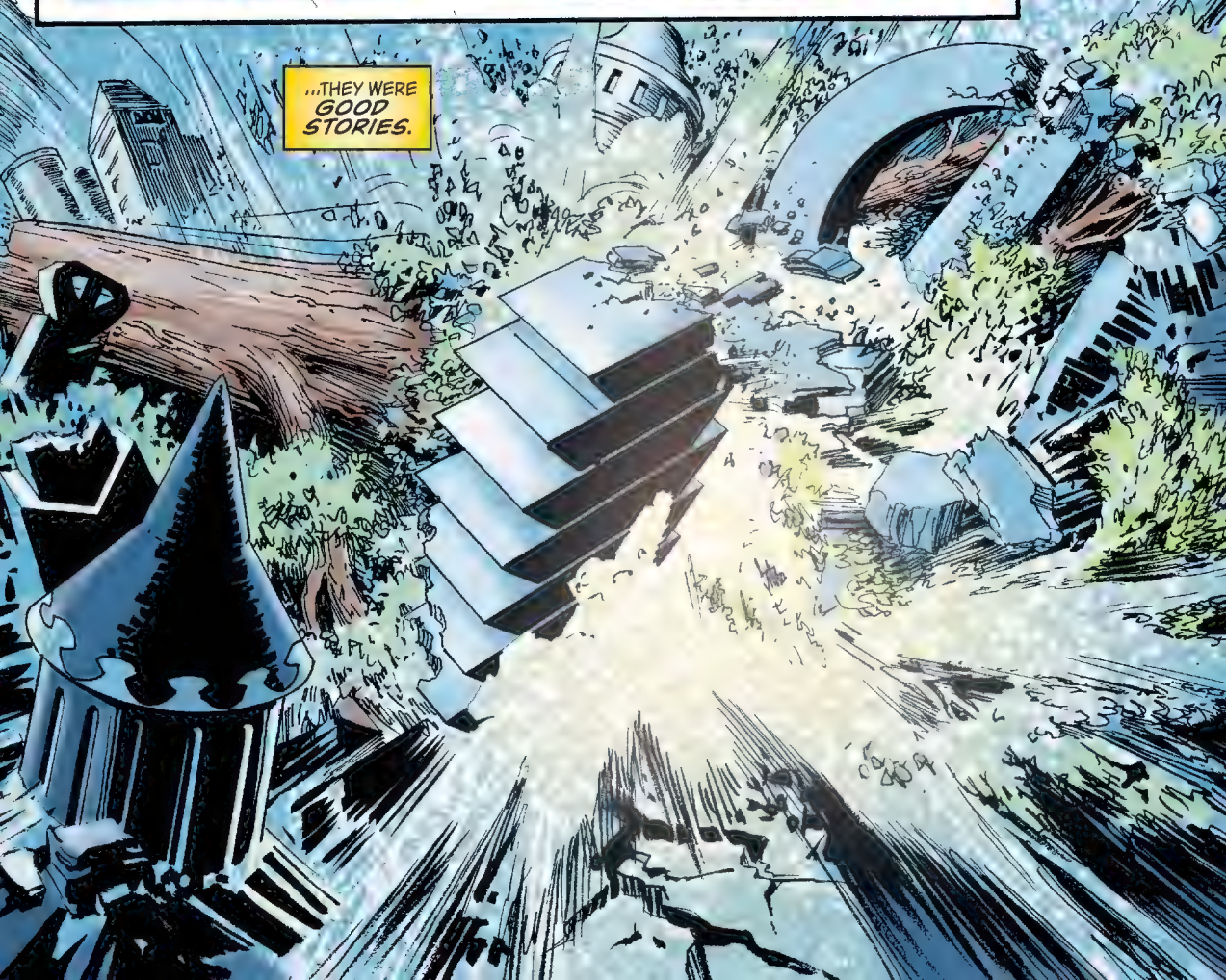


WERE THE STORIES
SO WRONG?



NO. THEY WERE
NOT WRONG.

AND SOME
GOOD WAS
DONE...



...THEY WERE
GOOD
STORIES.

BEHOLD, MY CHILDREN...BEHOLD THE "DEAD EARTH" IN THE HEAVENS.

IT IS A BLIGHT OF EVIL THAT WE MUST ALWAYS TRY TO BALANCE WITH OUR LIGHT.

YOU MUST NEVER GO THERE, MY CHILDREN, LEST ITS GRAVITY CORRUPT YOU.

YES, FATHER. THANK YOU FOR TEACHING US TO BE KIND.

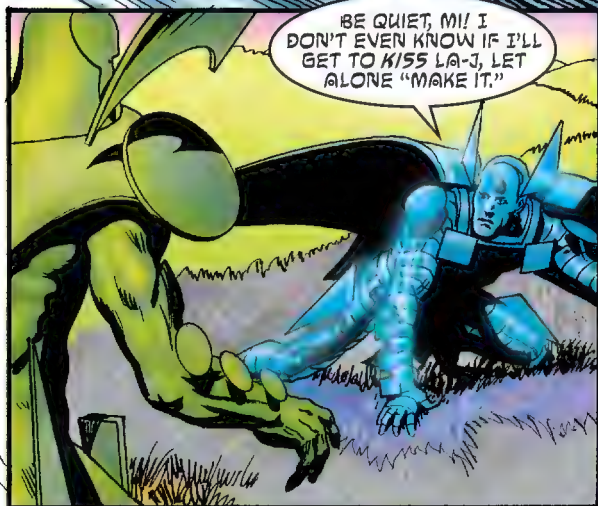
YES, FATHER. WE OBEY.

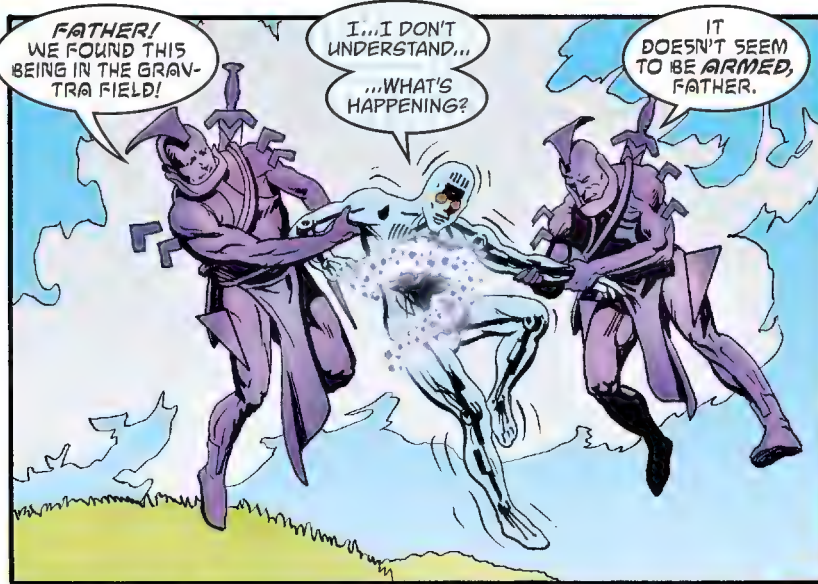
IT IS GOOD TO BE A GOD, FATHER. IT IS GOOD TO BE YOUR SONS.

AND IT IS GOOD TO BE YOUR FATHER...

...IT IS GOOD TO LIVE.





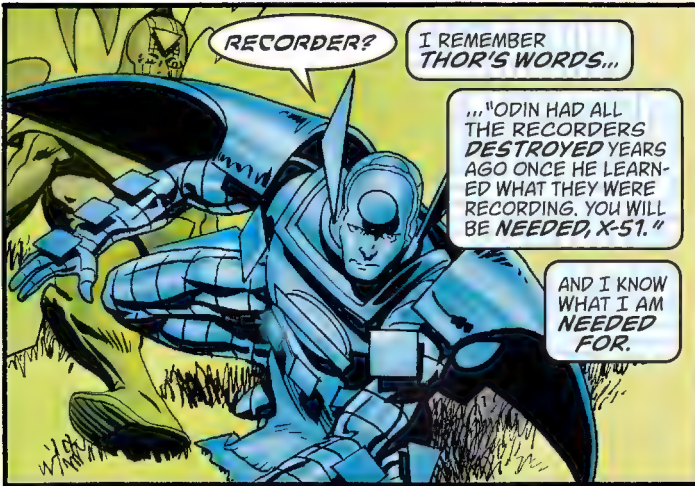


FATHER!
WE FOUND THIS
BEING IN THE GRAV-
TRA FIELD!

I...I DON'T
UNDERSTAND...
...WHAT'S
HAPPENING?

IT
DOESN'T SEEM
TO BE ARMED,
FATHER.

YET IT IS.
I HAD
FORGOTTEN ABOUT
THAT DAMNED
RECORDER.



RECORDER?

I REMEMBER
THOR'S WORDS...

...*"ODIN HAD ALL
THE RECORDERS
DESTROYED YEARS
AGO ONCE HE LEARN-
ED WHAT THEY WERE
RECORDING. YOU WILL
BE NEEDED, X-51."*

AND I KNOW
WHAT I AM
NEEDED
FOR.



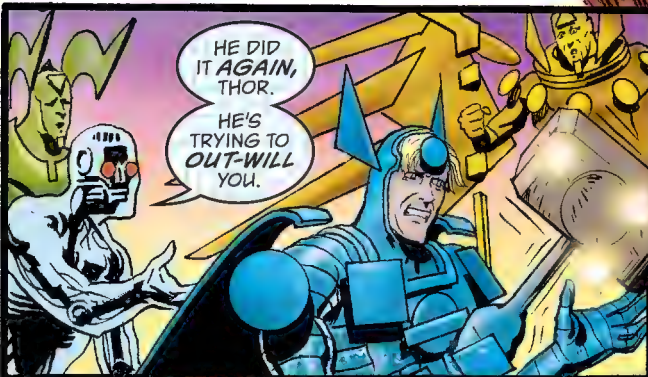
NOT...AGAINNN...
NNNOT. NNNOT. NO.

NO!



OR?

NO, NOT
OR...I AM THOR!
I SAY NO, FATHER.
NO...DONNER-
SON.

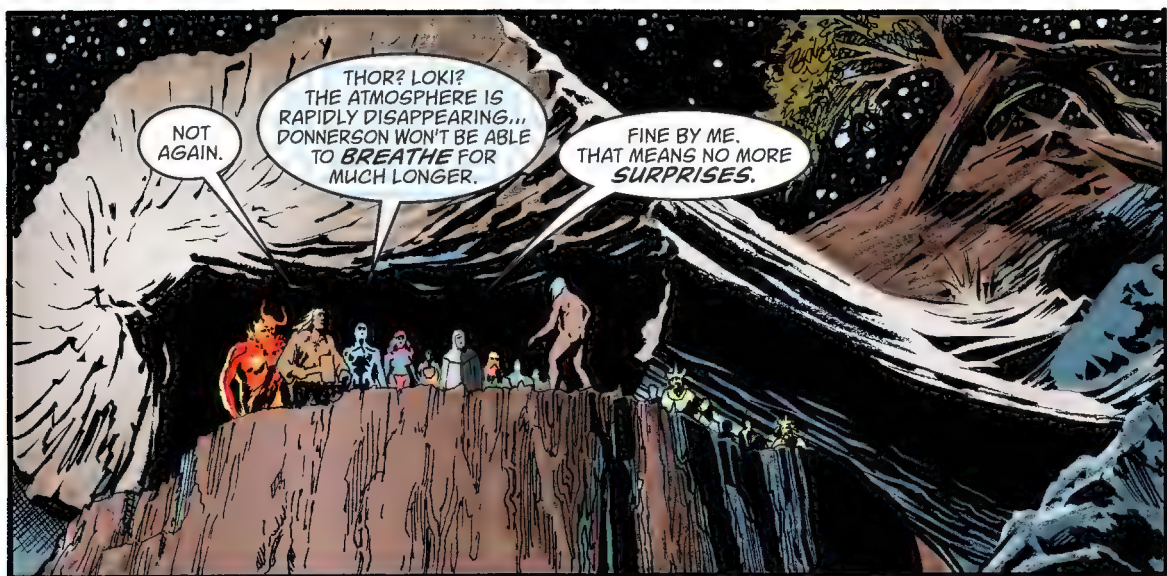


HE DID
IT AGAIN,
THOR.

HE'S
TRYING TO
OUT-WILL
YOU.

NOT
AGAIN!





NOT AGAIN.

THOR? LOKI?
THE ATMOSPHERE IS
RAPIDLY DISAPPEARING...
DONNERSON WON'T BE ABLE
TO *BREATHE* FOR
MUCH LONGER.

FINE BY ME.
THAT MEANS NO MORE
SURPRISES.



GODS.



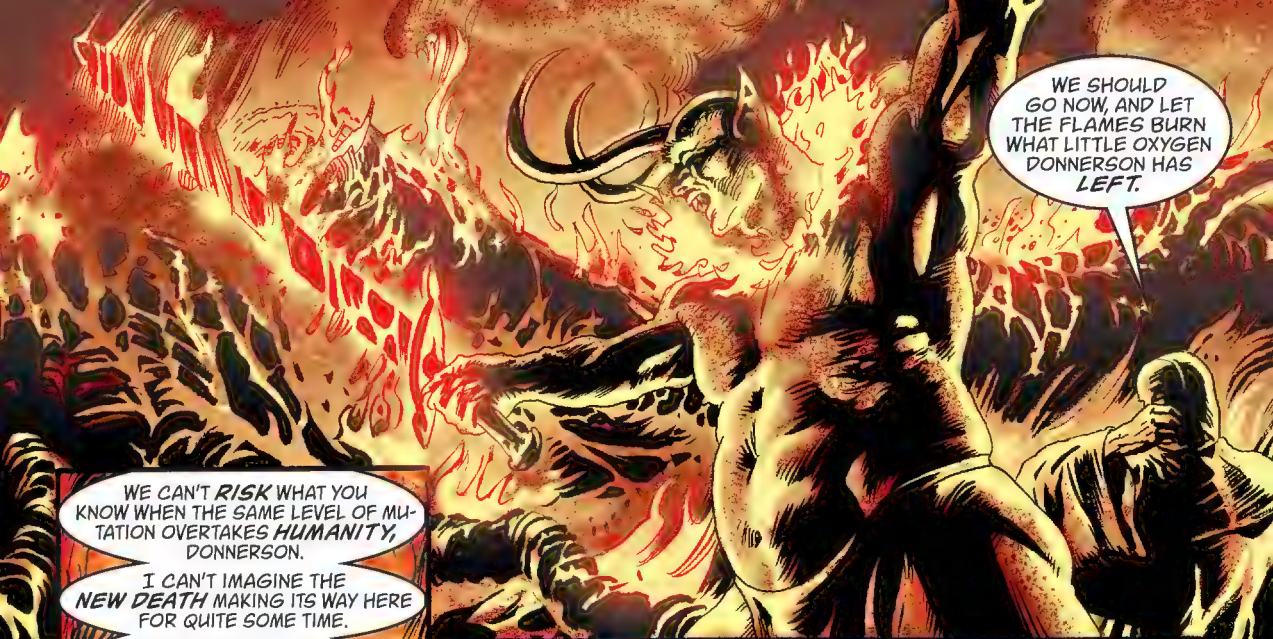
NOT *GODS*,
DONNERSON...BUT
BEINGS THAT HOPEFULLY
WON'T FORGET THE
LESSON LEARNED
HERE...

...AND
RECLAIM THE
ABILITY TO BE WHO
THEY *CHOOSE*
TO BE.



AS LONG
AS THIS CROSS-
SECTION EXISTS, THERE
IS A *MAP* MEPHISTO
COULD USE TO TRAVEL
BETWEEN DIMEN-
SIONS.

SURTUR?

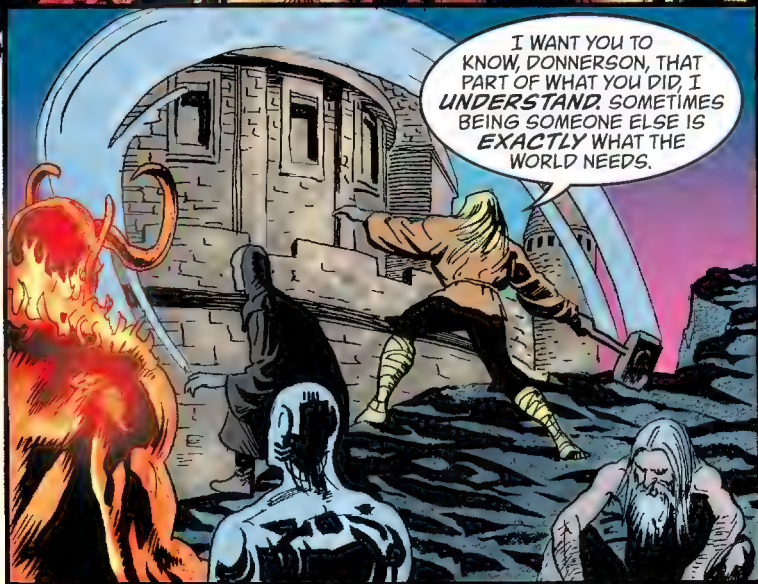


WE SHOULD GO NOW, AND LET THE FLAMES BURN WHAT LITTLE OXYGEN DONNERSON HAS LEFT.

WE CAN'T *RISK* WHAT YOU KNOW WHEN THE SAME LEVEL OF MUTATION OVERTAKES *HUMANITY*, DONNERSON.

I CAN'T IMAGINE THE *NEW DEATH* MAKING ITS WAY HERE FOR QUITE SOME TIME.

CONSIDER THIS AN *EXILE*. WHILE YOU WON'T DIE FROM LACK OF OXYGEN, ANY *WORDS* YOU SPEAK HERE IN SPACE WILL *NEVER BE HEARD*.



I WANT YOU TO KNOW, DONNERSON, THAT PART OF WHAT YOU DID, I *UNDERSTAND*. SOMETIMES BEING SOMEONE ELSE IS *EXACTLY* WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS.



IT'S *IRONIC*, ISN'T IT?

THE CELESTIALS PLANTED A *SEED* AND FROM IT GREW A *TREE*...



I DIDN'T MEAN TO *USE* YOU...

...I JUST *COULDN'T SEE*.



I NEVER WOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO HAVE A *FAMILY* OF MY OWN... I HAD *BAD EYES*...

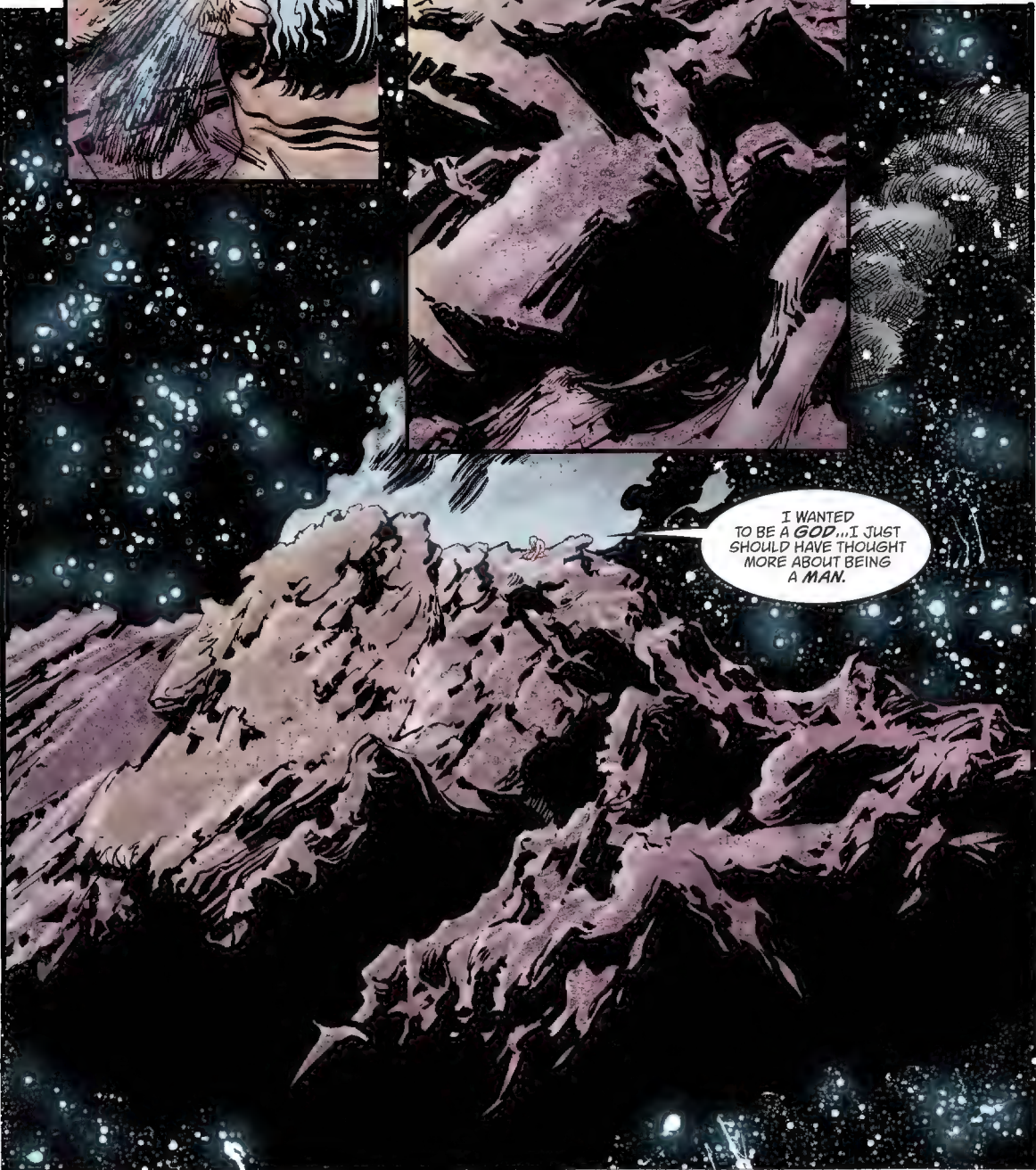
...I WAS BORN WITH A *TWISTED LEG*.



I NEVER
WOULD HAVE KNOWN
LOVE, WERE IT NOT
FOR ASGARD.



AND
FOR THAT, I AM
GRATEFUL.



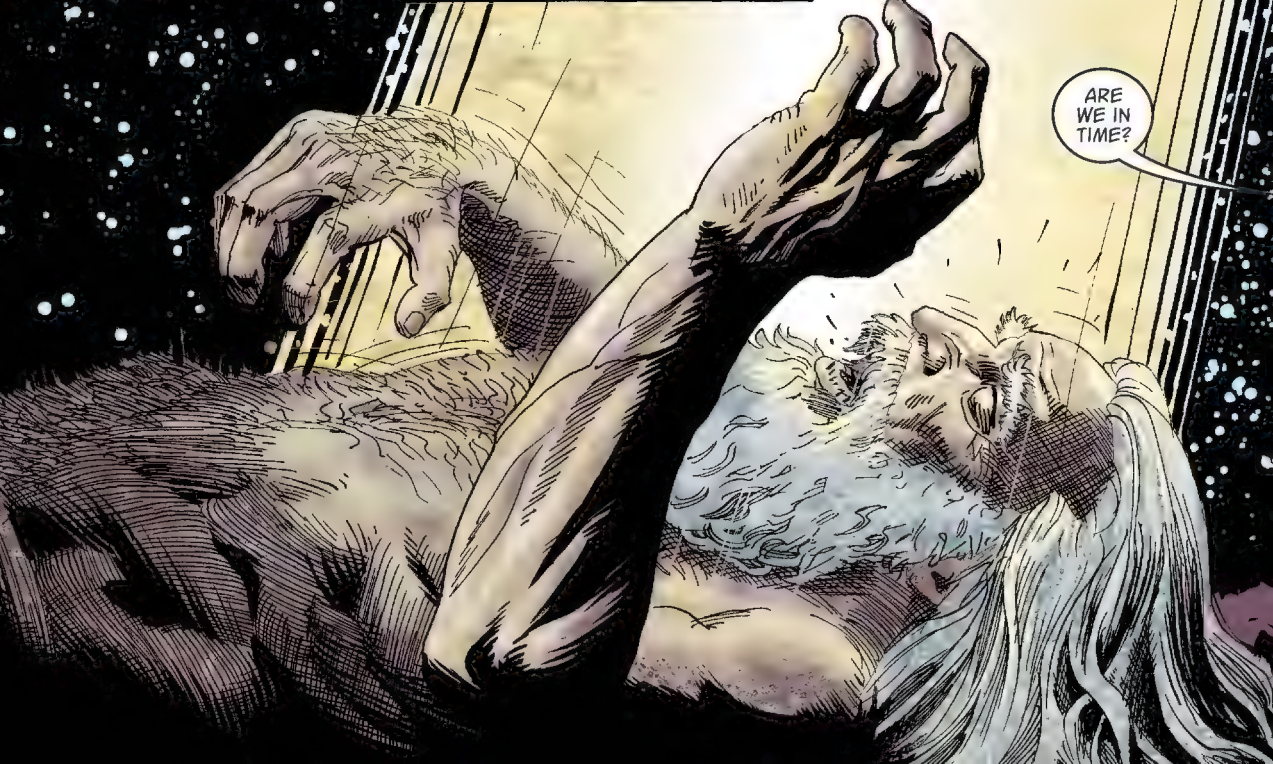
I WANTED
TO BE A *GOD*... I JUST
SHOULD HAVE THOUGHT
MORE ABOUT BEING
A *MAN*.



I ONLY HAVE
ENOUGH OXYGEN LEFT FOR
A FEW MORE WORDS. AND
THEY ARE *THESE*...



I'M SORRY.

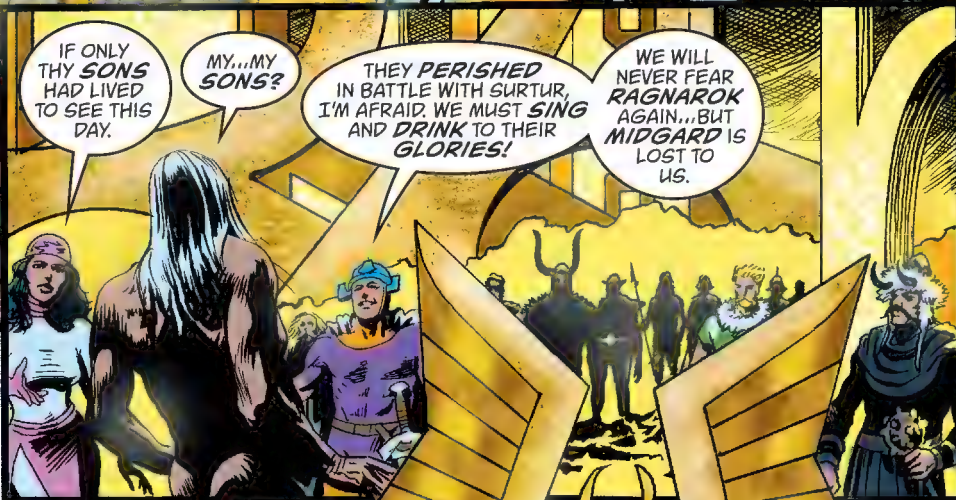


ARE
WE IN
TIME?



FATHER
ODIN! THANK THE
FATES WE HAVE FOUND
YOU! HELA SHOULD NOT
DRINK OF THY NOBLE
HERITAGE!

YOU...YOU
CAME BACK? YOU
WANT THIS...FOR YOUR-
SELVES...AFTER ALL
I'VE DONE?



IF ONLY
THY SONS
HAD LIVED
TO SEE THIS
DAY.

MY...MY
SONS?

THEY PERISHED
IN BATTLE WITH SURTUR,
I'M AFRAID. WE MUST SING
AND DRINK TO THEIR
GLORIES!

WE WILL
NEVER FEAR
RAGNAROK
AGAIN...BUT
MIDGARD IS
LOST TO
US.



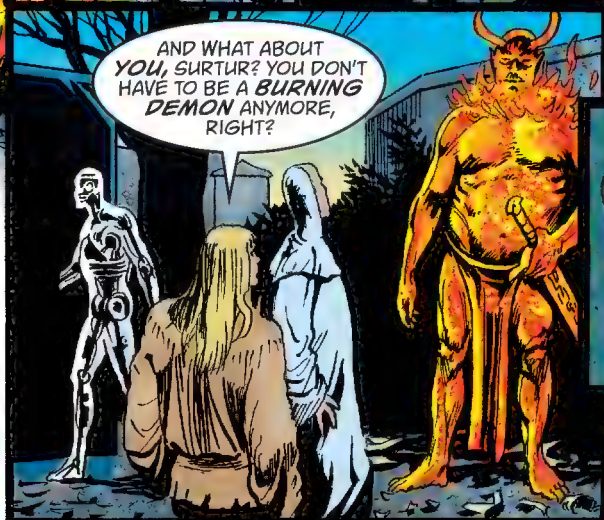
YOU
ARE ALL MY
CHILDREN.
INDEED,
YOU ARE ALL
GODS.



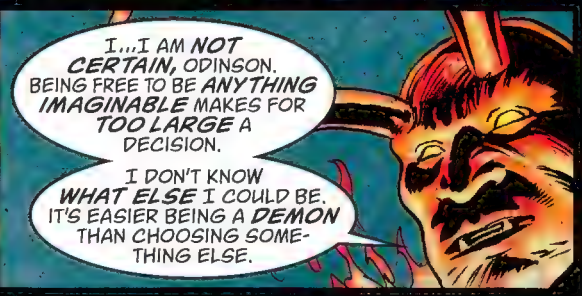
I NEED TO GET BACK TO THE MOON AND ERASE WHAT I SAW WHEN I LOOKED AT THE WORLD ASH'S CROSS-SECTION.

OTHERWISE, DESTROYING IT ISN'T GOING TO MAKE MUCH DIFFERENCE AT ALL.

THANK YOU, RECORDER. YOU DID WELL.



AND WHAT ABOUT YOU, SURTUR? YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A BURNING DEMON ANYMORE, RIGHT?



I...I AM NOT CERTAIN, ODINSON. BEING FREE TO BE ANYTHING IMAGINABLE MAKES FOR TOO LARGE A DECISION.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT ELSE I COULD BE. IT'S EASIER BEING A DEMON THAN CHOOSING SOMETHING ELSE.



BUT PERHAPS THE ROBOT WAS RIGHT. PERHAPS WE CAN'T ESCAPE OUR PASTS.

WELL HOW DO YOU LIKE THAT?



DO YOU THINK FATHER'S ALL RIGHT?

WHO CARES?



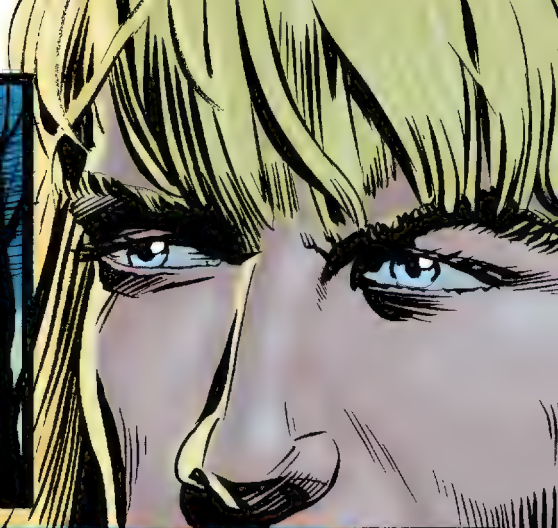
SURE, BUT WHO CAN FAULT HIM FOR WANTING TO BE LOVED? HE WANTED A FAMILY. PEOPLE TO NEED HIM. AND NOW HE'S ALL ALONE.

CAN I REALLY BLAME HIM?



YOU'RE ACTUALLY FEELING SORRY FOR HIM, THOR?

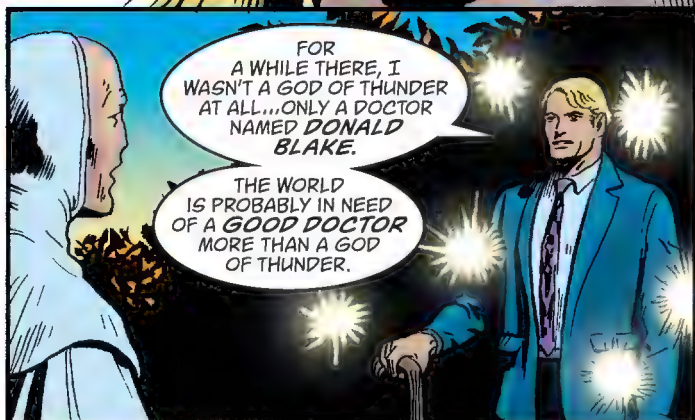
OH WAIT, I FORGOT, YOU'RE THE GOOD, BLEEDING-HEART BROTHER, WHILE I'M THE EVIL...



I...

YOU'RE ONE OF THE GOOD GUYS, LOKI. REMEMBER THAT.

SO WHAT ABOUT YOU? WHY'D YOU PICK ONE OF THE HOSPITALS TO COME TO?



FOR A WHILE THERE, I WASN'T A GOD OF THUNDER AT ALL... ONLY A DOCTOR NAMED DONALD BLAKE.

THE WORLD IS PROBABLY IN NEED OF A GOOD DOCTOR MORE THAN A GOD OF THUNDER.



"BLAKE," HUH?

SOME PEOPLE JUST CAN'T LET GO OF THE PAST.



WHAT ABOUT YOU, LOKI? WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOU?



DON'T KNOW, BLAKE.

I CREATED THE AVENGERS ONCE... MAYBE I'LL DO IT AGAIN.

MARVEL

9

TM

PARADISE



KRUEGER

BRAITHWAITE

REINHOLD

"What am I doing here, 'puter?"

"I'm trying to keep my promise, Luther Manning."

"I wasn't talking to you...you...oh, it's you, Aaron. I'm back on the moon, ain't I? You brought me back in the blink of an eye?"

"Yes."

"You've gotta give a guy some warnin' when ya yank him from one world to the next."

"Sorry."

"You said somethin' 'bout keepin' a promise?"

"I'm going to grow you a new body. You're going to be a man again."

"You can do that?"

"Yes."

"Shut up, 'puter. It's nothing personal."

"What?"

"I wasn't talking to you."

"I keep forgetting you have an internal hard drive."

"That's funny, a machine that can forget. I've been strapped to one for years. Your type never forgets."

"No. You're right, Luther, we can't forget. But that doesn't mean we don't want to. Being here is like a form of damnation, and I am only now beginning to understand that such judgments are self-imposed."

PARADISE X

I S S U E 9

JIM KRUEGER
story and script

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assistant editor

MIKE MARTS
editor

JOE QUESADA
editor in chief

BILL JEMAS
president

"LISTEN TO ME, LUTHER. YOU WERE A **SOLDIER** ONCE.

"YOU BELIEVED THAT AMERICA WAS THE PLACE WHERE ANYONE COULD BECOME ANYTHING IF THEY JUST **WORKED** AT IT HARD ENOUGH.

"BUT THIS NOTION IS NOT LIMITED TO A **SINGLE** PRINCIPALITY.

"IT'S THE NATURE OF MANKIND TO BECOME WHAT WE **DESIRE**, OR AT THE VERY LEAST, TO BECOME WHAT WE THINK WE **DESERVE**.

"LOOK AT **JOHNNY BLAZE**. ORPHANED AT A YOUNG AGE, HE BECAME THE ADOPTED SON OF 'CRASH' SIMPSON AND HIS FAMILY OF DAREDEVILS.

"JOHNNY'S FATHER, WHILE HE LIVED, WAS A **STUNT CYCLIST**.

"JOHNNY TRAINED TO FOLLOW HIS FATHER'S PATH, BUT WHEN HIS CYCLE ACCIDENTALLY CAUGHT ON FIRE, HE ALMOST KILLED HIS STEPSISTER, **ROXANNE SIMPSON**, WHO WOULD LATER BECOME THE LOVE OF HIS LIFE.

"THEN, THE ONLY WOMAN THAT JOHNNY EVER KNEW AS HIS MOTHER, HIS STEPMOTHER MONA, **DIED** THAT DAY...

"INTERESTING, ISN'T IT?"

"WHAT?"

"THAT JOHNNY BLAZE NEVER KNEW HIS **REAL MOTHER**... A FRIEND OF MINE NAMED KYLE RICHMOND SAID THAT **MEPHISTO** MADE A SIMILAR CLAIM."

"WHAT DOES **MEPHISTO** HAVE TO DO WITH ALL THIS, AARON?"

"A FEW YEARS AFTER THE DEATH OF HIS STEPMOTHER, JOHNNY DISCOVERED THAT HIS **STEFFATHER** WAS DYING OF A RARE BLOOD DISEASE.

"THERE WAS **NOTHING** THE DOCTORS COULD DO..."

"THEN THEY DIDN'T KNOW THE **RIGHT DOCTORS**. LOOK AT **ME**."

"NONETHELESS, JOHNNY COULD NOT ACCEPT THE DEATH OF YET **ANOTHER** LOVED ONE.

"AND SO WHERE **SCIENCE** HAD FAILED, JOHNNY CALLED UPON THE DARK AND SPIRITUAL **OCCULT FORCES**.

"MEPHISTO, WHO HAS ALWAYS HAD AN **OPEN-DOOR POLICY** FOR THOSE IN NEED OF A **MIRACLE**, HEARD JOHNNY'S CALL.

"IN EXCHANGE FOR BLAZE'S SERVICE, MEPHISTO GUARANTEED THAT 'CRASH' SIMPSON WOULD **NOT DIE** AS A RESULT OF HIS BLOOD DISEASE."

"SO SIMPSON LIVED?"

"NO, LUTHER. HE DIED SHORTLY THERE-AFTER IN ONE OF HIS **STUNT SHOWS**. BUT HE HADN'T DIED IN A HOSPITAL BED, JUST LIKE MEPHISTO HAD **PROMISED**.

"SO MEPHISTO WENT AFTER BLAZE, READY TO **CLAIM HIS SOUL**.

"JOHNNY'S CURSE WAS HALF-SPOKEN WHEN ROXANNE **BLOCKED** THE DEVIL'S DAMNATION OF BLAZE WITH A **COUNTER-CURSE**, BELIEVING SHE HAD ARRIVED IN TIME TO SAVE HIM.

"AND THE TRUTH IS, SHE **DID** SAVE HIM. MEPHISTO HAD **NO POWER** OVER HIM... **PER SE**."

"WHAT'S THAT MEAN, AARON?"

"THAT ROXANNE WAS IN TIME TO SAVE JOHNNY FROM **MEPHISTO**... BUT THAT DIDN'T MEAN SHE COULD SAVE BLAZE FROM **HIMSELF**."



"JOHNNY BLAZE'S **MOTHER** DIED SHORTLY AFTER HE WAS BORN. COMPLICATIONS FROM **CHILDBIRTH**.

"HIS **REAL FATHER** DIED THE SAME WAY HIS **ADOPTED FATHER** DID. IN **FLAMES**. ON A **BIKE**.

"AND THE ONLY MOTHER HE EVER KNEW, HIS **STEP-MOTHER**, ALSO DIED ON A **FLAMING BIKE**.

"JOHNNY BLAZE **BLAMED HIMSELF** FOR ALL OF THESE **DEATHS**...

"...AND UNKNOWINGLY **TRIGGERED** HIS OWN DORMANT **CELESTIAL SEED** WITH HIS FUMBLING DABBLINGS IN **MAGIC**.

"HIS **GUILT** OVER EVERYONE HE CARED FOR DYING ON A **BIKE** OF **FLAMES** CAUSED A TRANSFORMATION HE BELIEVED WAS **SUPER-NATURAL** IN DESIGN, NOT **BIOLOGICAL**.

"THE **GHOST RIDER** WAS BORN, NOT BECAUSE **MEPHISTO'S CURSE** WAS INTERRUPTED, BUT BECAUSE **JOHNNY BLAZE** FELT **GUILTY**, AND BELIEVED HE SHOULD SPEND THE REST OF HIS EXISTENCE STRAPPED TO A **BURNING BIKE**.

"I'M SORRY, LUTHER, I KNOW THIS IS ALL **SO MUCH** TO GRASP AT ONCE..."

"...BUT YOU MUST KNOW THAT THERE IS A **SEED** IN EVERY MAN...A SEED THAT, ONCE GERMINATED, HAS THE POTENTIAL TO GIVE EACH MAN THE ABILITY TO **BE ANYTHING** AND **BECOME ANYTHING**.

"BUT HUMANITY IS A **FEARFUL RACE**. A **SMALL-MINDED** COLLECTION OF BEINGS THAT CAN SEE **SO LITTLE** SO MUCH OF THE TIME.

"LIKE **JOHNNY BLAZE** OR THE **HELLSTROM CHILDREN**, WE ARE MOLDED AND GIVEN FORM BY **GUILT**...BY THE BELIEF THAT WE MUST BE **DAMNED** FOR THE POWER WE POSSESS.

"I ONCE BELIEVED THE MUTATION OF MANKIND WOULD LEAD US TO BECOME LIKE THE **CELESTIALS**. LIKE THE **GODS** THEMSELVES.

"BUT I WASN'T THINKING LIKE A **MAN** WHEN I HOPED FOR THAT.

"WHY DO WE HAVE A MUTATED MAN TAKE ON THE ROLE OF A **DEVIL** BUT NOT OF A **GOD**?"

"IT'S BECAUSE WE WANT SOMEONE TO **DEAL** WITH THE THINGS WE FEEL **GUILTY** OVER.

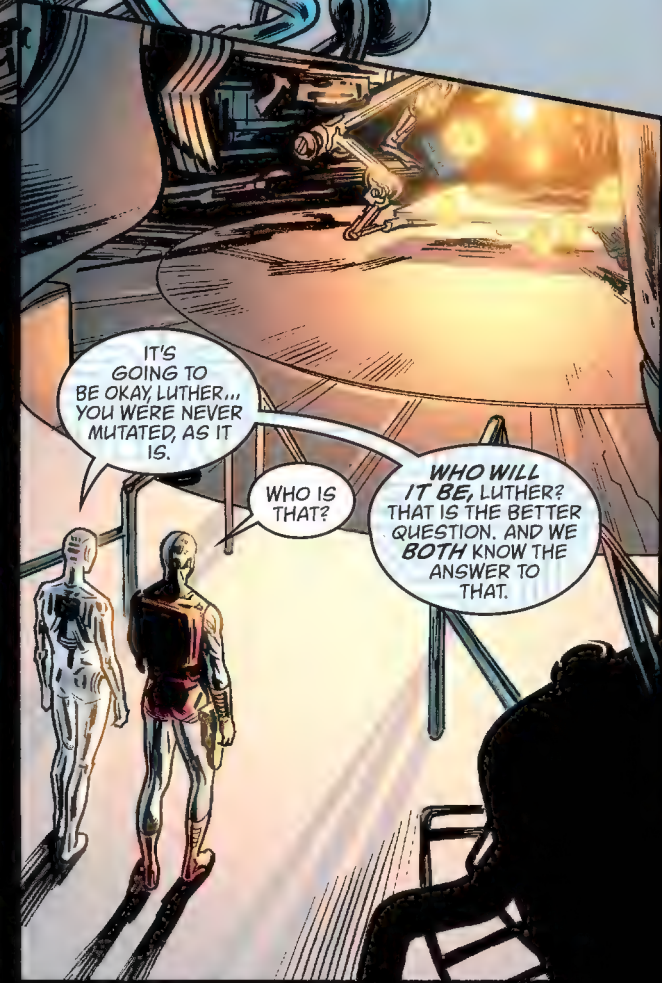
"NOT BECAUSE WE DON'T WANT TO BE **SAVED** FROM OUR **GUILT**... BUT BECAUSE WE **CAN'T BELIEVE IT**."



I NEVER
DID ANYTHIN'
TO DESERVE
THIS.

BUT
DIDN'T YOU,
LUTHER?

I'VE SEEN
EVERYTHING. YOU
WERE A SOLDIER. AND
WHEN YOU BECAME
DEATHLOK, LIFE
LOST ALL MEAN-
ING FOR YOU.



IT'S
GOING TO
BE OKAY, LUTHER...
YOU WERE NEVER
MUTATED, AS IT
IS.

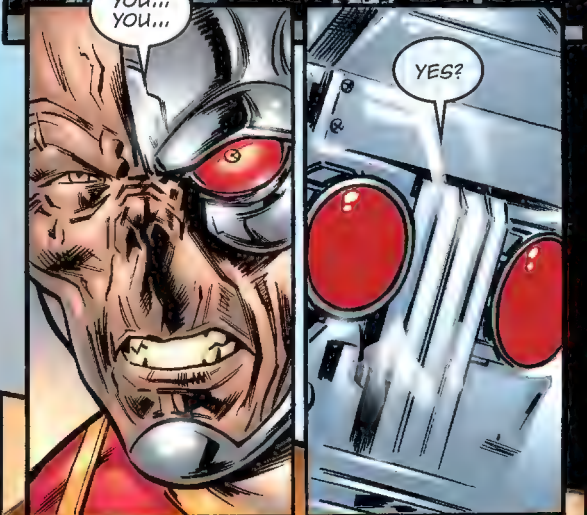
WHO IS
THAT?

**WHO WILL
IT BE, LUTHER?**
THAT IS THE BETTER
QUESTION. AND WE
BOTH KNOW THE
ANSWER TO
THAT.



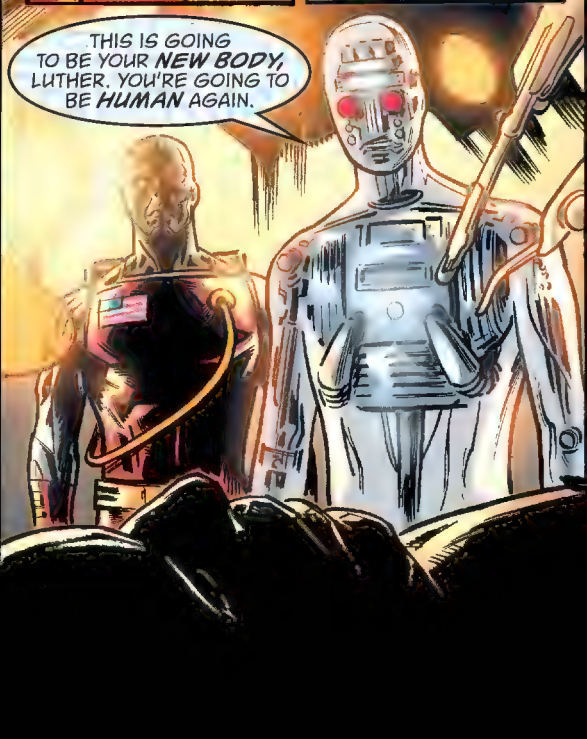
SHUT
UP.

YOU DON'T
KNOW WHAT IT'S
LIKE BEIN' ME...
BEIN' MORE
MACHINE THAN
HUMAN...



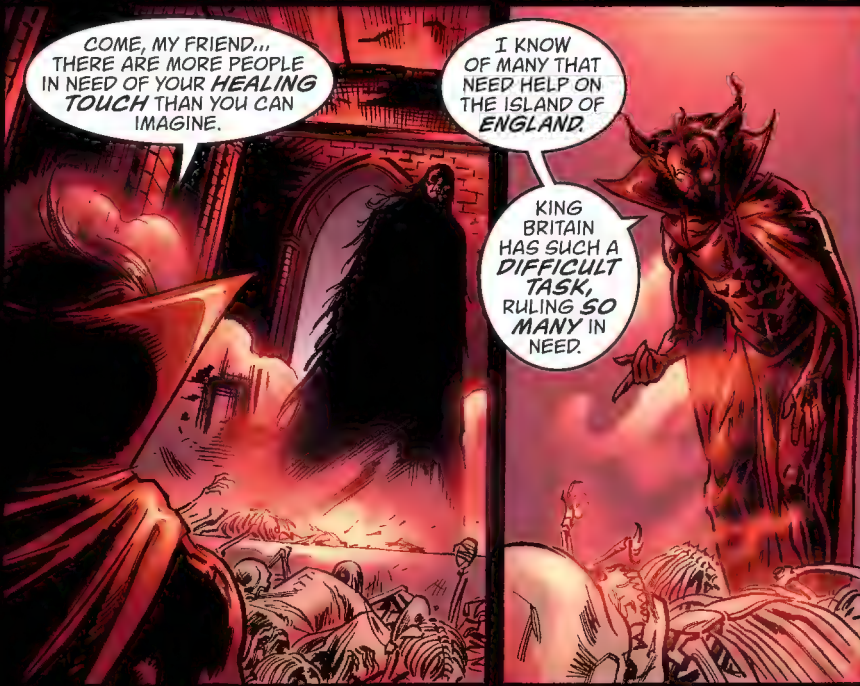
YOU...
YOU...

YES?



THIS IS GOING
TO BE YOUR **NEW BODY**,
LUTHER. YOU'RE GOING TO
BE **HUMAN** AGAIN.

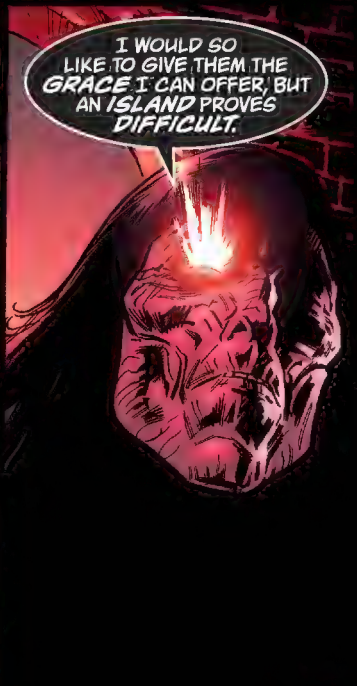




COME, MY FRIEND...
THERE ARE MORE PEOPLE
IN NEED OF YOUR **HEALING
TOUCH** THAN YOU CAN
IMAGINE.

I KNOW
OF MANY THAT
NEED HELP ON
THE ISLAND OF
ENGLAND.

KING
BRITAIN
HAS SUCH A
**DIFFICULT
TASK,**
RULING **SO
MANY** IN
NEED.



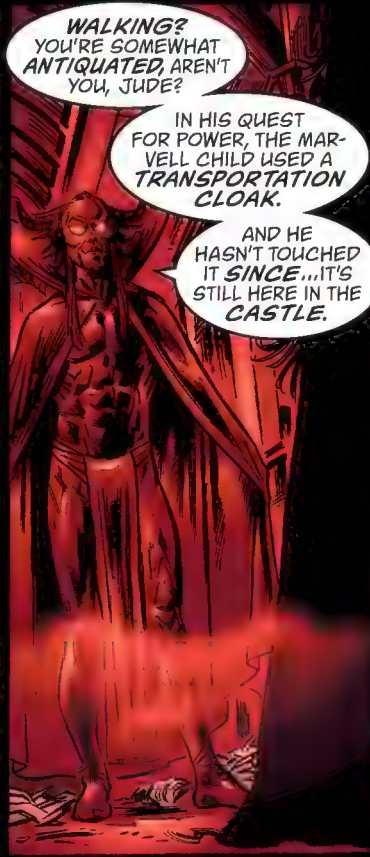
I WOULD SO
LIKE TO GIVE THEM THE
GRACE I CAN OFFER, BUT
AN **ISLAND** PROVES
DIFFICULT.



WHY?



BECAUSE
THIS **PATH** I HAVE
BEEN GIVEN TO WALK
IS ONE THAT I **DO WALK.**
AND THAT MAKES
REACHING **ISLANDS**
DIFFICULT.



WALKING?
YOU'RE SOMEWHAT
ANTIQUATED, AREN'T
YOU, JUDE?

IN HIS QUEST
FOR POWER, THE MAR-
VELL CHILD USED A
**TRANSPORTATION
CLOAK.**

AND HE
HASN'T TOUCHED
IT **SINCE...** IT'S
STILL HERE IN THE
CASTLE.



OF COURSE,
YOU UNDERSTAND THAT
ANY ATTEMPT TO **SHARE**
YOUR GIFT OF ENTROPY
WITH ME WILL LEAVE
YOU **LOST** IN THE
CLOAK--

--UNABLE
TO SHARE IT
WITH **ANYONE
ELSE.**

AND
NEITHER OF US
WANTS **THAT,** DO
WE?



I HATE
THE NEGATIVE
ZONE, STRETCH!
I REALLY
DO!

DON'T
TALK LIKE THAT,
BEN. WE'RE HERE
TO SAVE IT.

ALONG WITH
EVERYTHING
ELSE.

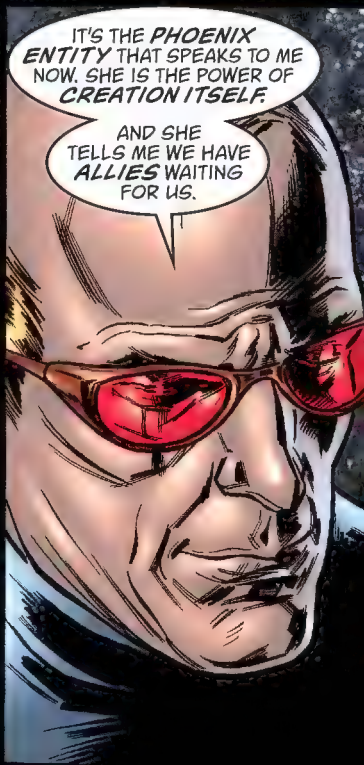


IT'S
THIS
WAY.



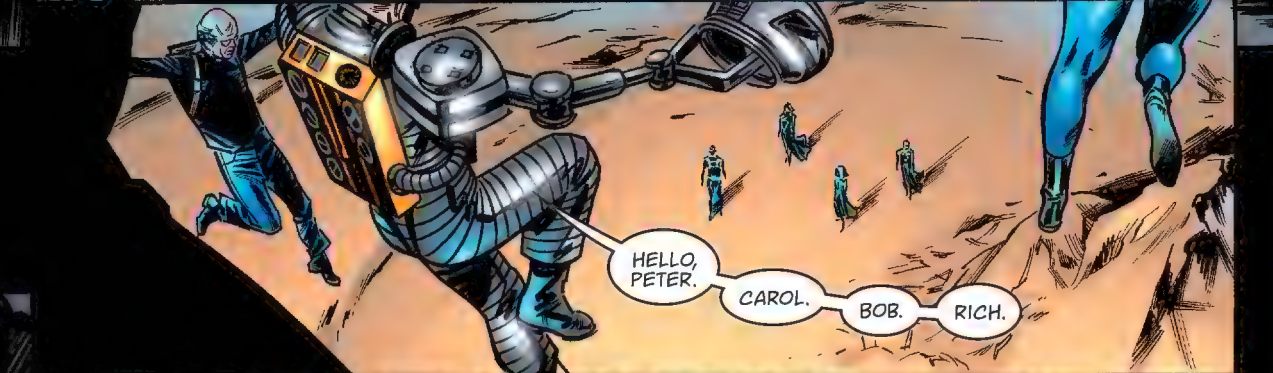
YOUR *PSYCHIC*
RAPPORT WITH JEAN,
SCOTT...ARE YOU CER-
TAIN IT'S JEAN WHO
SPEAKS TO YOU?

YOU MAKE
THE SAME MISTAKE
THAT I DID, REED. IT'S
NOT JEAN. IT NEVER
WAS.



IT'S THE *PHOENIX*
ENTITY THAT SPEAKS TO ME
NOW. SHE IS THE POWER OF
CREATION ITSELF.

AND SHE
TELLS ME WE HAVE
ALLIES WAITING
FOR US.





IT'S
RIGHT IN
FRONT OF
YOU.

OH, MY
GOD.



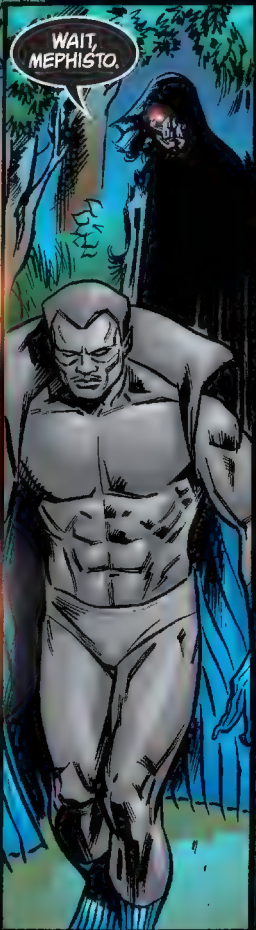
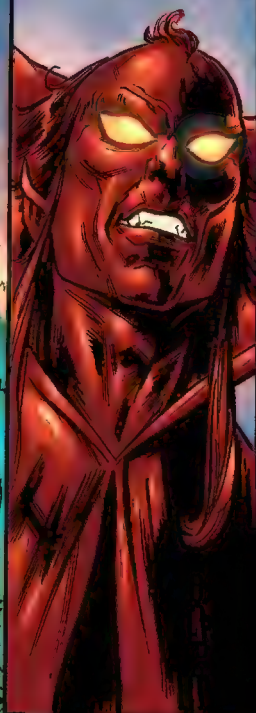
AH, MERRY
OLD ENGLAND...
NOW DOESN'T THIS
BEAT *WALKING*,
JUDE?

LET'S
HAVE *FUN*
WITH A FEW
GUARDS...

HAVE
TO PUT
MY *FACE*
ON.

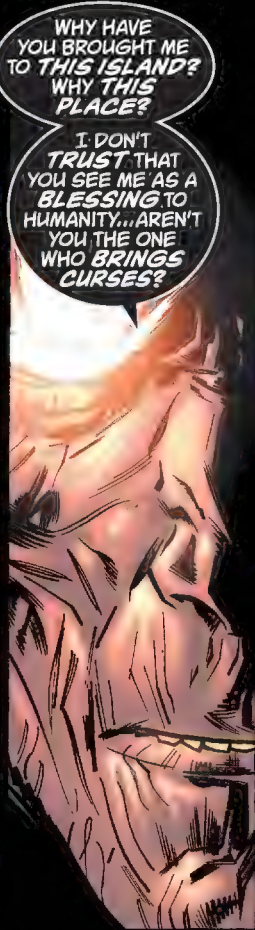
THERE.

I'LL LET
YOU KNOW
WHEN YOU'RE
NEEDED.



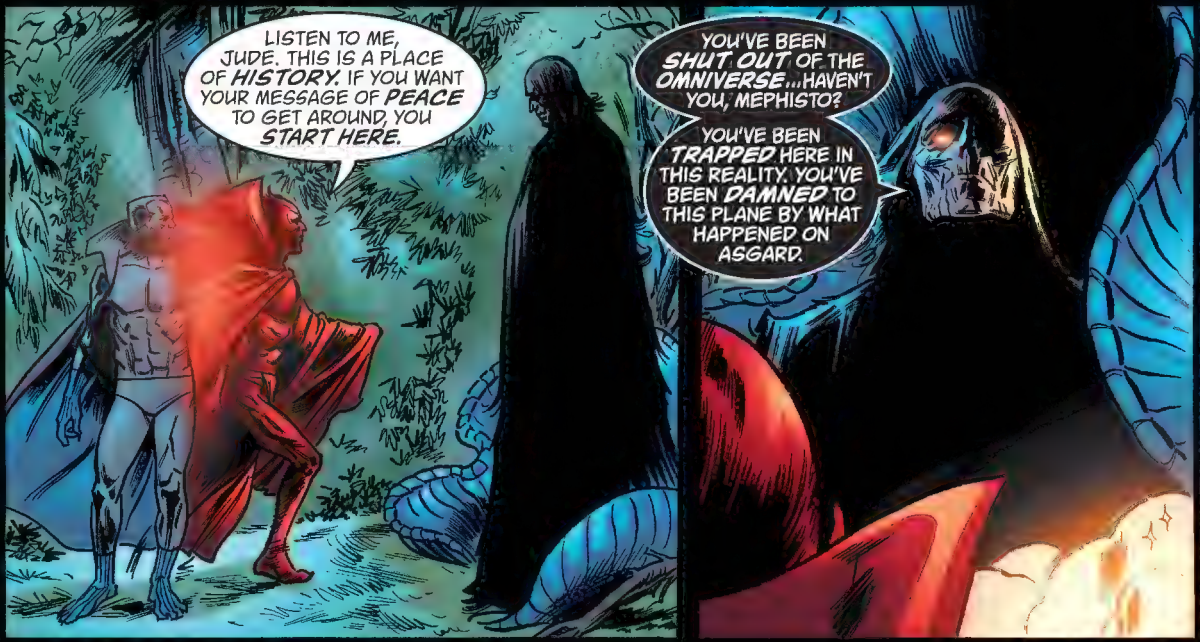
WAIT,
MEPHISTO.

WAIT?
WHAT
FOR?



WHY HAVE
YOU BROUGHT ME
TO *THIS ISLAND*?
WHY *THIS*
PLACE?

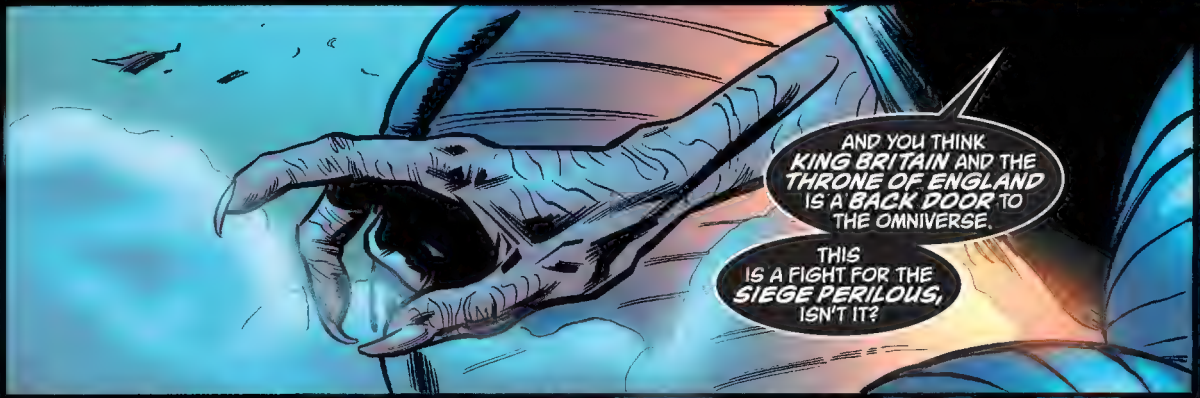
I DON'T
TRUST THAT
YOU SEE ME AS A
BLESSING TO
HUMANITY...AREN'T
YOU THE ONE
WHO *BRINGS*
CURSES?



LISTEN TO ME, JUDE. THIS IS A PLACE OF *HISTORY*. IF YOU WANT YOUR MESSAGE OF *PEACE* TO GET AROUND, YOU *START HERE*.

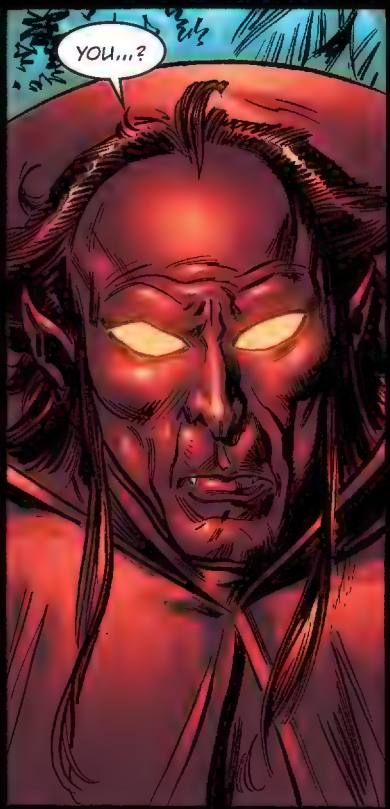
YOU'VE BEEN *SHUT OUT* OF THE *OMNIVERSE*...HAVEN'T YOU, MEPHISTO?

YOU'VE BEEN *TRAPPED* HERE IN THIS REALITY. YOU'VE BEEN *DAMNED* TO THIS PLANE BY WHAT HAPPENED ON ASGARD.

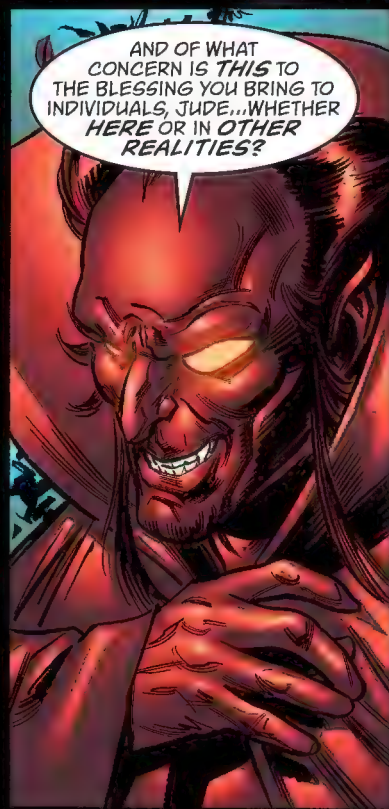


AND YOU THINK *KING BRITAIN* AND THE *THRONE OF ENGLAND* IS A *BACK DOOR* TO THE *OMNIVERSE*.

THIS IS A FIGHT FOR THE *SIEGE PERILOUS*, ISN'T IT?



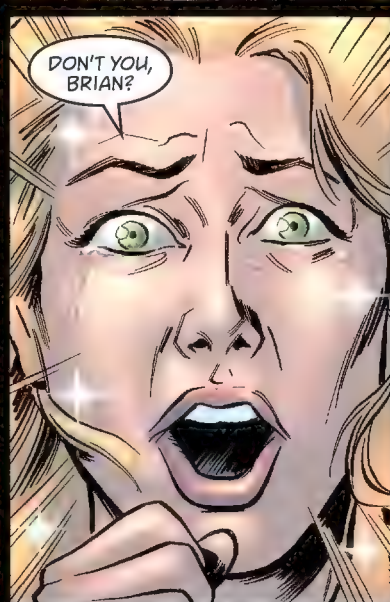
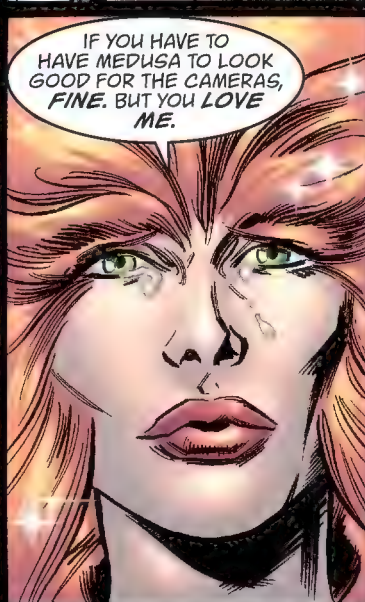
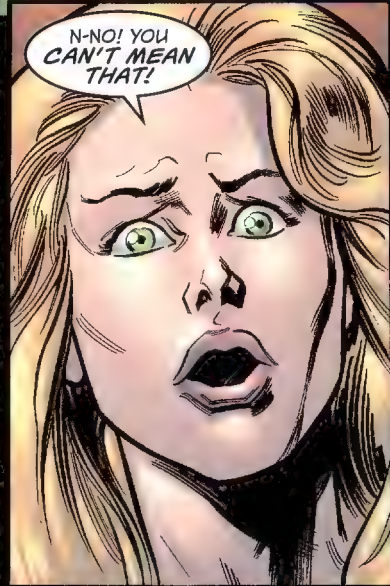
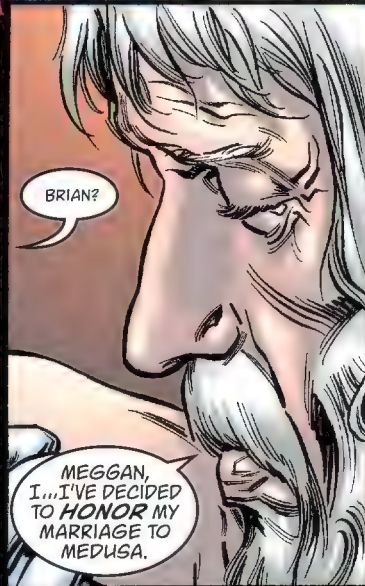
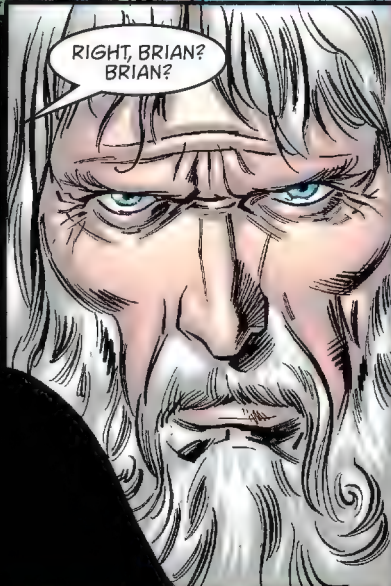
YOU...?

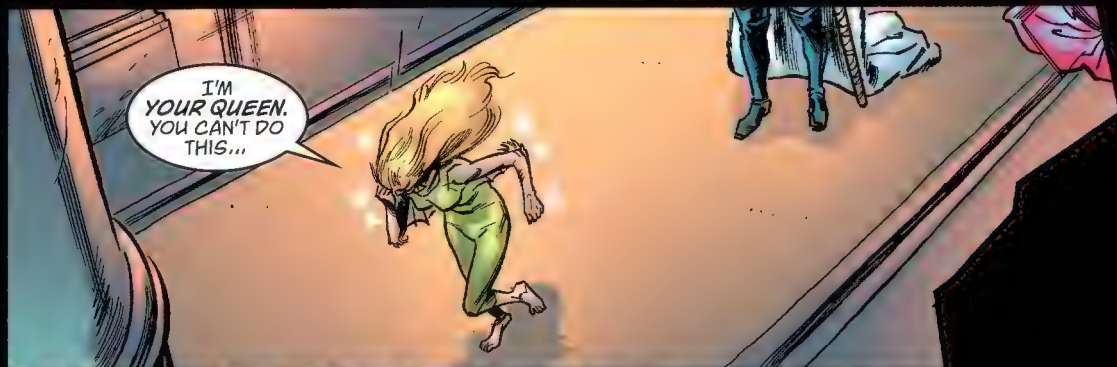


AND OF WHAT CONCERN IS *THIS* TO THE BLESSING YOU BRING TO INDIVIDUALS, JUDE...WHETHER *HERE* OR IN *OTHER REALITIES*?



NONE.





"THIS FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOOD OFFICER'S GOT BETTER THINGS TO DO THAN WAIT OUT THE **END OF THE WORLD** IN THE BAXTER BUILDING."

ANOTHER MINUTE OF THIS AND I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO'S GOING TO BE **CLIMBING THE WALLS**.

ANOTHER MINUTE OF LISTENING TO **YOU**, DAD, AND NO ONE'S GOING TO **MIND** THE END OF THE WORLD.

GOOD ONE, HONEY.

NOW SEE IF YOU CAN FIND A COFFEE MAKER WITHOUT ACCIDENTALLY OPENING A **PORTAL TO WONDERLAND** IN THIS PLACE.

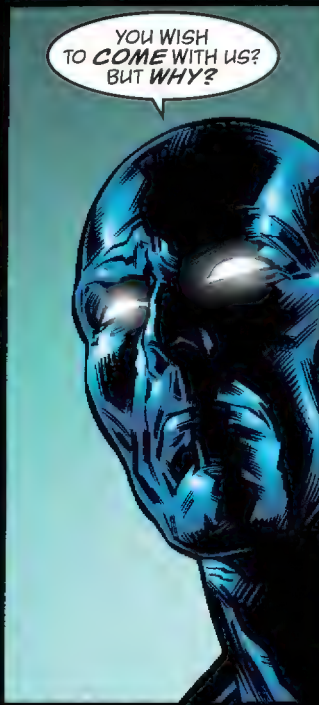
EXCUSE ME, VANCE. I KNOW WHY YOU'RE HERE. AND I CAN **HELP**.

I HAVE THIS IDEA THAT **RADIOACTIVITY** ITSELF SHOULD BE ABLE TO IGNITE THE DORMANT SEED IN THIS FUTURE MANKIND.

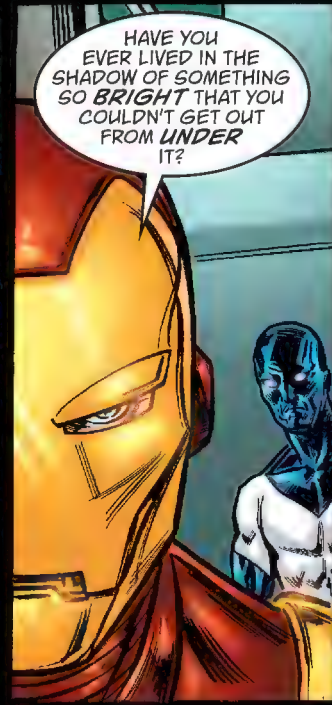


"I WAS...WITNESS TO A **RADIOACTIVE EXPLOSION** IN THE WORLD WHERE I COME FROM. THE RESULT LED TO **MANY MUTATIONS**."

"PERHAPS I CAN **REPLICATE** THAT EVENT IN YOUR REALITY."



YOU WISH TO **COME** WITH US? BUT **WHY?**



HAVE YOU EVER LIVED IN THE SHADOW OF SOMETHING SO **BRIGHT** THAT YOU COULDN'T GET OUT FROM **UNDER** IT?



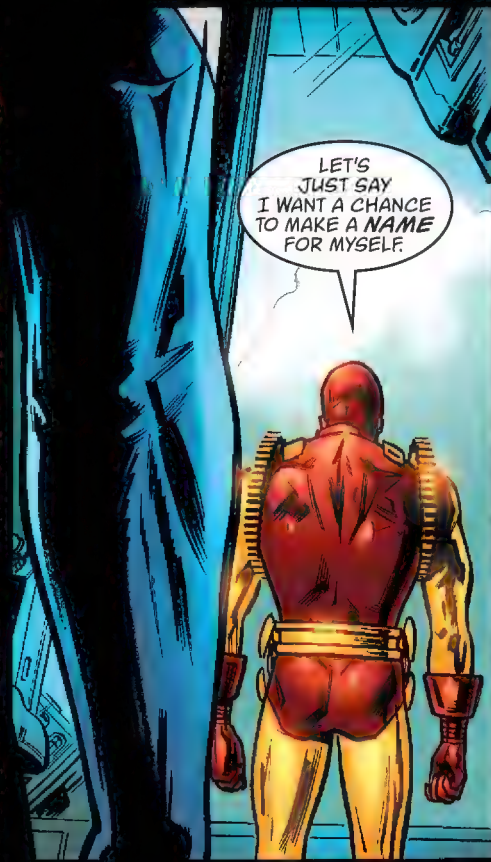
TONY STARK?



"**SOMETHING** LIKE THAT."

YOU DETONATED AN **ATOMIC BOMB** IN THE MIDDLE OF A CITY! YOU KILLED **MILLIONS**, STARK!

AND **MILLIONS** MORE HAVE **RADIATION POISONING**! YOU HAVE TO **PAY** FOR WHAT YOU'VE DONE!



LET'S JUST SAY I WANT A CHANCE TO MAKE A **NAME** FOR MYSELF.

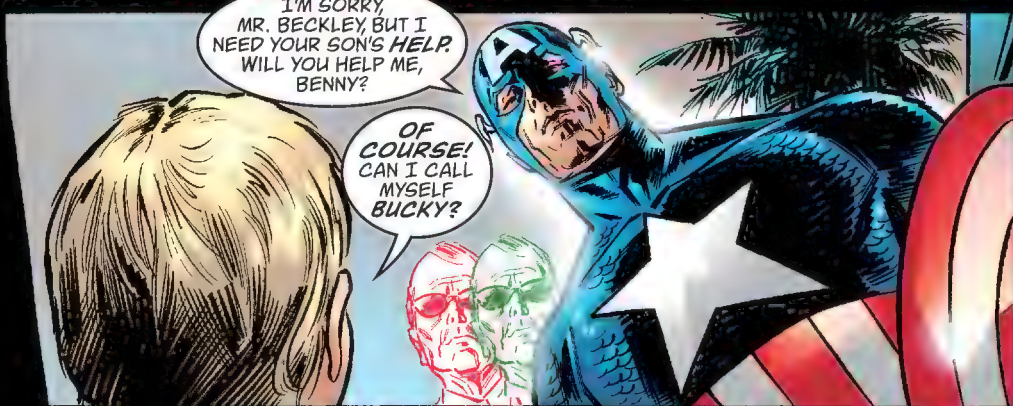
"THIS IS THE PLACE
WHERE YOUR BATTLE
WILL BE **WON** OR
LOST, STEVE ROGERS.

"YOUR ENEMY IS YOUR **ONLY
HOPE**. THIS BOY, THE CHILD
YOU KILLED."



I'M SORRY,
MR. BECKLEY, BUT I
NEED YOUR SON'S **HELP**.
WILL YOU HELP ME,
BENNY?

OF
COURSE!
CAN I CALL
MYSELF
BUCKY?



WHO ARE
WE **FIGHTING**?
ZEMO? THE **RED
SKULL**? WHO?





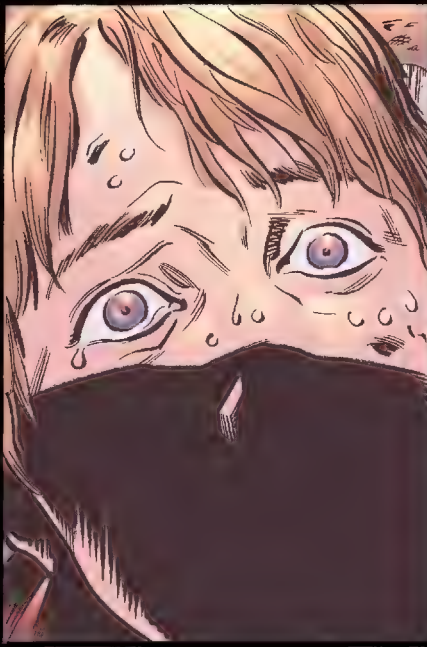
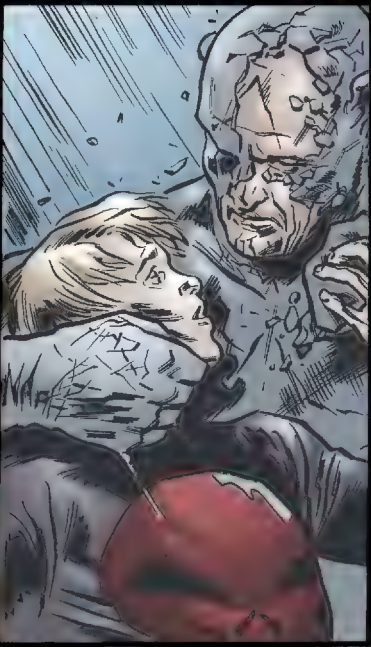
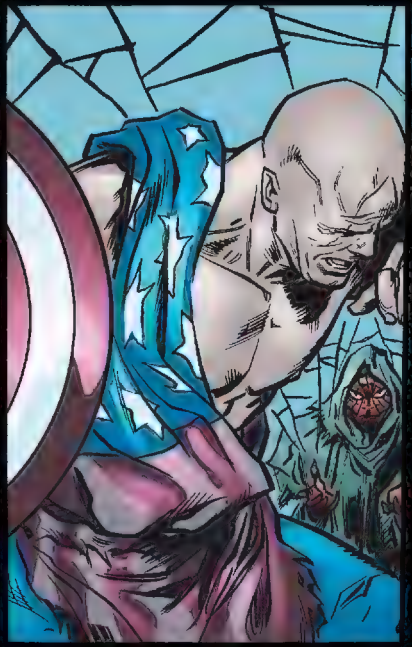
BEFORE
WE DO ANYTHING,
I NEED TO *SHOW*
YOU SOMETHING,
BENNY...

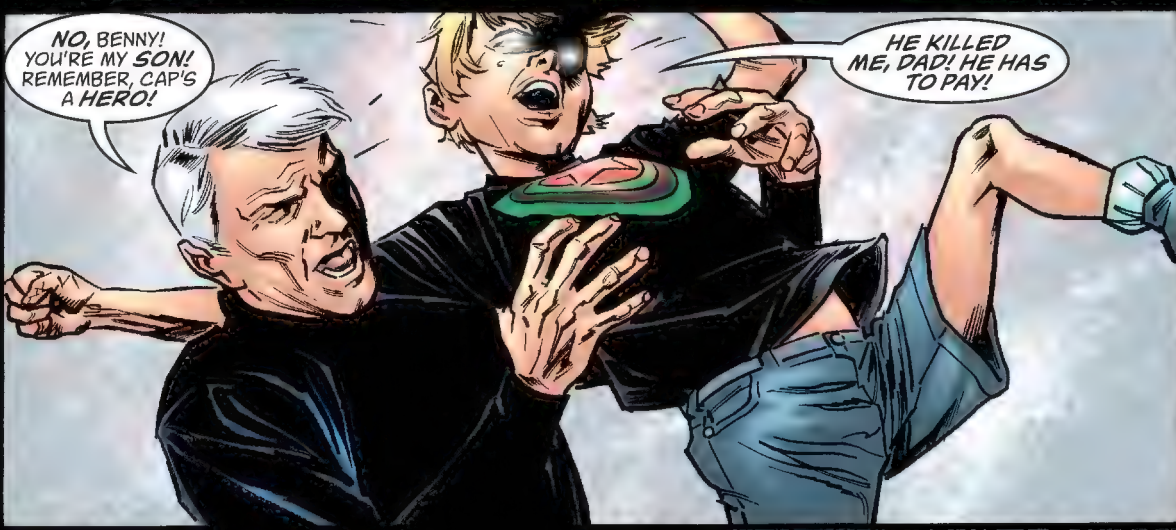
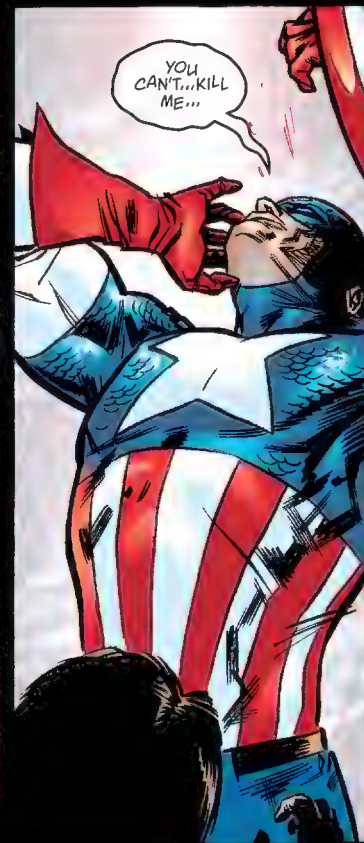


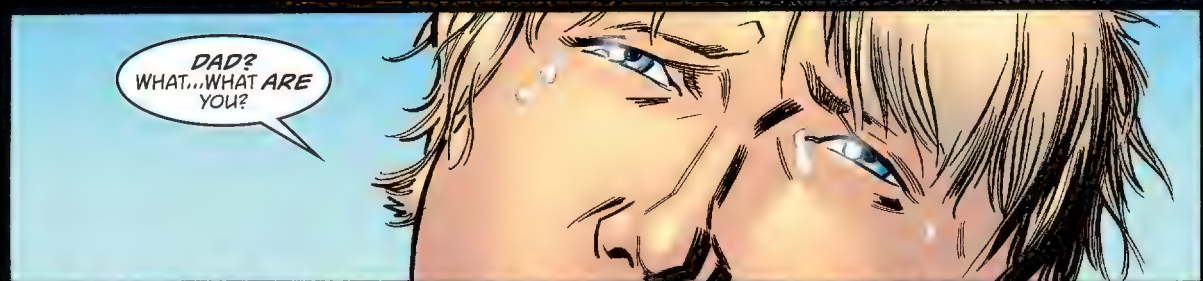
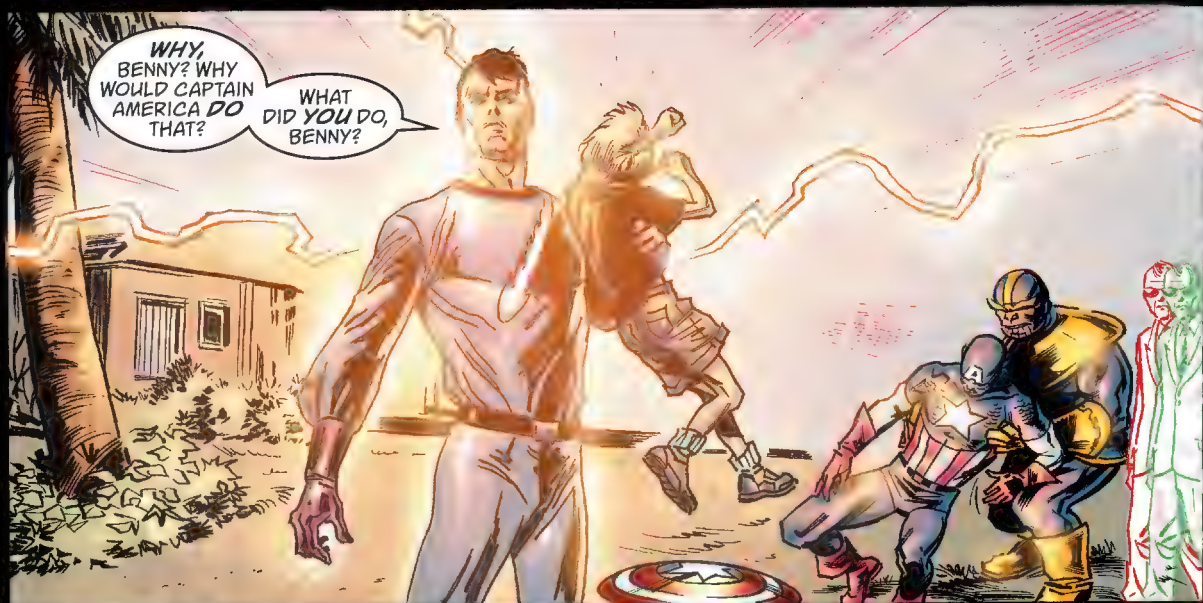
I DON'T
GET IT, CAP...
WHY ARE YOU
SO SAD?



WHY ARE
YOU--?!











YOU'RE
A **MONSTER**,
BENNY. THAT WAS
YOUR **FATHER**.

I ONLY
DID WHAT **YOU**
WOULD HAVE DONE,
CAP.

I ONLY
DID WHAT **YOU**
DID TO **ME**.

"Evil comes from
the abuse of free
will." — C.S. Lewis

MARVEL

10

TM

PARADISE



KRUEGER
BRAITHWAITE
REINHOLD

“What’s happening, Aaron?”

“Being a watchman doesn’t mean I understand everything I see, Luther Manning. Three realities are converging on each other. In the Realm of the Living, the reality you know, the new form of Death known as Jude has become allied with Mephisto, and the two approach England with the ambition to end the lives of everyone there.”

“But won’t the heroes be able to stop them?”

“The Iron Avengers have left Earth. And most of the greatest heroes have joined Reed Richards in the Negative Zone to confront the expanding Paradise.”

“And in the Paradise?”

“Mar-Vell cannot be found and his Host of angels is doubting their author’s sanity.”

“Who are these ‘angels’?”

“Transfigured heroes from the Realm of the Dead. Captain America. Phoenix. Doctor Doom. Tony Stark. Black Bolt. Hank Pym. Matt Murdock. They are now so opposed to Mar-Vell that Captain America is seeking further help in the Realm of the Dead.”

“How can he do that?”

“He’s trying to get help from a human capable of controlling the physical functions of the masses. This boy was best known to the world as The Skull.”

“The kid? But isn’t he—?”

“Yes. You’re right. He’s the child Captain America killed in the first place.”

PARADISE X

I S S U E 1 0

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story and script

ALEX ROSS
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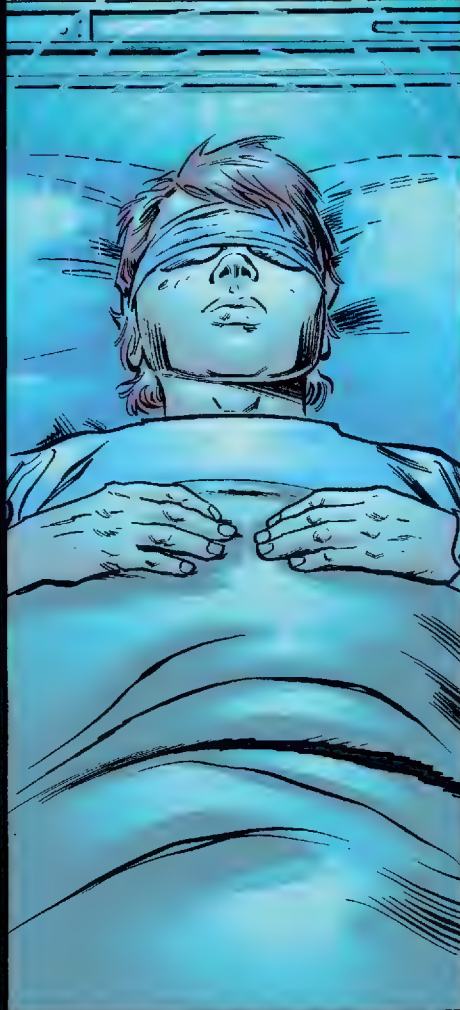
BILL JEMAS
president

"MATT MURDOCK, THE ORIGINAL DAREDEVIL, IS THE MOST ABSENT OF THE ANGELS, SPENDING MORE TIME THAN EVER IN THE REALM OF THE DEAD..."

"...ON THE STREETS OF HELL'S KITCHEN, NEW YORK. OR AT LEAST, WHAT APPEARS TO BE THE STREETS HE GREW UP ON."

"THE STREETS WHERE HE WAS BLINDED, AND HIS OTHER REMAINING SENSES WERE AMAZINGLY HEIGHTENED. THE STREETS WHERE HE MADE HIS OATH."

"OATH, X-51?"



"YES, LUTHER. EVEN BEFORE THE MURDER OF HIS FATHER, MATT HAD FORSWORN HIMSELF TO BECOMING A LAWYER."

"HIS FATHER MADE A DEAL WITH THE CRIMINAL UNDERWORLD TO PAY FOR MATT'S COLLEGE SO THAT MATT WOULD NOT BECOME A FIGHTER LIKE HIM..."

"...A FIGHTER THAT WORKED 'PROTECTION' FOR THE MOB AND WAS PAID TO LOSE FIGHTS."

"BUT BATTLIN' JACK MURDOCK, MATT'S FATHER, NEVER SAW HOW MATT SPENT HIS NIGHTS. ALONE IN THE GYM, WORKING THE BAG, STUDYING TO FIGHT."



"IF HE HAD, HE MIGHT HAVE REALIZED THAT THERE ARE SOME THINGS A FATHER CAN'T HELP BUT PASS ON TO HIS SON."

"YOU MEAN THE FIGHTING?"

"YES. BUT FAR MORE THAN THAT. HE PASSED HIS DECEIT ON TO HIS SON."

"BATTLIN' JACK MURDOCK WASN'T NECESSARILY A GOOD MAN, BUT HE PRETENDED TO BE ONE TO HIS SON."

"NOT A GOOD FATHER, BUT MATT NEVER KNEW IT. NOT A GOOD HUSBAND, WHICH IS WHY MATT'S MOTHER LEFT HOME BEFORE MATT HAD ANY RECOLLECTION OF HER...WHY SHE BECAME A NUN AND DENIED HER SON ANY KNOWLEDGE OF HER."

"MATT MURDOCK, THE ORIGINAL DAREDEVIL, IS THE MOST ABSENT OF THE ANGELS, SPENDING MORE TIME THAN EVER IN THE REALM OF THE DEAD..."

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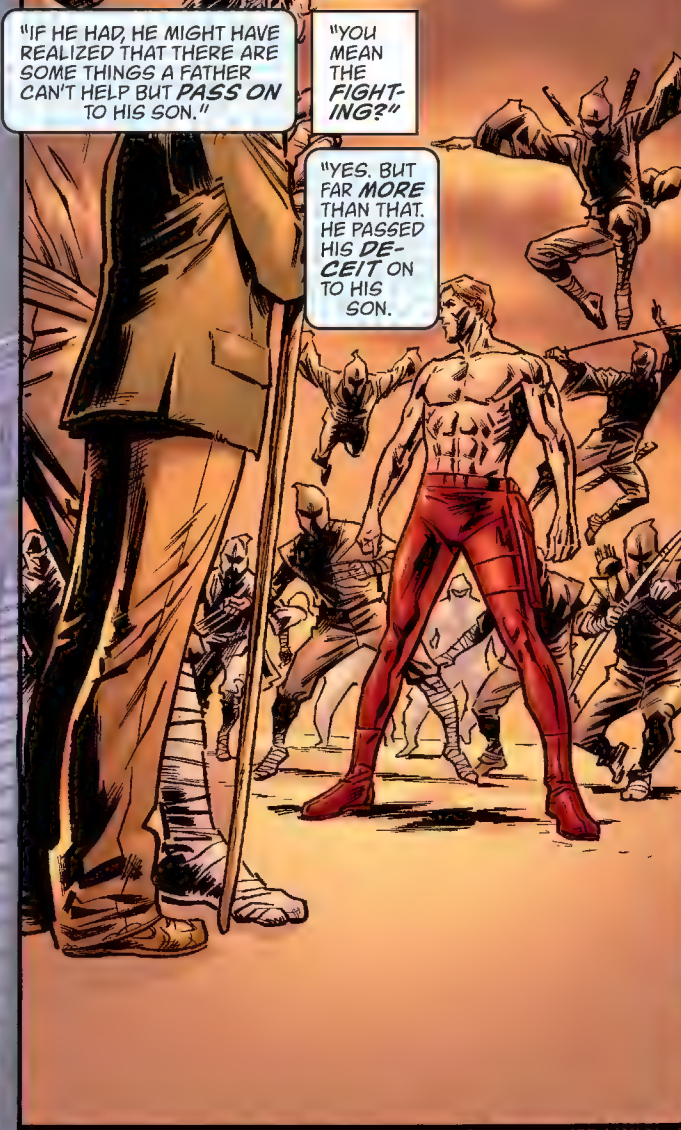
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"ELEKTRA, WHO MATT HAD LOVED IN COLLEGE, WAS ALSO TRAINED BY STICK IN THE **INVISIBLE ARTS**.

"HER EDUCATION WAS COMPLETED AS A MEMBER OF THE **HAND**, THE ASSASSIN GUILD I JUST MENTIONED.

"SHE WAS HIRED BY **WILSON FISK**, KNOWN TO THE UNDERWORLD AS THE **KINGPIN**, TO ASSASSINATE CERTAIN ENEMIES.

"ONE OF THESE ENEMIES TURNED OUT TO BE MATT MURDOCK'S LAW PARTNER, **FOGGY NELSON**."

"WHICH **REUNITED** HER WITH MURDOCK?"

"YES, LUTHER.

"MURDOCK AWAKENED IN HER THE **LOVE** THEY ONCE SHARED. A LOVE SHE THOUGHT WAS **LONG** PUT TO REST.

"SHE COULDN'T KILL NELSON AS SHE HAD BEEN ORDERED...AND SO THE **ASSASSIN** BECAME THE **TARGET**."

"**BULLSEYE**, WHOSE HATRED FOR DAREDEVIL HAD GROWN TO **INSANITY**, WAS THEN HIRED TO KILL ELEKTRA. AND HE ALMOST SUCCEEDED."

"**ALMOST?** BUT I THOUGHT SHE HAD **DIED** AND THEN WAS **RESURRECTED?**"

"USING HER TRAINING, ELEKTRA THREW HER **SOUL** INTO A **WITNESS** OF HER DEATH--A DANCER WHO JUST HAPPENED TO HAVE SEEN HER STAGGER UP TO MURDOCK'S APARTMENT.

"AND SO, WHEN THE **HAND RESURRECTED** ELEKTRA'S BODY LATER, IT WAS NOT THE SOUL OF **ELEKTRA** THAT LAY WITHIN, BUT THAT OF THE **DANCER**, A CLEAN SOUL **UNTOUCHED** BY THE **HAND**."

"ELEKTRA **REVERSED** THE EFFECTS OF THIS TRANSCENDENTAL MIGRATION ABOUT A YEAR AFTER HER BODILY RESURRECTION.

"ELEKTRA **RETURNED** TO MATT MURDOCK...AND IN TIME, THE TWO BECAME THE OBJECTS OF **BULLSEYE'S** MANIA ONCE AGAIN."

"BUT DIDN'T ELEKTRA **KILL** DAREDEVIL?"

"I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU MEANT WHEN YOU SAID THAT MURDOCK LET THE WORLD GO ON **THINKING** THAT HE WAS DEAD WHEN HE **STILL LIVED?**"

"HAVEN'T YOU **GUESSED**, MANNING? MURDOCK, USING THE SAME METHODS TAUGHT TO ELEKTRA, **SWAPPED SOULS** WITH **BULLSEYE**."

"HE LET ELEKTRA SEEMINGLY **KILL** DAREDEVIL SO THAT THEY COULD BE **FREE** OF EVERYONE. FREE OF THE **CONTRADICTIONS** THAT MARKED MATT MURDOCK ALL HIS **LIFE**. ELEKTRA LEFT NEW YORK SHORTLY AFTER THAT."

"BUT IN **BULLSEYE'S** BODY? MURDOCK WAS IN THE BODY OF THE MAN THAT KILLED... THAT **TRIED** TO KILL HER?"

"YOU COULD CONSOLE YOURSELF WITH THE KNOWLEDGE THAT LIKE JUSTICE, **LOVE** IS ALSO BLIND, MANNING."

"OR YOU COULD THINK OF IT AS YET ANOTHER OXYMORON TO DEFINE MURDOCK AND THE LIFE--AND DEATH--OF **DAREDEVIL**."

"BULLSEYE, OR THE **BODY** OF BULLSEYE, LEFT SHORTLY THEREAFTER TO BE **REUNITED** WITH ELEKTRA IN THE MEDITERRANEAN."

"FOGGY NELSON **POURED** OVER DOSSIER AFTER DOSSIER IN MURDOCK'S FILES, PROVIDING HIM WITH **EVIDENCE** HE WOULD LATER USE TO SEND THE KINGPIN TO **PRISON**."

"FOGGY DELIVERED THE INFORMATION TO CITY HALL IN A WAY THAT LED TO RUMORS THAT **NELSON HIMSELF** WAS THE MASKED VIGILANTE."

7
"YOU SAID THAT MURDOCK DOESN'T SPEND MUCH TIME WITH THE *HOST* IN THE PARADISE. IS HE IN THE REALM OF THE DEAD NOW?"

"I DON'T KNOW...THE WATCHER'S EQUIPMENT CAN'T LOOK INTO THAT REALM. BUT I CAN TELL YOU THAT MURDOCK CONFRONTED THE *KINGPIN* THERE ONCE ALREADY."

AS IF MURDOCK WEREN'T HIS USUAL PAIN-IN-THE-ASS SELF, NOW I HAVE *CASTLE* TO CONTEND WITH! HE'S TRYING TO KILL EVERY-ONE!

"WHY WOULD MURDOCK EVEN *GO* TO THE REALM OF THE DEAD?"

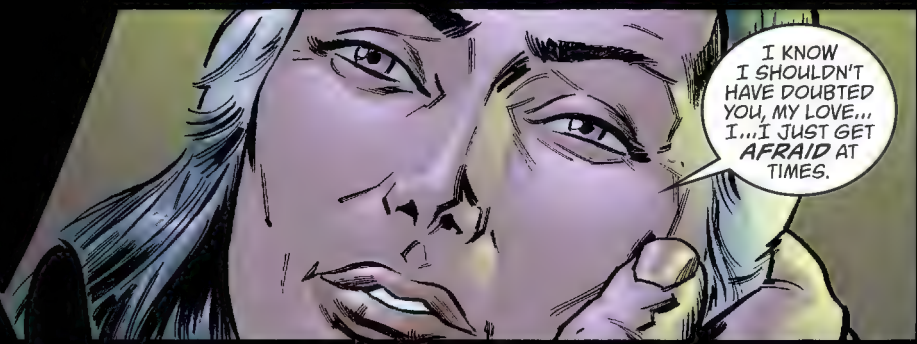
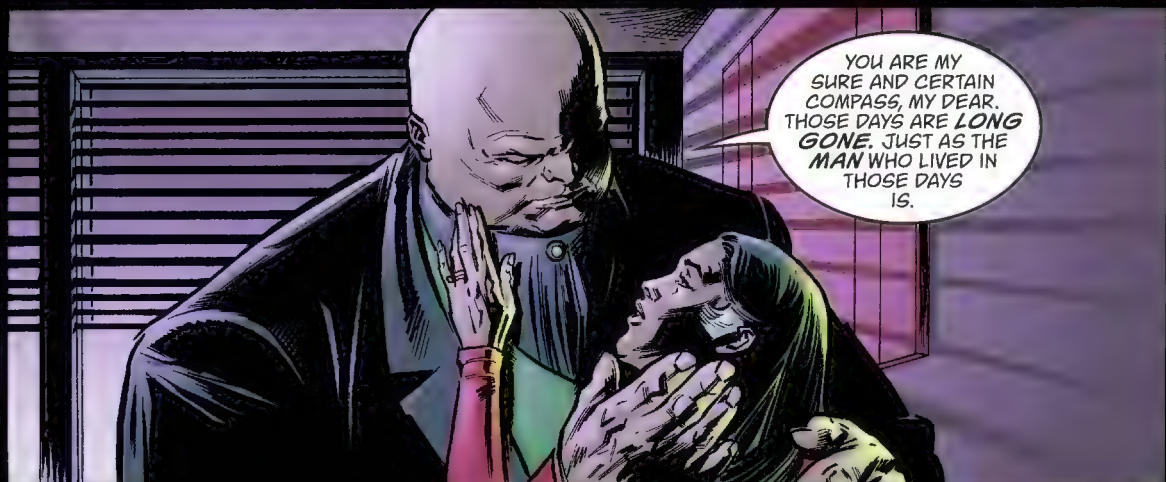
"THE *KINGPIN* HAD BEEN TAKEN TO THE PARADISE, BUT RATHER THAN ACCEPT LIVING IN A HEAVEN OF HIS *OWN MAKING*, ONE PEOPLED BY HIS OWN *IMAGINATION*, WILSON FISK CHOSE INSTEAD TO *MANIPULATE* THOSE IN THE REALM OF THE DEAD."

"EVERYONE WHO '*LIVES*' IN THE REALM OF THE DEAD BELIEVE THAT THEY ARE, IN FACT, *ALIVE*...AND THAT MAKES THEM A *TARGET* FOR THE *KINGPIN*'S CONTROL."

GET ME *CASTLE*. BUT BRING HIM TO ME *ALIVE*. HE'S OF *NO USE* TO ME DEAD...NOT THAT I *BELIEVE* YOU COULD KILL HIM.

THEN YOU DON'T KNOW ME VERY WELL, *KINGPIN*! ANYTHING IN MY HANDS IS A *WEAPON*!

YOU KNOW BETTER THAN TO *SECOND-GUESS* ME. I WANT THE *PUNISHER*. NOW GET OUT.

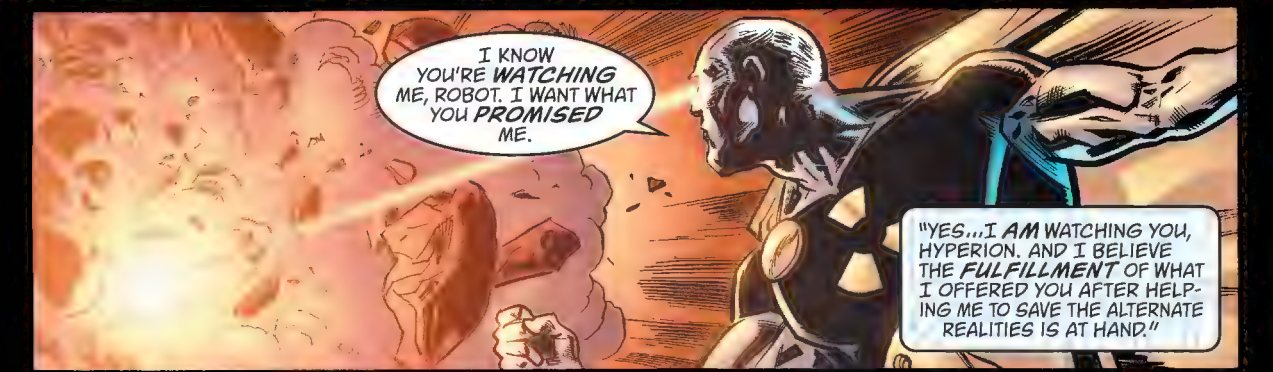




"YOU CAN'T LOOK INTO THE THIRD REALM, EITHER--CAN YOU, X-51? YOU CAN'T SEE THIS **PARADISE** YOU KEEP SPEAKING OF."

"NO. BUT I CAN TELL YOU, MANNING, THAT REED RICHARDS AND HIS ARMADA ARE APPROACHING THE PARADISE FROM THE **NEGATIVE ZONE**. REED WANTS TO SPEAK TO **MAR-VELL**."

I NEVER GET USED TO THIS PLACE! 'SPECIALLY THE **SMELL!**

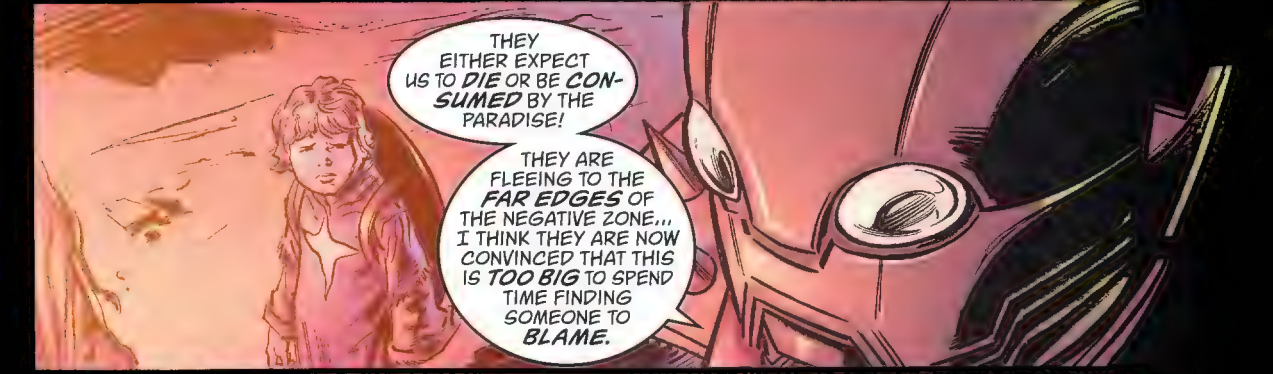


I KNOW YOU'RE **WATCHING** ME, ROBOT. I WANT WHAT YOU **PROMISED** ME.

"YES...I **AM** WATCHING YOU, HYPERION. AND I BELIEVE THE **FULFILLMENT** OF WHAT I OFFERED YOU AFTER HELPING ME TO SAVE THE ALTERNATE REALITIES IS AT HAND."

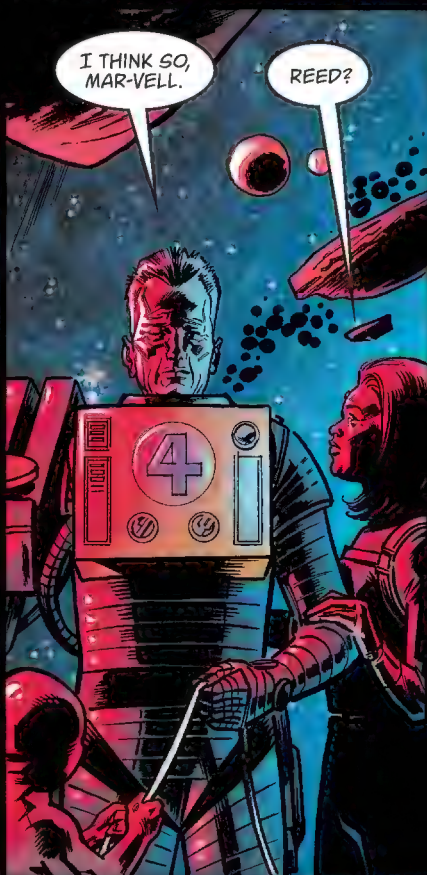


THE INHABITANTS OF THE **NEGATIVE ZONE** AREN'T EVEN TRYING TO **FIGHT** US!



THEY EITHER EXPECT US TO **DIE** OR BE **CONSUMED** BY THE PARADISE!

THEY ARE FLEEING TO THE **FAR EDGES** OF THE **NEGATIVE ZONE**... I THINK THEY ARE NOW CONVINCED THAT THIS IS **TOO BIG** TO SPEND TIME FINDING SOMEONE TO **BLAME**.

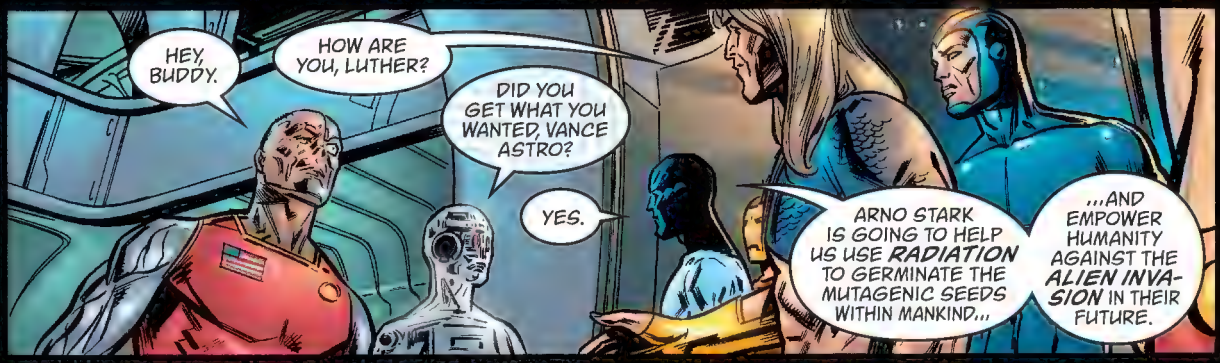
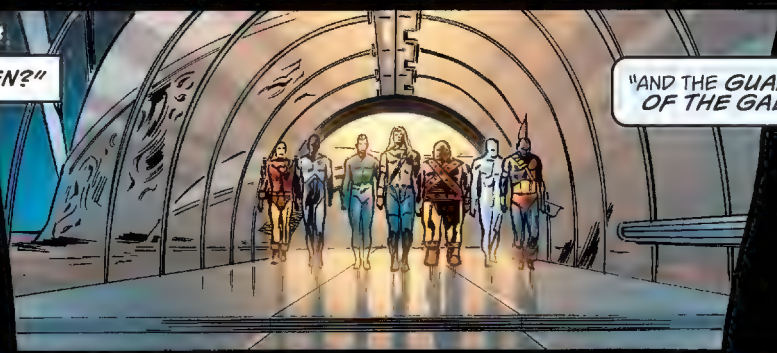




"WE HAVE VISITORS, MANNING...
VISITORS WHO NEVER GOT THE
CHANCE TO MEET REED IN LATVERIA."

"KILL RAVEN?"

"AND THE GUARDIANS
OF THE GALAXY."



HEY,
BUDDY.

HOW ARE
YOU, LUTHER?

DID YOU
GET WHAT YOU
WANTED, VANCE
ASTRO?

YES.

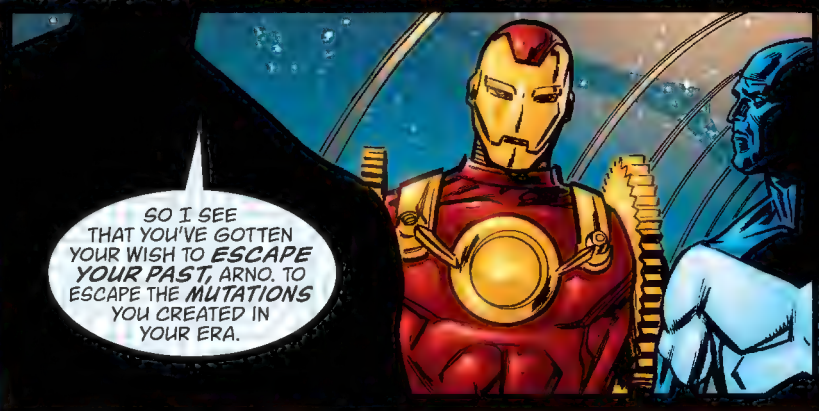
ARNO STARK
IS GOING TO HELP
US USE RADIATION
TO GERMINATE THE
MUTAGENIC SEEDS
WITHIN MANKIND...

...AND
EMPOWER
HUMANITY
AGAINST THE
ALIEN INVA-
SION IN THEIR
FUTURE.



I SUPPOSE I
SHOULD APOLOGIZE
FOR THE WAY I TREATED
YOU WHEN WE FIRST
ARRIVED...

...BUT
THAT'S JUST NOT
MY WAY.



SO I SEE
THAT YOU'VE GOTTEN
YOUR WISH TO ESCAPE
YOUR PAST, ARNO. TO
ESCAPE THE MUTATIONS
YOU CREATED IN
YOUR ERA.



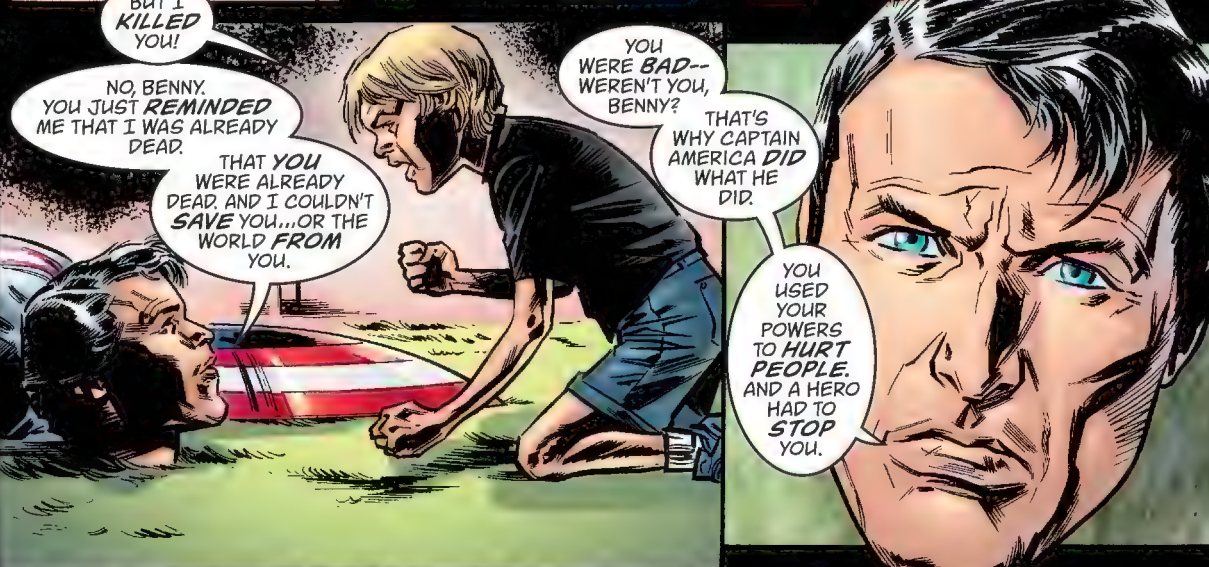
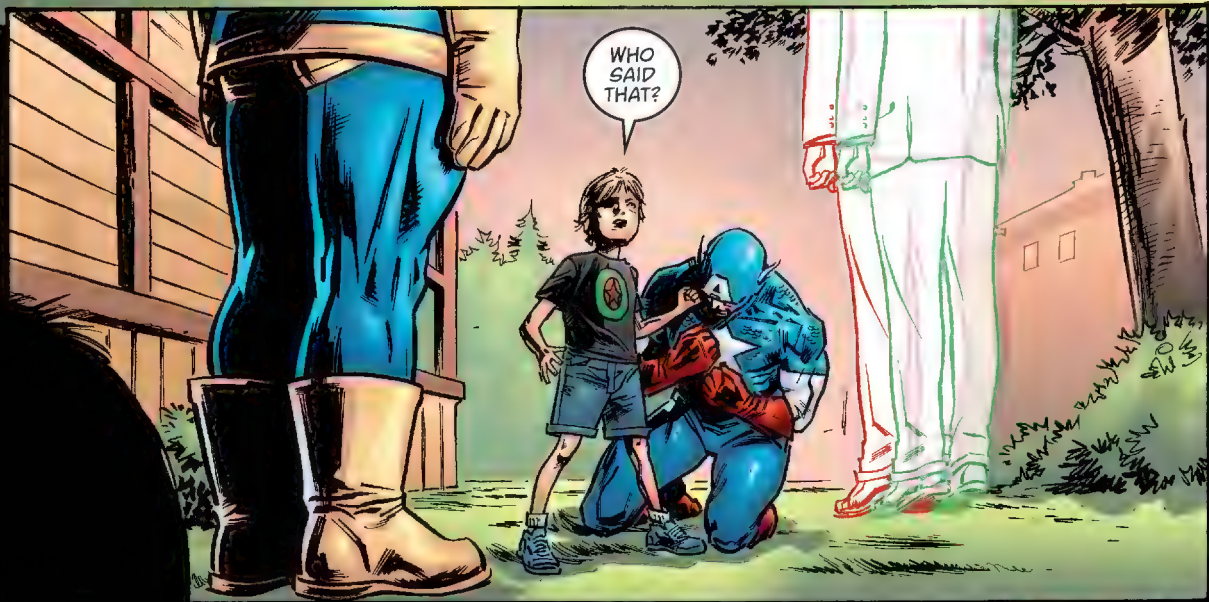
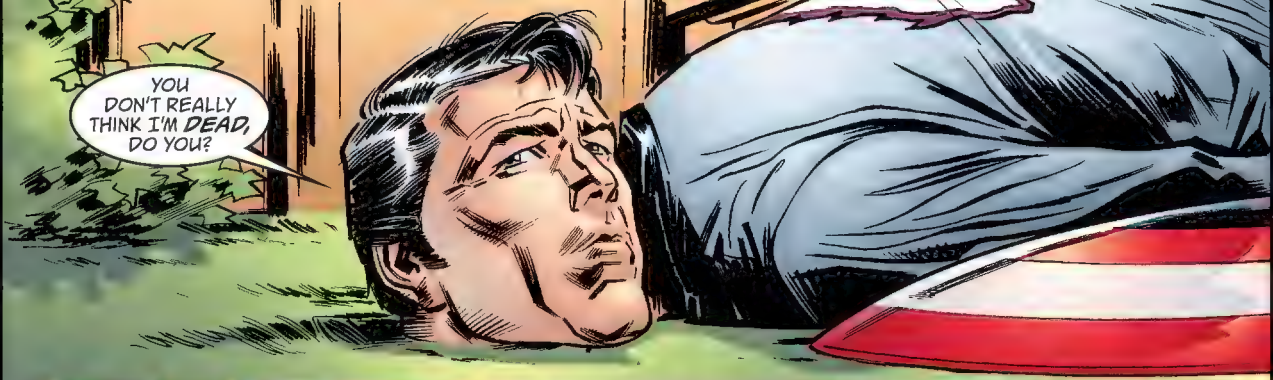
AND WHAT
ABOUT YOU, KILL-
RAVEN? HAVE YOU
FOUND WHAT YOU
WANTED TO
KNOW?

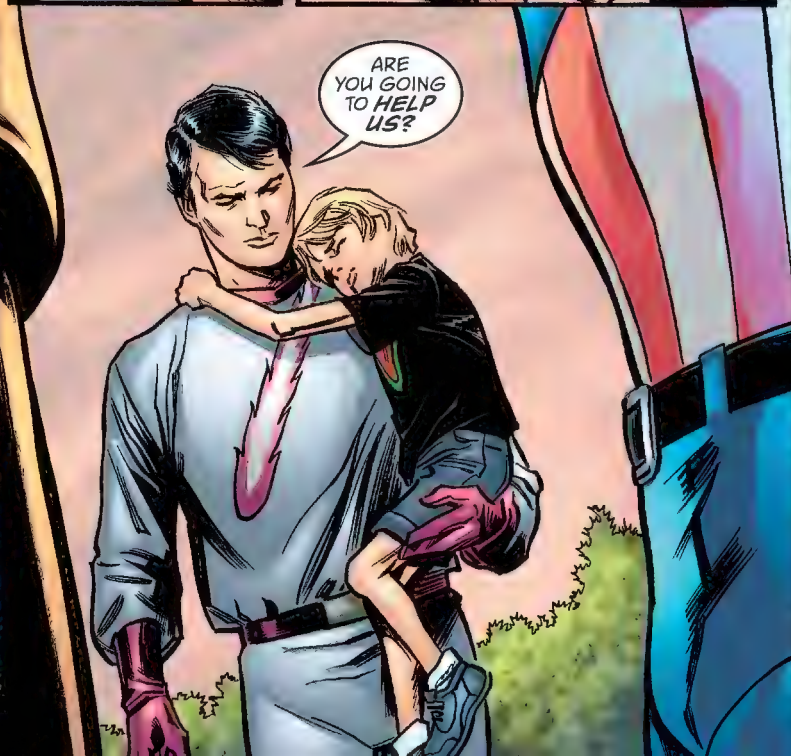
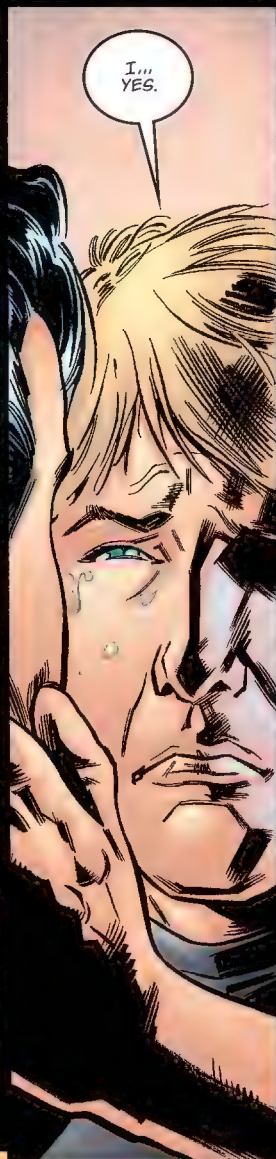
I THINK SO...
IT **DOESN'T MATTER**
WHETHER THE GUARDIANS
ARE FROM **MY FUTURE** OR **NOT**.
AS LONG AS I KNOW THAT
THERE IS **ONE REALITY**
WHERE HUMANITY
DID WIN.

I HOPE
YOU ENJOY YOUR
NEW BODY,
LUTHER.

BYE.

THANKS,
ROBOT. IF YOU'RE
STILL AROUND IN A
FEW THOUSAND
YEARS, GIVE US
A **VISIT**.







"DO NOT **FEAR**, KING BRITAIN...YOUR **THRONE** IS SAFE. THIS IS AN **ISLAND**, AND TO MY UNDERSTANDING THIS NEW 'DEATH' CANNOT **SWIM**."



SO WE'RE SAFE WHILE DEATH SPREADS ACROSS THE REST OF THE **WORLD**? IS THAT WHAT YOU'RE SAYING?

IS OUR SAFETY REALLY ALL YOU THINK I CARE ABOUT?



WE MUST OPEN THE **DOORS** TO ALL THOSE WHO NEED **REFUGE**! THEY WILL BE SAFE HERE BECAUSE THIS SWORD IS THE **SWORD OF DEATH**!



PERHAPS THAT IS THE REASON MARVELL DIDN'T TAKE IT WHEN I OFFERED IT TO HIM.



KING BRIAN--WE'RE UNDER ATTACK!

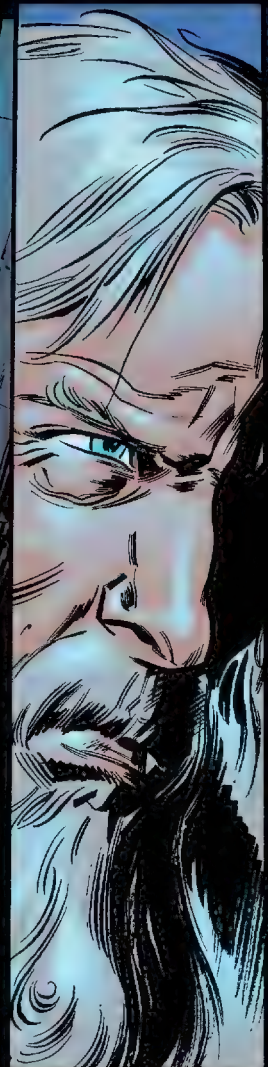


SHOW ME, JACK! GARGOYLE, BRING MY SWORD!

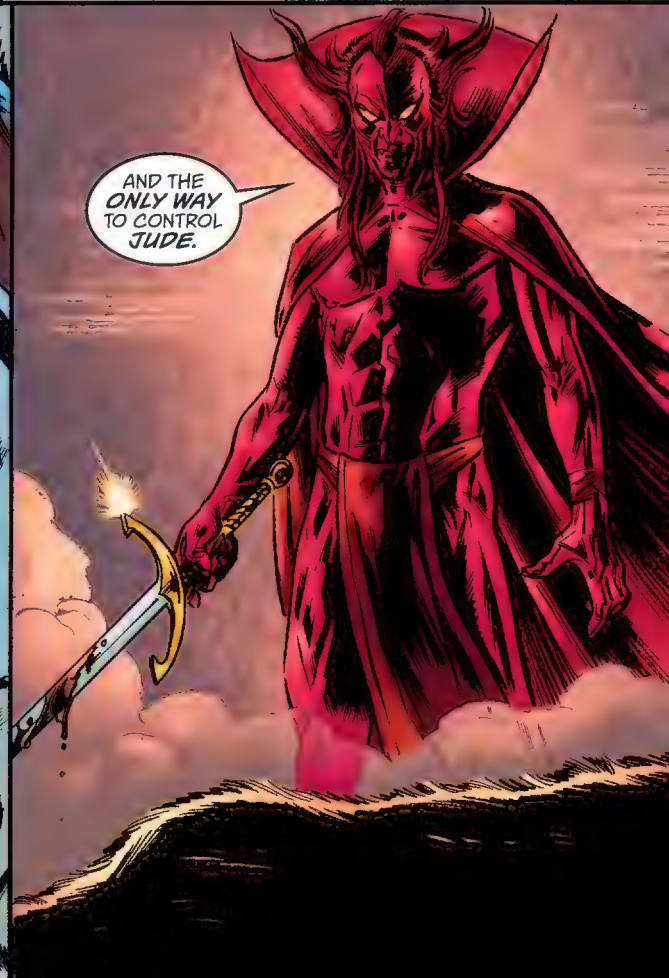
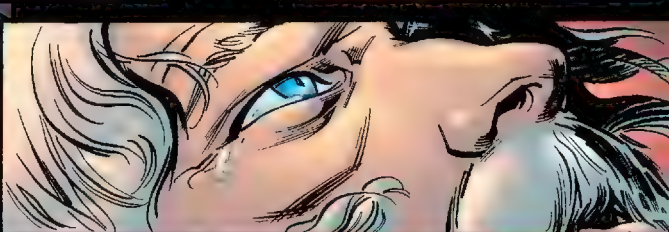
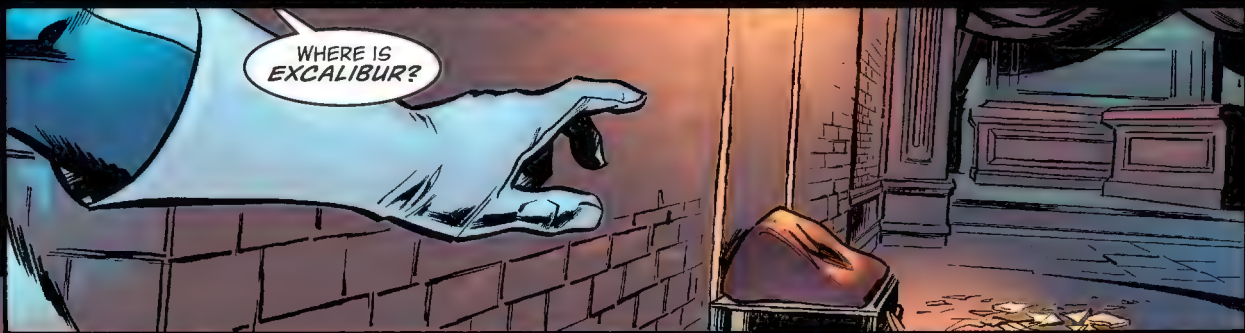


WHAT...
WHAT ARE
THEY?

I THINK
THEY'RE *DEVIANTS*--
AN EARLY EVOLUTIONARY
STRAIN OF HUMANITY. BUT
WHY ARE THEY HERE?
WHY NOW?



"DO WHAT YOU CAN, JACK.
I NEED MY *SWORD* AND
STEED."





COOL.

WELCOME
TO **PARADISE**,
BENNY.

PARADISE
IS WHAT WE
MAKE OF IT,
CAPTAIN.

I **PRAY**
YOU'RE WRONG,
ALIEN. I HOPE THIS
ISN'T PARADISE...I
DON'T WANT TO BE
THE AUTHOR OF
MY OWN
DESTINY.



THE PLATE
IS RIGHT WHERE
DOOM SAID IT
WOULD BE.

DOOM?
AND YOU **TRUST**
HIM?



HE'S
NOT THE MAN
HE **ONCE WAS**,
THANOS. **NONE**
OF US ARE.



WE MUST
EAT TO ENTER
THEIR AFTER-
STATES.

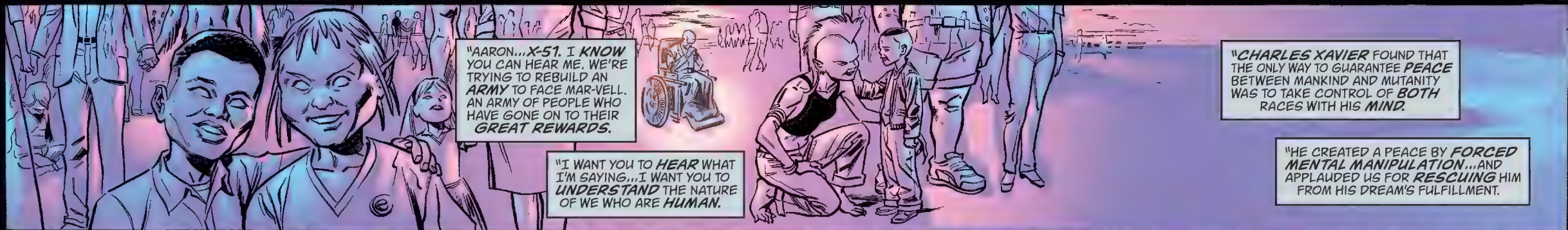
I'M GOING
TO **ANCHOR** US,
SO WE DON'T GET
SWEEPED INTO ANY
PARTICULAR VISION
BY ALLOWING X-51
TO HEAR OUR
THOUGHTS.



HOW DO WE
KNOW YOU'RE NOT JUST
SENDING A **MESSAGE** TO
MAR-VELL? YOU DO **SHARE**
HIS CONSCIOUSNESS,
DON'T YOU?

NOT EXACTLY.
I DON'T EVEN KNOW
WHERE MAR-VELL **IS** RIGHT
NOW. AND I'M **SUPPOSED**
TO KNOW EVERY-
THING.

DON'T WORRY,
I WON'T **BETRAY** YOU.
I HAVE NO REASON
TO.

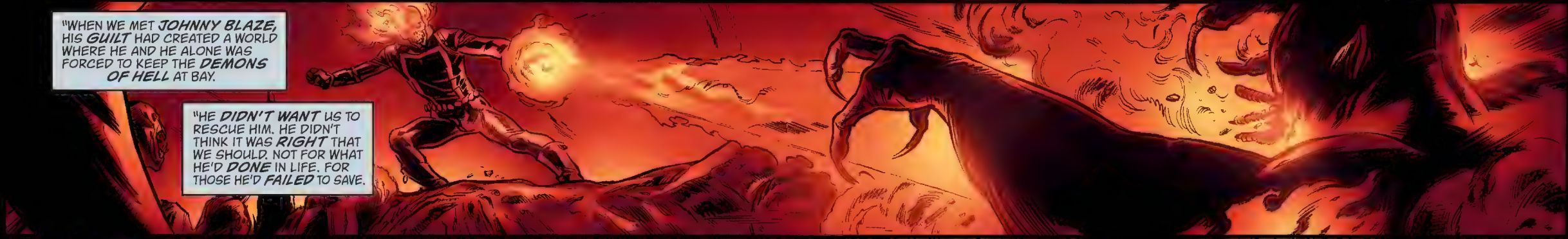


"AARON...X-51. I **KNOW** YOU CAN HEAR ME. WE'RE TRYING TO REBUILD AN **ARMY** TO FACE MAR-VELL. AN ARMY OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE GONE ON TO THEIR **GREAT REWARDS**."

"I WANT YOU TO **HEAR** WHAT I'M SAYING...I WANT YOU TO **UNDERSTAND** THE NATURE OF WE WHO ARE **HUMAN**."

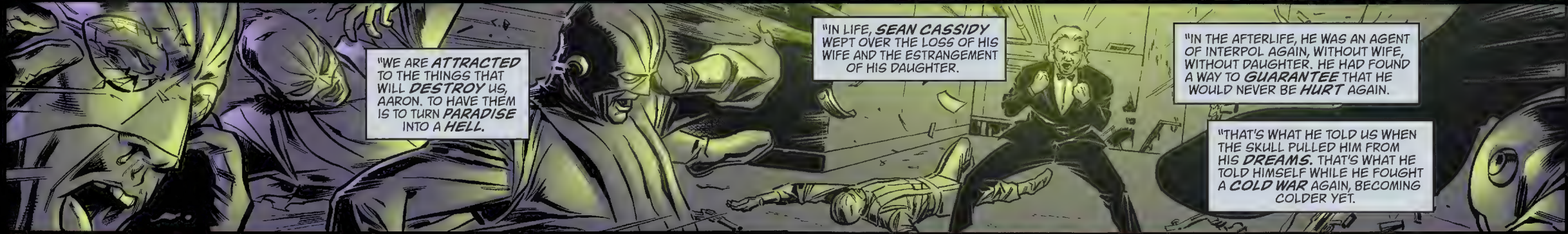
"**CHARLES XAVIER** FOUND THAT THE ONLY WAY TO **GUARANTEE PEACE** BETWEEN MANKIND AND MUTANITY WAS TO TAKE CONTROL OF **BOTH RACES** WITH HIS **MIND**."

"HE CREATED A PEACE BY **FORCED MENTAL MANIPULATION**...AND **APPLAUDED US** FOR **RESCUING HIM** FROM HIS DREAM'S FULFILLMENT."



"WHEN WE MET **JOHNNY BLAZE**, HIS **GUILT** HAD CREATED A WORLD WHERE HE AND HE ALONE WAS FORCED TO KEEP THE **DEMONS OF HELL** AT BAY."

"HE **DIDN'T WANT US** TO RESCUE HIM. HE **DIDN'T** THINK IT WAS **RIGHT** THAT WE SHOULD. NOT FOR WHAT HE'D **DONE** IN LIFE. FOR THOSE HE'D **FAILED** TO SAVE."



"WE ARE **ATTRACTED** TO THE THINGS THAT WILL **DESTROY US**, AARON. TO HAVE THEM IS TO TURN **PARADISE** INTO A **HELL**."

"IN LIFE, **SEAN CASSIDY** WEPT OVER THE LOSS OF HIS WIFE AND THE ESTRANGEMENT OF HIS DAUGHTER."

"IN THE AFTERLIFE, HE WAS AN AGENT OF INTERPOL AGAIN, WITHOUT WIFE, WITHOUT DAUGHTER. HE HAD FOUND A WAY TO **GUARANTEE** THAT HE WOULD NEVER BE **HURT** AGAIN."

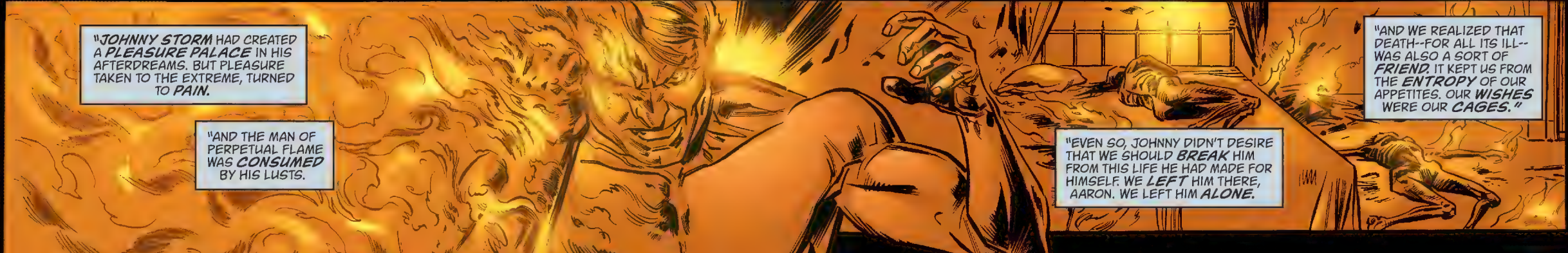
"THAT'S WHAT HE TOLD US WHEN THE **SKULL** PULLED HIM FROM HIS **DREAMS**. THAT'S WHAT HE TOLD HIMSELF WHILE HE FOUGHT A **COLD WAR** AGAIN, BECOMING COLDER YET."



"IN THE DREAMS OF **BLOODSTONE**, **ULYSSES** KILLED **MEPHISTO** AT THE DAWN OF MANKIND'S HISTORY, JUST LIKE HE'D HAD THE CHANCE TO IN THE REALM OF THE LIVING."

"HE **DEFEATED** THE MANIPULATOR WHILE HE WAS STILL BUT A BEGINNING MAN."

"WHEN WE APPROACHED **ULYSSES** IN HIS DREAM, HE WAS **GRATEFUL** TO MAKE HIS DREAM A **REALITY**. HE WAS GRATEFUL FOR A **SECOND CHANCE** IN A WORLD WHERE ACTIONS--FOR GOOD OR BAD--HELD **CONSEQUENCES**."



"**JOHNNY STORM** HAD CREATED A **PLEASURE PALACE** IN HIS AFTERDREAMS. BUT PLEASURE TAKEN TO THE EXTREME, TURNED TO **PAIN**."

"AND THE MAN OF PERPETUAL FLAME WAS **CONSUMED** BY HIS LUSTS."

"EVEN SO, **JOHNNY** DIDN'T DESIRE THAT WE SHOULD **BREAK** HIM FROM THIS LIFE HE HAD MADE FOR HIMSELF. WE **LEFT** HIM THERE, AARON. WE LEFT HIM **ALONE**."

"AND WE REALIZED THAT **DEATH**--FOR ALL ITS ILL--WAS ALSO A SORT OF **FRIEND**. IT KEPT US FROM THE **ENTROPY** OF OUR APPETITES. OUR **WISHES** WERE OUR **CAGES**."



THE THINGS WE SAW
COULD **FILL BOOKS**, AARON.
THE INSIGHTS INTO WHAT DRIVES
US, WHAT MAKES US **WHO WE ARE**
CANNOT AND **SHOULD NOT** BE
FORGOTTEN.

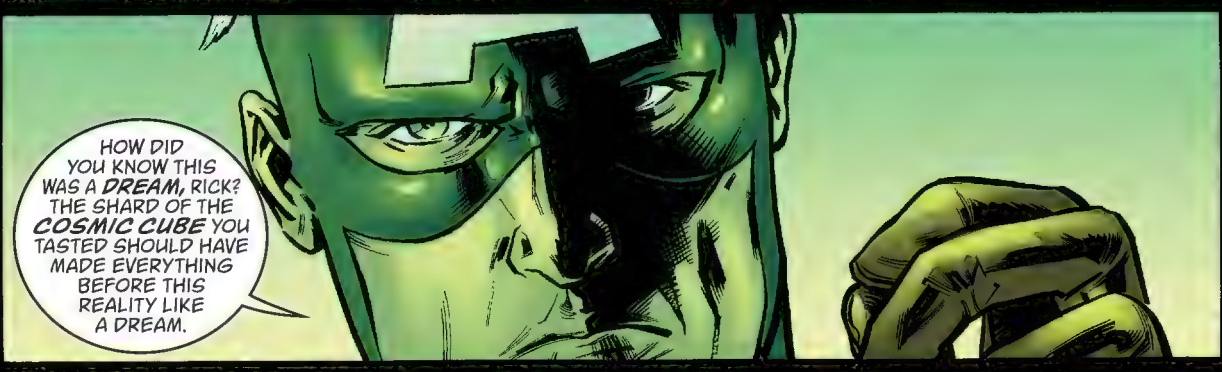
THESE TWILIGHT
DREAMS WERE LIKE A
STRANGE AND DAMNING
APOCRYPHA FOR
MANKIND.

WHEN WE
CAME UPON **RICK
JONES**, THOUGH, IT
WAS A **DIFFERENT
MATTER**.

THANK **GOD**
YOU'RE HERE. I'VE
BEEN **WAITING** FOR
YOU!



YOU WERE
WAITING FOR US?
THAT'S **WEIRD...**



HOW DID
YOU KNOW THIS
WAS A **DREAM**, RICK?
THE SHARD OF THE
COSMIC CUBE YOU
TASTED SHOULD HAVE
MADE EVERYTHING
BEFORE THIS
REALITY LIKE
A DREAM.



I'VE **MADE
UP** PEOPLE ALL
MY LIFE, CAP. I JUST
NEVER KNEW THIS
WAS MY
POWER.

I ACCIDENTALLY
KILLED **GENIS** WITH MY
POWER AND RECREATED A
FUTURE VERSION OF
HIM TO TAKE HIS
PLACE.

STEVE, I'VE
HAD IT WITH LIVING
UNDER **LIES**.



WHEN I WAS
THE **AVENGERS' BOY
MASCOT**, ALL I WANTED
TO DO WAS BE LIKE
THEM.

I HAD
A LOT TO
LEARN.



DON'T WE
ALL.



SO
IT'S AGREED
THEN, WHERE'S
MATT?

I THINK
HE'S CLEANING
UP YOUR MESS,
STEVE.



"AARON, LISTEN TO ME. IT'S
ALL BEGINNING TO COME
TOGETHER.

"THE AVENGING HOST IS
COLLECTING THOSE RESCUED
FROM THE PARADISE.

"THEY'RE FORMING AN ARMY TO
FACE MAR-VELL. THEY'RE JUST
WAITING FOR MURDOCK TO
RETURN FROM DEATH'S REALM.



"HE CAN'T LEAVE THE
PAST THE WAY IT WAS...
HE CAN'T LET THE KINGPIN
OWN THE DEAD."

WHAT HAVE
YOU DONE TO
YOURSELF NOW,
FRANK?



I WAS
SHOT...BUT
I'M NOT
DEAD?

WHAT DOES
IT MEAN? YOU DON'T
SURVIVE SOMETHING
LIKE A BULLET TO
THE HEAD!

PLEASE,
GOD, HELP MY
HUSBAND!
HE'S A GOOD
MAN!

HELP MY
DADDY, GOD.
SEND AN ANGEL
TO HELP
HIM.

EVEN
IF IT'S ONE
THAT DOESN'T
HAVE HIS
WINGS
YET!

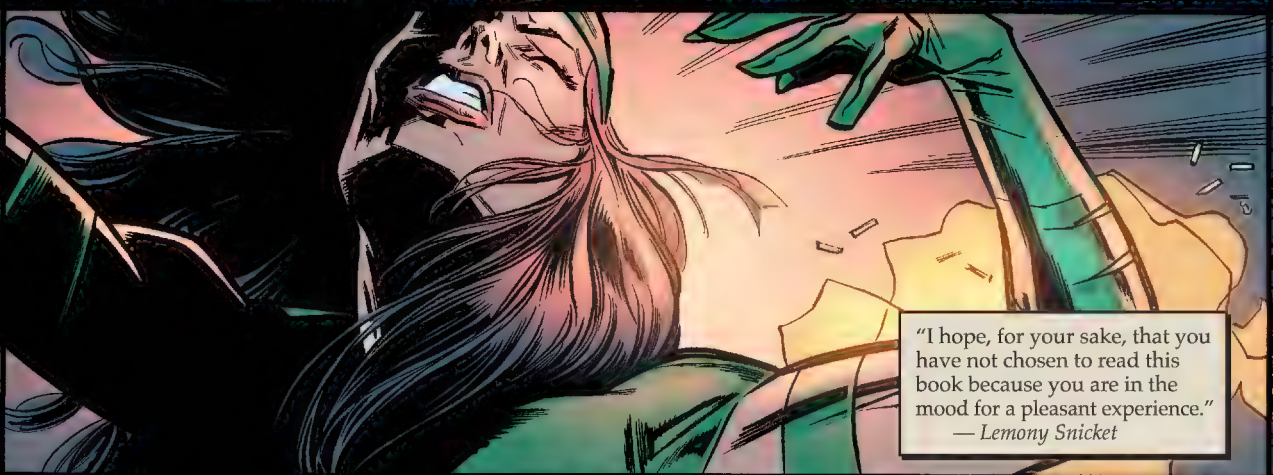
YOU
CAN TELL
THE KINGPIN
TO GO TO
HELL!

GOT
YOU.



ELEKTRA?

MATT? BUT
THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE...
YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO
BE DEAD, AREN'T
YOU?



"I hope, for your sake, that you
have not chosen to read this
book because you are in the
mood for a pleasant experience."
— Lemony Snicket



MARVEL

11

PARADISE



A dynamic comic book cover illustration. In the foreground, a character with long white hair and a large, textured, shell-like mask looks down. Behind them, a man with a mustache and a red mark on his forehead looks on. To the right, a man in a black and white outfit with a circular emblem on his chest is in a dynamic pose. In the background, a character with a star-shaped headpiece and a blue, glowing, segmented suit is visible. The scene is set against a backdrop of a bright, glowing light source, possibly a sun or a portal, with a dark, rocky landscape in the lower right corner.

KRUEGER
BRAITHWAITE
REINHOLD

"You're a fool, Vance Astro, if you believe that you can change your future by listening to Tony Stark's words. He killed millions in his era."

"I'm tired of you, robot. I believe Stark can mutate the people of Earth. They'll be able to defend themselves from that alien invasion. That's all I need to know. You can solve the mysteries of time and space without me."

"There is much about time travel you do not understand, Vance. Its very design is the result of an unwillingness to accept reality. At its core is regret and a turning to the past instead of the future."

"Yeah, that's what I'm saying, Tin Tin. The future. You and all your friends are the past."

"Listen to me, Vance. If there's anything I've seen since everyone on the planet was mutated, it's this: not everyone should have power. Not everyone deserves it. And even less will do well with it."

"That's not for you to decide, X-51."

"I've made my decision. Time travel is a funny thing, Vance. I once believed that every trip through it created a new alternate version of the era you left, once you returned to it. A world where the thing you attempted to change in the past was indeed changed. I have since learned that there are certain points where one can enter a reality without changing it again. One of these points exists in your era, Vance. Unless I tell you the point of re-entry, the future you return to won't be the one you left. Unless you'd like your entire mission to have been for nothing, I'd like to know how you found out what was happening here."

"You're about to become a scrap heap, robot. There won't be enough of you left to recycle when I'm done."

"Whatever."

"I will break you...I will...will...okay. Okay, fine. If this is what I have to do, I'll play ball."

"Good."

"One of our historians unearthed a book written about the history of this time by Kyle Richmond. But it wasn't completed. We assumed that Nighthawk had died."

"I was wondering where that book had gone. Your historian is Mephisto, Astro. He sent you here hoping you would create another future for him to escape into. You will never save those people you want to save. The best you can hope for is to return to a future where the people of Earth can be mutated. But look around you, Astro. How much good will that do? You read Kyle's book. What did he write?"

"This was my decision, not my historian's."

"Then how did you know to come back here to the year 2003?"

PARADISE X

I S S U E 1 1

JIM KRUEGER
story and script

ALEX ROSS
story, cover and character designs

DOUGIE BRAITHWAITE
pencils

BILL REINHOLD
inks

PETE PANTAZIS
colors

TODD KLEIN
letters

JENNY HUANG
assistant editor

MIKE MARTS
editor

JOE QUESADA
editor in chief

BILL JEMAS
president



"WHAT I AM SHOWING YOU, VANCE, IS A **CROSS-SECTION** OF THIS MOMENT, FROM ONE ALTERNATE PRESENT TO ANOTHER.

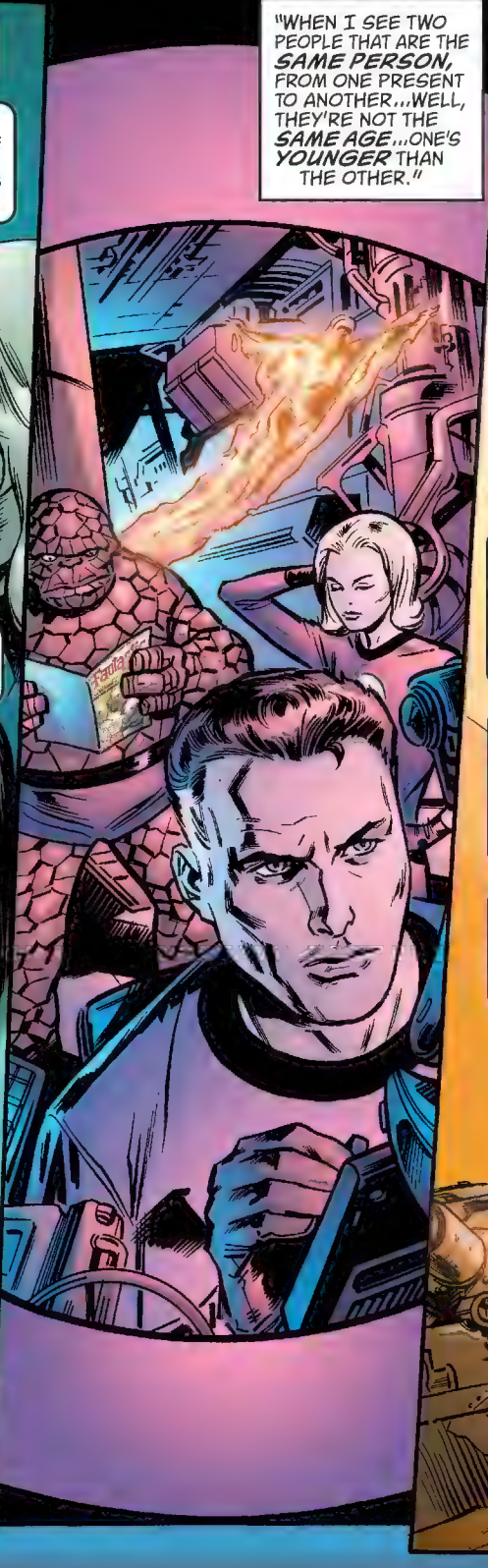
"I HAVE LINKED THIS TO THE LIFELINES I FOUND AT THE CENTER OF THE **WORLD ASH TREE**, THE PLACE WHERE MEPHISTO HID THE **MAP** OF HOW TO TRAVEL FROM ONE REALITY TO ANOTHER WITHOUT AFFECTING CHANGE IN THAT ERA.



"THIS IS HOW MEPHISTO REMAINED FREE TO **MANIPULATE** THEM ALL."

"WHAT'S GOING ON, ROBOT? ARE THESE THINGS ALL HAPPENING AT THE **SAME TIME**?"

"YOU SEE IT TOO, DON'T YOU?"



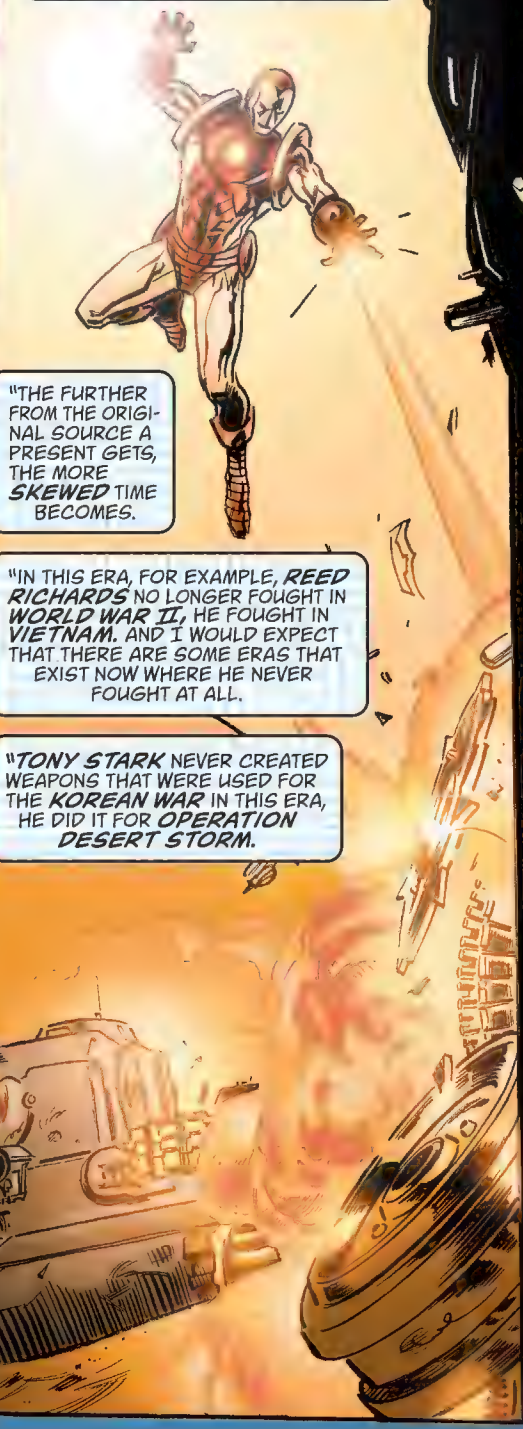
"WHEN I SEE TWO PEOPLE THAT ARE THE **SAME PERSON**, FROM ONE PRESENT TO ANOTHER...WELL, THEY'RE NOT THE **SAME AGE**...ONE'S **YOUNGER** THAN THE OTHER."

"WHEN I FIRST BECAME THE STEWARD OF THIS PLACE, I DIDN'T KNOW HOW THE ALTERNATE REALITIES WERE ORDERED...OR IF THERE EVEN **WAS** AN ORDER. NOW I DO, THANKS TO THE **CROSS-SECTION** FROM THE **WORLD ASH**.

"THE FURTHER FROM THE ORIGINAL SOURCE A PRESENT GETS, THE MORE **SKewed** TIME BECOMES.

"IN THIS ERA, FOR EXAMPLE, **REED RICHARDS** NO LONGER FOUGHT IN **WORLD WAR II**, HE FOUGHT IN **VIETNAM**. AND I WOULD EXPECT THAT THERE ARE SOME ERAS THAT EXIST NOW WHERE HE NEVER FOUGHT AT ALL.

"**TONY STARK** NEVER CREATED WEAPONS THAT WERE USED FOR THE **KOREAN WAR** IN THIS ERA, HE DID IT FOR **OPERATION DESERT STORM**.

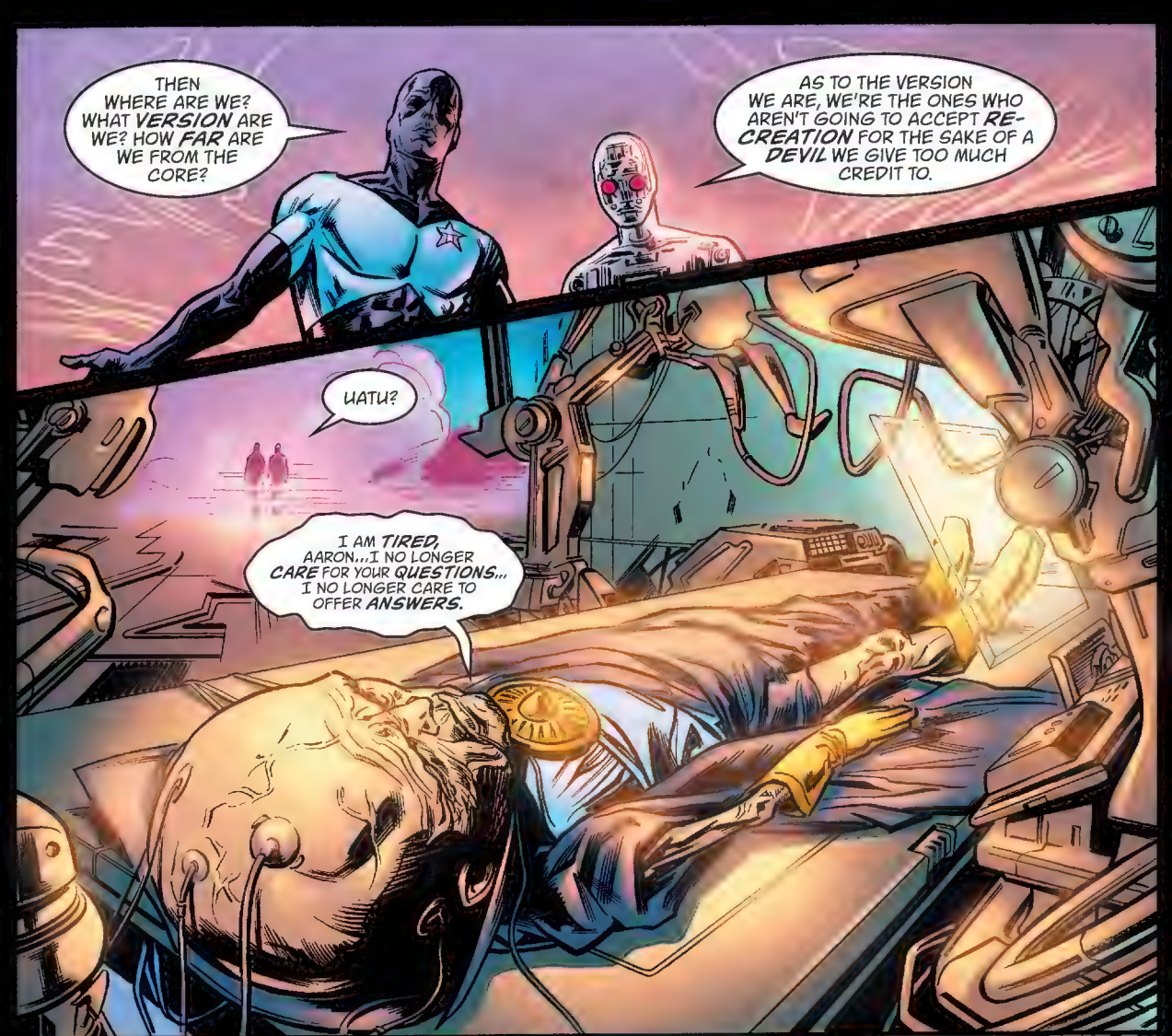


"IN STILL LATER ERAS..."

"...IT WILL BE AS IF **PETER PARKER** WAS JUST BITTEN BY A RADIOACTIVE SPIDER. IT WILL BE AS IF HE HAD HIS **WHOLE LIFE** AHEAD OF HIM...BUT THAT LIFE WILL **NEVER COME**.

"THERE WILL BE NO **HEROES**, NO **MARVELS**, NO LIFETIMES OF **HEROICS**. ONLY A **PERPETUAL MOMENT** STRETCHED AROUND A CORE...A LIFETIME **NO ONE** WILL REMEMBER IS THERE.

"AND FOR THE **WATCHERS**, THERE WILL BE NOTHING NEW TO WATCH AT ALL."



THEN
WHERE ARE WE?
WHAT **VERSION** ARE
WE? HOW **FAR** ARE
WE FROM THE
CORE?

AS TO THE VERSION
WE ARE, WE'RE THE ONES WHO
AREN'T GOING TO ACCEPT **RE-
CREATION** FOR THE SAKE OF A
DEVIL WE GIVE TOO MUCH
CREDIT TO.

UATU?

I AM **TIRED**,
AARON... I NO LONGER
CARE FOR YOUR QUESTIONS...
I NO LONGER CARE TO
OFFER **ANSWERS**.

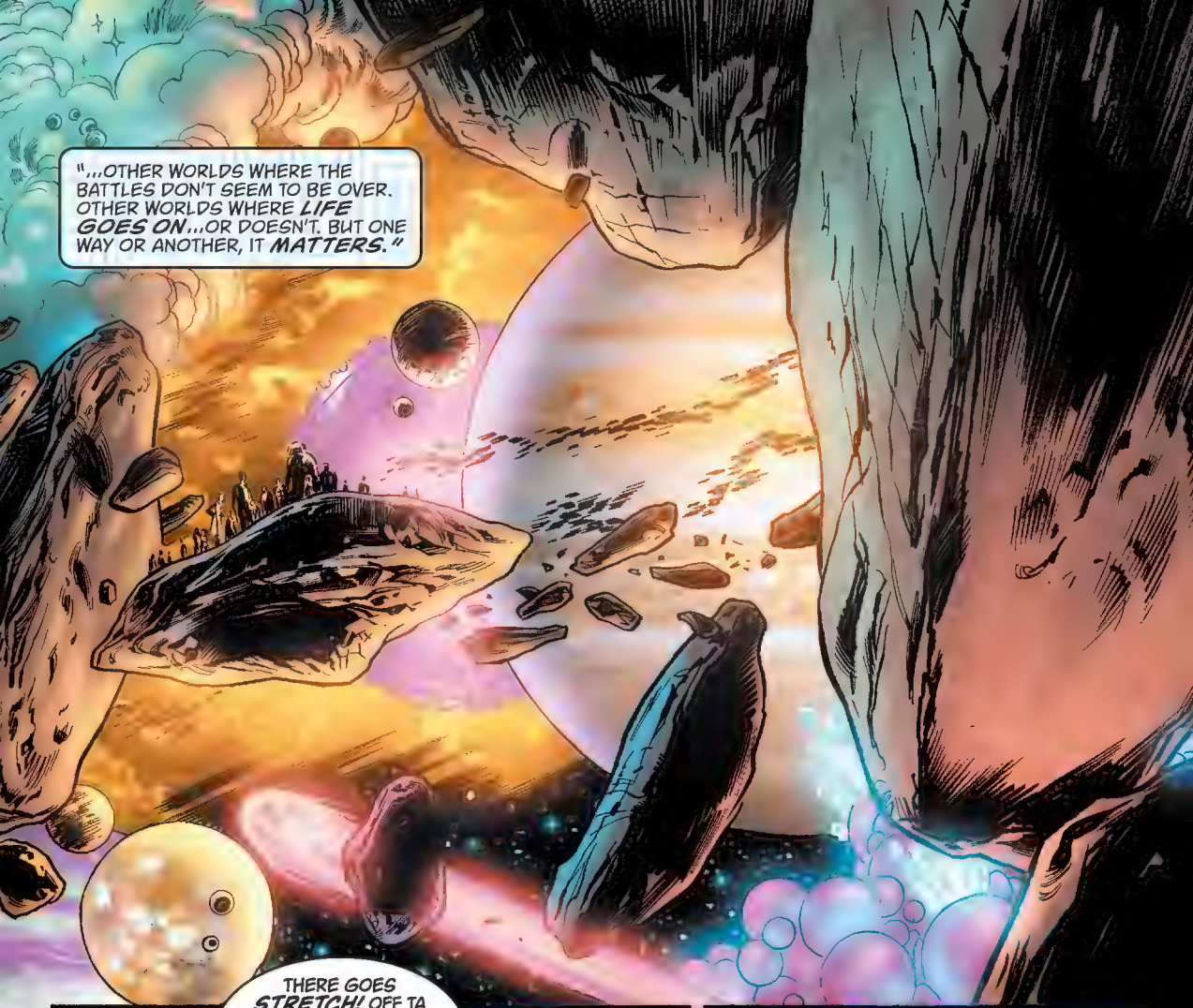
I'M GOING TO
TAKE YOU TO EARTH,
UATU. I'M GOING TO LET
JUDE TOUCH YOU. I'M
GOING TO LET
YOU **DIE**...

...I WANT
YOU TO GO TO
DEATH'S REALM.
I'M SURE YOU'LL
HAVE **EYES**
THERE.

WHY?

BECAUSE
DESPITE ALL
YOU'VE TOLD ME, I
STILL BELIEVE IN
CHARITY.

AND
I BELIEVE IN
OTHER WORLDS
WHERE **MEAN-
ING** CAN BE
FOUND...



"...OTHER WORLDS WHERE THE BATTLES DON'T SEEM TO BE OVER. OTHER WORLDS WHERE *LIFE GOES ON*...OR DOESN'T. BUT ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, IT *MATTERS*."



THERE GOES *STRETCH!* OFF TO SAVE THE WHOLE BLAMED *UNIVERSE* WHILE THE REST'A US SIT HERE TWIDDLIN' OUR *THUMBS!*

THOSE OF US THAT *GOT THUMBS*, I MEAN.



WE'RE ALL THUMBS COMPARED TO REED, BEN...

"OF COURSE IT WOULD
COME DOWN TO REED
AND THE *UNIVERSE*..."

"...REALITY ISN'T *BIG*
ENOUGH FOR THE
TWO OF THEM."

DO YOU
THINK RICHARDS
WAS *RIGHT* ABOUT
THE ANTI-MATTER
HEART OF THE
NEGATIVE ZONE
AND THE ABSENCE
OF MALICIOUS-
NESS?

LIKE THE
REST OF US, HE IS
ONLY *HUMAN*. AND THAT
MEANS HE COULD
BE *WRONG*.

I AM
PREPARED TO
BELIEVE *ANYTHING*
RICHARDS SUGGESTS...
AND THIS IS WHAT
WORRIES ME.

I'M COMING,
MAR-VELL. DO YOU
HEAR ME? I'M
COMING!

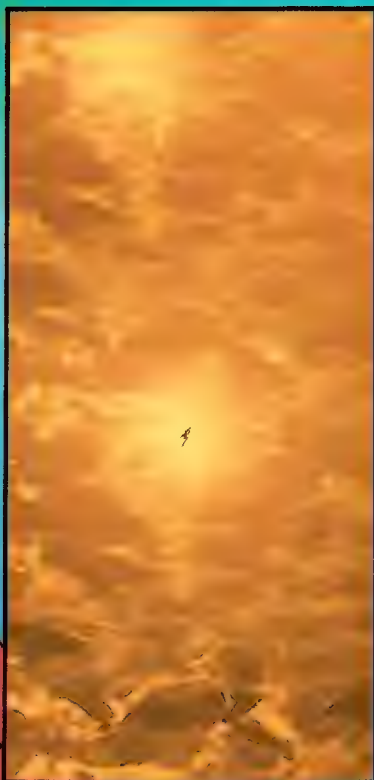
I SHOULD
BE GOING WITH
HIM, SUSAN.

NO, HYPERION.
ONLY IF SOMETHING
GOES WRONG.

JUST LIKE WE
PLANNED.



"REED NEEDS
TO SEE WHAT'S
IN THERE."

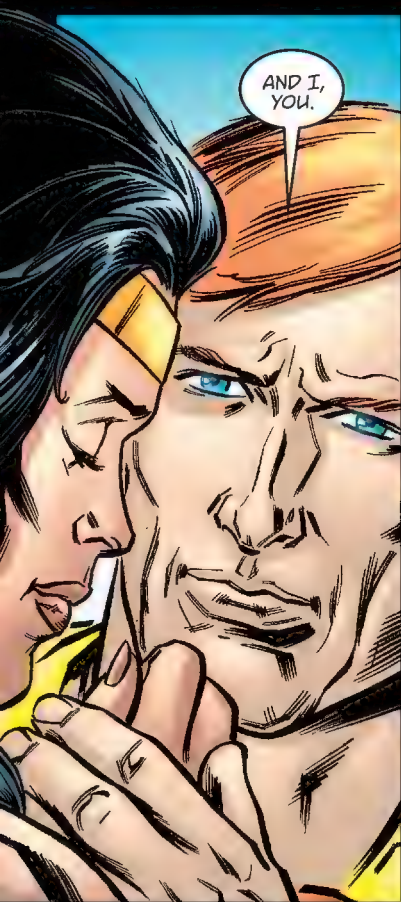


I DON'T
WANT TO FACE
MAR-VELL WITHOUT
MURDOCK...
HE'S OUR
ADVOCATE.

DOESN'T
THIS ALL FEEL A
LITTLE **FAMILIAR**?
I DON'T WANT TO
PLAY THE PART OF
THE **DEVIL**
AGAIN.

THERE WILL
ALWAYS BE THOSE
WHO LOOK UPON THE
GOOD WE DO AND
CALL IT **EVIL**.

BUT
WE DO GOOD
ANYWAY. I
GET IT.





"...AT LEAST WE
COULD LIVE THE
LIE TOGETHER
THERE."

GIVE
IT UP, FRANK!
THERE'S
A BETTER
WAY!

BUT
WE'RE ALL
DEAD, MATT!
THIS PLACE
IS DEAD!



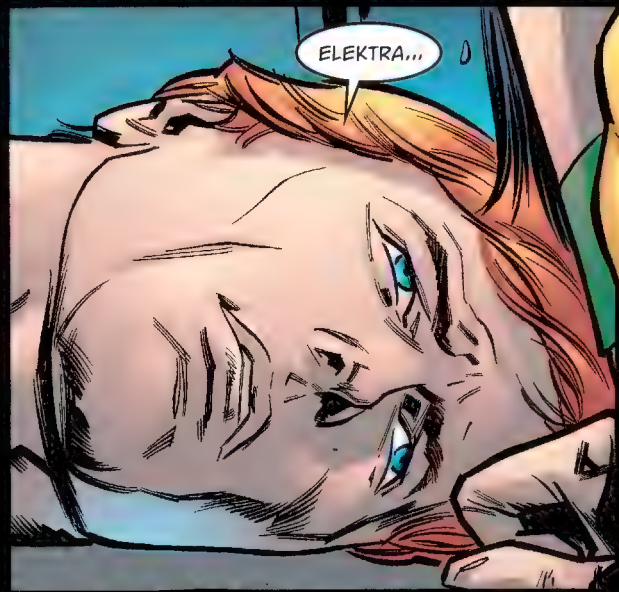
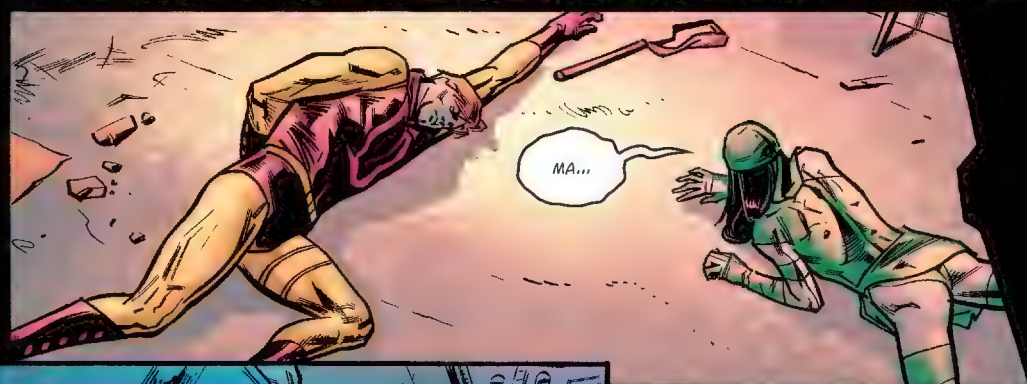
I *KNEW*
YOU WERE MURDOCK,
DEVIL! I *KNEW*
IT!



MURDOCK'S
DEAD, ANYWAY.



MATT!





PUT THE
GUN AWAY, FRANK.
YOUR BULLETS HAVE
NO POWER
HERE.



AND
THEY'RE JUST
SCARING
PEOPLE.



FINE,
MATT.

BUT
I **KILLED**
YOU, DEVIL...
I **KILLED**
YOU.



THERE
IS NO KILLING
HERE.



SO MUCH
VIOLENCE, MY
HUSBAND...



...IN YOUR
VERY STREETS, CAN'T
YOU DO ANYTHING
TO **STOP** IT?



THEY
ARE **OLD**
GRIEVANCES,
MY DEAR. **OLD**
HATREDS.

I WOULD
GET INVOLVED,
BUT I HAVE **ONE**
CONCERN...**YOU.**
AND LIVING THE
REST OF OUR LIVES
TOGETHER.

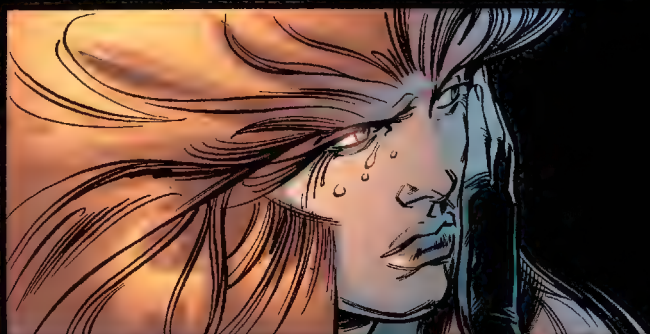


KING
BRITAIN IS
DEAD! LONG
LIVE THE
KING!

NOW,
WHERE'S JUDE?
THERE MUST BE A MEASURE
OF *PROTOCOL* TO
ESTABLISH!

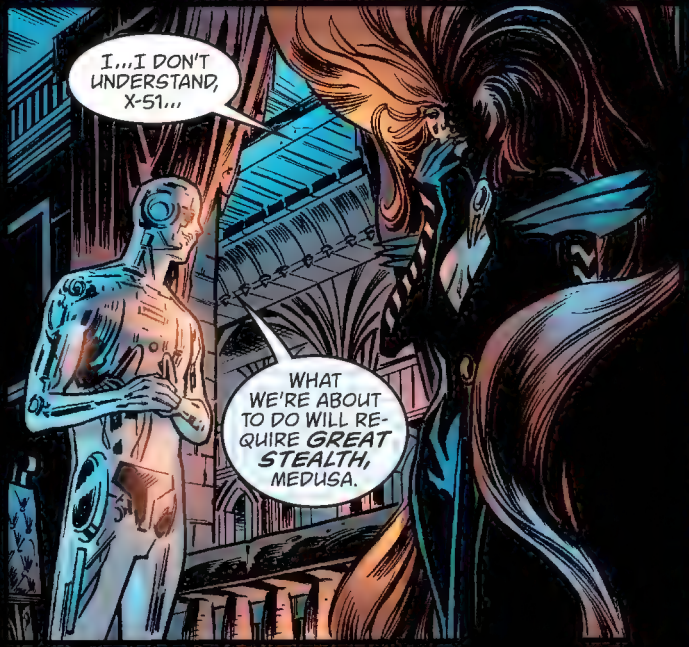
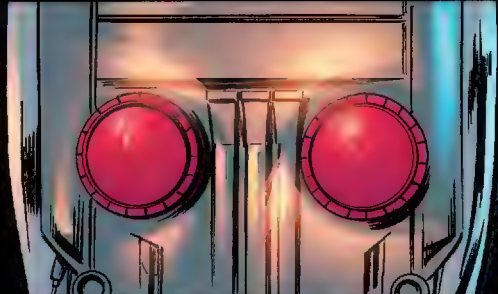


NOT AGAIN...



KYLE TOLD ME SOMETHING LIKE THIS WOULD HAPPEN.

HE TOLD ME ABOUT THE **SWORD**, ABOUT WHAT IT COULD DO...AND SAID THAT IT WOULD BE **NECESSARY** TO COME WITH THIS KNOWLEDGE AFTER IT SEEMED TOO LATE.



I...I DON'T UNDERSTAND, X-51...

WHAT WE'RE ABOUT TO DO WILL REQUIRE **GREAT STEALTH**, MEDUSA.

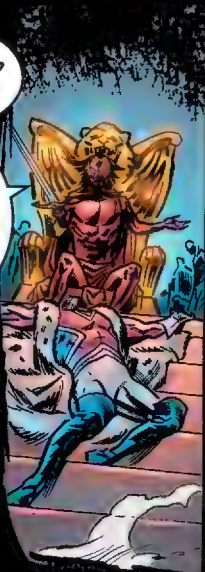


MY HUSBAND...MY FIRST HUSBAND TAUGHT ME HOW TO **KEEP QUIET**.

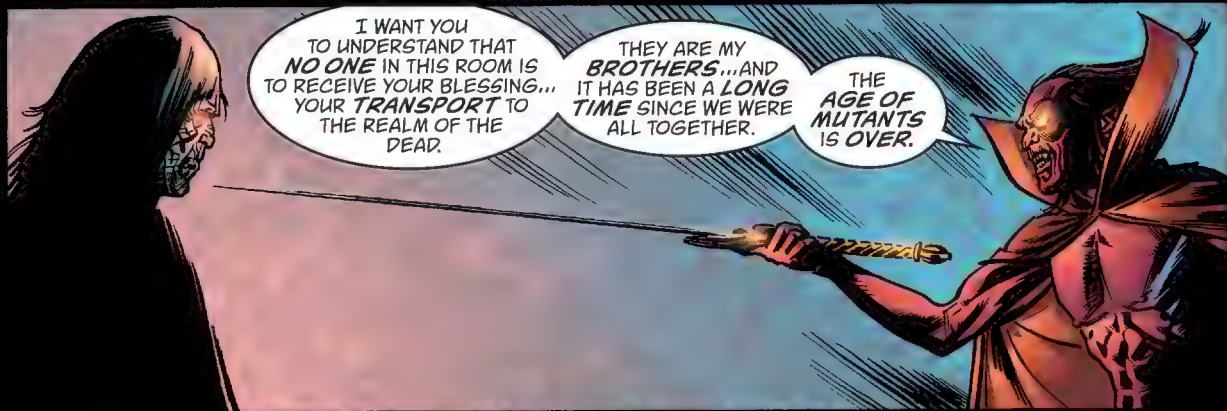


JUST SO WE UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER, JUDE...

...YOU KNOW THIS SWORD CAN KILL EVEN YOU. AND WHERE WOULD YOUR BLESSINGS BE THEN?



MY BLESSING IS NOT FOR ONE LIKE YOU, MOCKER. IT IS FOR THOSE THAT WILL RECEIVE IT WITH JOY.



I WANT YOU TO UNDERSTAND THAT NO ONE IN THIS ROOM IS TO RECEIVE YOUR BLESSING... YOUR TRANSPORT TO THE REALM OF THE DEAD.

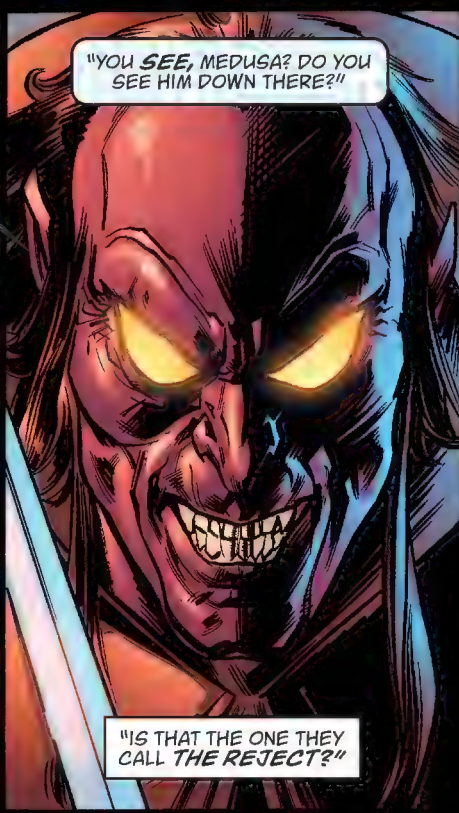
THEY ARE MY BROTHERS...AND IT HAS BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE WE WERE ALL TOGETHER.

THE AGE OF MUTANTS IS OVER.



WE ARE THE FIRSTBORN OF THE CELESTIALS.

LET US CLAIM OUR BIRTH-RIGHT!



"YOU SEE, MEDUSA? DO YOU SEE HIM DOWN THERE?"

"IS THAT THE ONE THEY CALL THE REJECT?"



"THAT'S HIM...HE'S IN PLACE AS WE KNEW HE WOULD BE."

"WE?"



YOU.

WHY A MASK
HERE? YOU ARE AMONG
FAMILY.



BECAUSE
YOU ARE NOT
FAMILY.

NOR
ARE YOU A TRUE
DEVIAN.

YOUR
FORM IS AN
OPTION.



OUR
FORMS CANNOT
CHANGE.

HORRIBLE!

DISGUSTING
CREATURE!

IT'S HIM...
THE MOST
HIDEOUS OF
US ALL!



YOU CALL
WHAT IS BEAUTIFUL
UGLY, WHAT IS GOOD
EVIL.

YOU'RE A
MONSTER!



AND YOU ARE A FLY!



KILL IT!

THE AGE OF THE ETERNAL IS OVER! EVEN THOSE THAT LOOK LIKE THEM!

GIVE HIM TO JUDE!
GIVE HIM TO JUDE!



YOU SEE, JUDE?

INDEED, MEPHISTO...YOU ARE A FITTING BROTHER TO THEM.



BRING
HIM TO
ME.



IF YOU
COULD REBEL, ANY
OF THEM COULD. I
MUST BE **CAREFUL**...
I CANNOT AFFORD A
BEAUTIFUL
DEVIAN'T.



THEY WILL
SEE WHAT YOU ARE,
JUST AS I HAVE--
UGHK!!



THEY SEE
YOU ARE **NOW**
DEAD...



...AS ARE
ALL THAT
OPPOSE
US!



SCOTT?
SCOTT?



JEAN...*PHOENIX*. REED
RICHARDS IS ABOUT TO
ENTER THE *PARADISE*.

I KNOW. *MAR-
VELL* KNOWS.



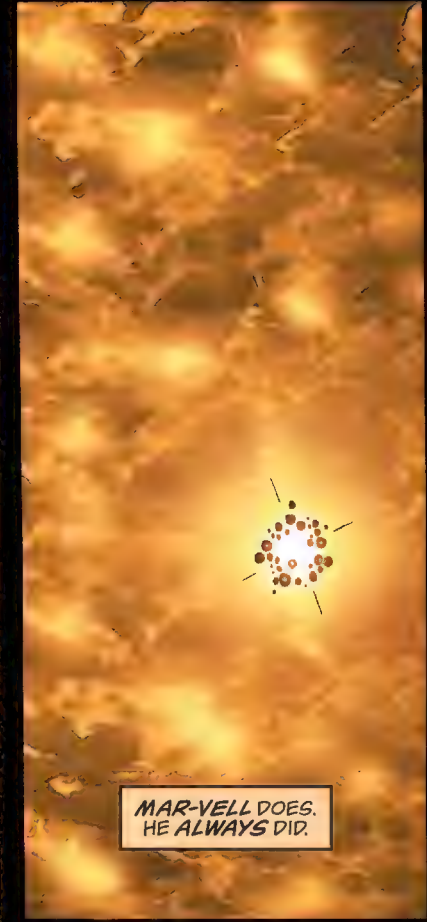
HE DOES?
HOW?



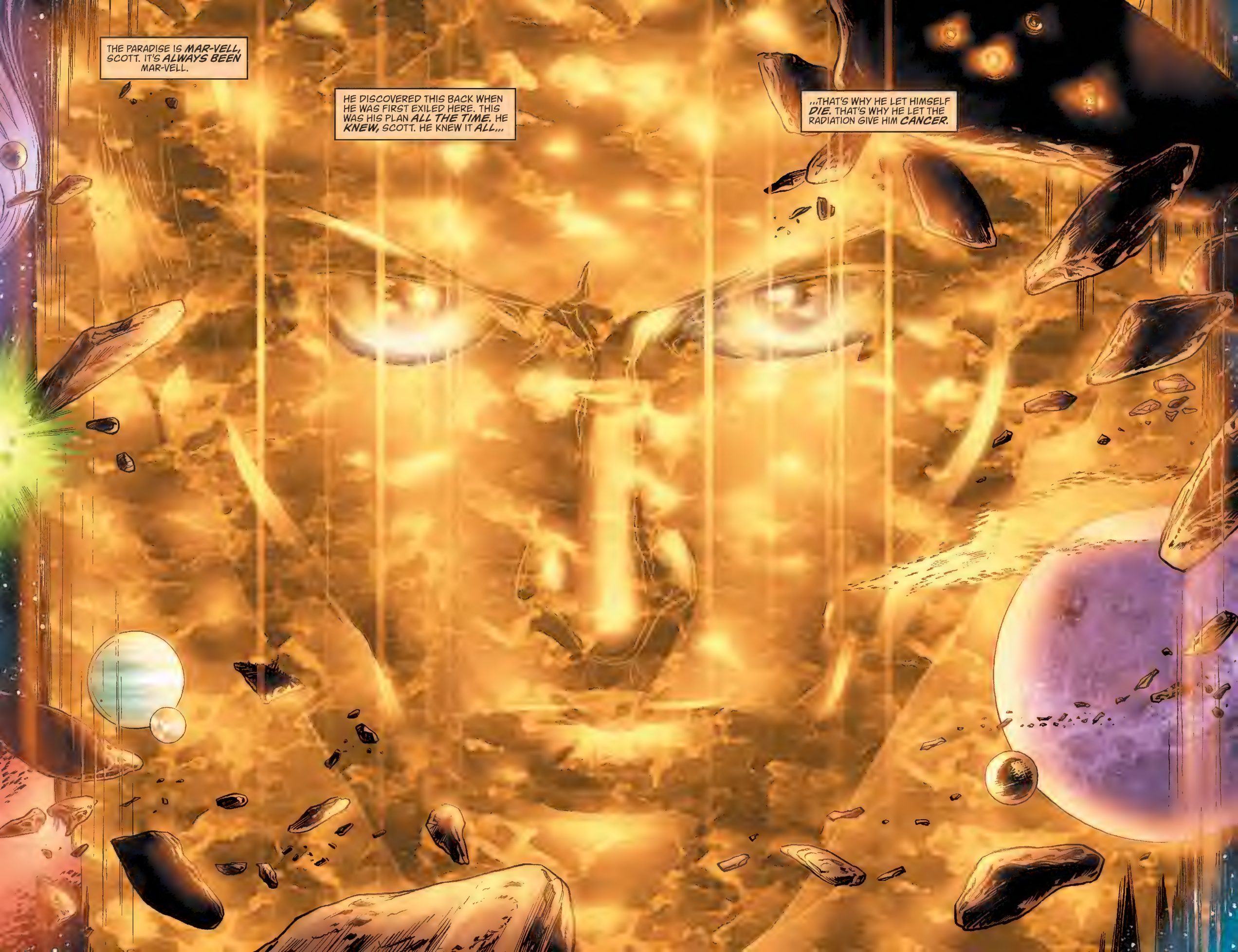
HE'S *ALWAYS* KNOWN,
SCOTT. JUST AS HE
KNEW WHAT YOU WOULD
DO TO ME. HOW YOU
WOULD *CHANGE* ME.



CHANGE YOU? I
DON'T UNDERSTAND...



MAR-VELL DOES.
HE *ALWAYS* DID.



THE PARADISE IS **MAR-VELL**,
SCOTT. IT'S **ALWAYS BEEN**
MAR-VELL.

HE DISCOVERED THIS BACK WHEN
HE WAS FIRST EXILED HERE. THIS
WAS HIS PLAN **ALL THE TIME**. HE
KNEW, SCOTT. HE KNEW IT **ALL...**

...THAT'S WHY HE LET HIMSELF
DIE. THAT'S WHY HE LET THE
RADIATION GIVE HIM **CANCER**.



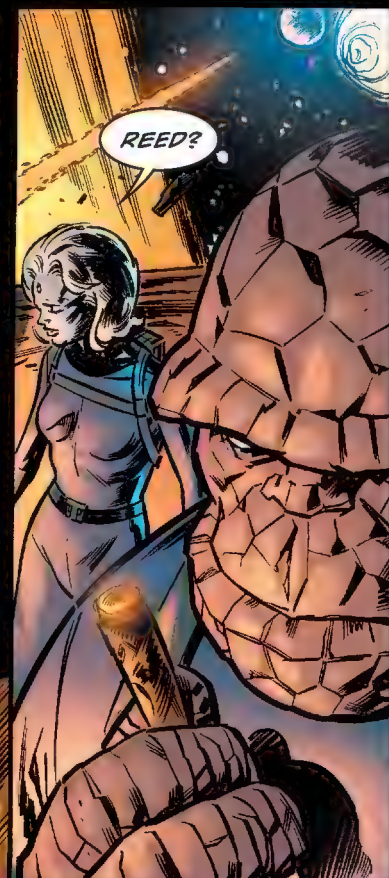
HE KNEW YOUR LOVE
WOULD CHANGE ME.
HE KNEW I'D AGREE
WITH HIM.

I...I STILL DON'T
UNDERSTAND.

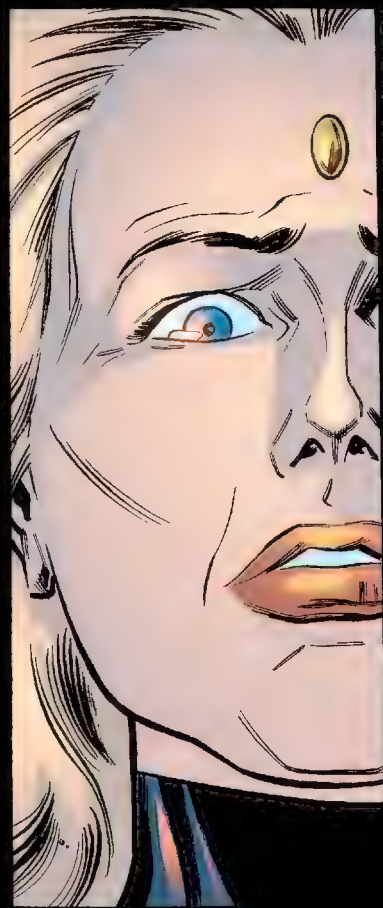
YOU WILL, SCOTT.
YOU WILL.



I DON'T
KNOW HOW TA
TELL YA THIS,
SUZE...



REED?



I'LL
GET
HIM.



OH, BEN...
HE'S NEVER COMING
BACK...

IT'S NOT OVER,
SUZY. STRETCH'S BEEN
IN *WORSE* SITUATIONS.
WELL, *ALMOST* AS
BAD. I MEAN...

HYPERION--?
BUT THE ANTI-
MATTER COULD
KILL HIM...

I
HOPE IT
DOES...

...RIGHT
AFTER I RESCUE
RICHARDS.

Sandy: I can't believe what
you're finding out. Are you
gonna continue with this?

Jeffrey: Yeah.

Sandy: Until when? I mean,
what are you going to do
with this stuff?

Jeffrey: Well, I don't know.

Sandy: You're not going back
to her apartment. (Jeffrey
nods.) Jeffrey, why?

Jeffrey: I'm seeing something
that was always hidden. I'm
involved in a mystery. I'm
in the middle of a mystery
and it's all secret.

Sandy: You like mysteries that
much?

Jeffrey: Yeah. You're a mystery.
I like you, very much.

— David Lynch,
BLUE VELVET

MARVEL

12

PARADISE



KRUEGER

BRAITHWAITE

REINHOLD

"I am the Watchman of Earth. Model number X-51. Some say I am simply a program-deluded robot, a push-button man. I have often responded to these allegations by explaining that I was created to be human...a thinking and feeling computer, to have independent thought. I am no mere robot, I would say with programmed dignity.

"But now, I believe that perhaps I was wrong. I am a robot. For what is independent thought when considering genetic destiny or the nurture of family and social values?

I have watched all of human history. And now I doubt all of humanity. I doubt the freedom I once took as axiom. The man that built me gave me his personality. How different is that from being born into a family? Perhaps in the end, when everything that defines each one of us is on the line, we do what we must. We accept only what we've been built to accept. We do only what life has prepared us to do. We decide only what we have been prepared for and given inclination to choose. I have recently watched so many champions fall in hopes of a better world. Captain America. Iron Man. Norrin Radd. And now, perhaps, Reed Richards is dead, as well.

"If I were to ask Earth's former Watcher, Uatu, what these acts mean, he would tell me that these acts were the equivalent of any other act. They mean nothing. Heroism means nothing. Mankind's only purpose in the universe is to be a cog in the process of Celestial Propagation.

"I cannot deny the purpose that the Celestials would have humanity serve. And perhaps that is all that we've been genetically destined for. But there's more, there's far more than an act of manipulation that dates back to the dawn of civilization. There's everything that happened between then and now.

"Maybe in the end, we're all robots. The question is whether we will serve a programming that damned us long ago, or one that has been forged in the history of the people of Earth since.

"Perhaps being a cog is all we've been told we can look forward to, but there's something far greater that we Robots of Earth have been built for."

PARADISE X

I S S U E 1 2

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"THERE WAS A UNIVERSE THAT EXISTED BEFORE THIS ONE. UATU HAS SAID VERY LITTLE ABOUT WHAT IT WAS LIKE..."

"...ONLY THAT THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE BEINGS THAT WOULD LATER BECOME THE **CELESTIALS** LED TO THE COLLAPSE OF THAT SYSTEM.

"OUR UNIVERSE'S **BIG BANG** WAS AS MUCH DESTRUCTION AS IT WAS CREATION. AS MUCH AN END AS IT WAS A BEGINNING. MUCH MORE A REORGANIZATION THAN A DISSOLUTION.

"BUT IT WAS NOT THE **END** OF ALL THAT LIVED IN THIS ORIGINAL UNIVERSE.

"SOME **SURVIVED** TO EXPLOIT THIS NEW UNIVERSE..."

"...THE **CELESTIALS**.

"THEY BEGAN PROCREATING BY LAYING THE **SEEDS** OF THEIR NUMBERS WITHIN THE CORES OF THE VERY PLANETS OF THE NEW UNIVERSE AND THEN **MUTATING** THE NATIVE INHABITANTS INTO SUPER-POWERED ANTIBODIES TO PROTECT THE EGGS FROM **OUTSIDE INVASION**..."

"...BY **GALACTUS**.

"HE ALONE OPPOSED THE CELESTIALS BY FINDING THOSE IMPLANTED PLANETS THAT HAD NOT YET GIVEN BIRTH TO ANOTHER CELESTIAL AND **CONSUMING** THE EMBRYO.

"STILL OTHERS SURVIVED THE ORIGINAL UNIVERSE BY ATTEMPTING TO **RE-CREATE** THAT UNIVERSE OUT OF THE MATERIAL REASSEMBLED IN THE NEW ONE..."

"...THE **ELDERS OF THE UNIVERSE**.

"THE ELDERS ALREADY KNEW NOT TO OPPOSE THE CELESTIALS. THEY CREATED A **COLLECTING POOL** FROM WHICH THEY BEGAN TO GATHER THE DEAD AND LIFELESS REMAINS OF THE CELESTIALS' PROCREATION.

"BOTH THE PHYSICAL AND THE METAPHYSICAL PLACENTA OF THIS NEW UNIVERSE, IF AN APT METAPHOR IS REQUIRED, FROM WHICH THEY HOPED TO **REBUILD** THE GLORY AND SPLENDOR OF THE ORIGINAL UNIVERSE.

"THIS PLACE HAS HAD **MANY NAMES**...I HAVE HEARD IT CALLED '**THE REALM OF THE DEAD**' MORE OFTEN THAN NOT.

"THOSE THAT FIND THEMSELVES HERE AREN'T EVEN AWARE OF THEIR OWN EXPIRED MORTALITY.

"EACH DAY HERE IS LIKE THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW AND THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY... IT IS AN IRONY THAT IN THE **ABSENCE** OF A TRUE HEAVEN AND TRUE HELL, THIS PURGATORY OF SOULS **EXISTS**.

"THE CELESTIALS CAME TO **EARTH** AS THEY DID **ANY** WORLD THAT SUITED THEIR NEEDS...AND IMPLANTED ONE OF THEIR **OWN** WITHIN THE CORE OF THE PLANET.

"THEY BEGAN TO **MANIPULATE** THE NATURAL DOMINANT SPECIES INTO A RACE THAT COULD SUITABLY PROTECT THE GROWING CELESTIAL.

"THEY **GENEENGINEERED** PRIMITIVES INTO VARIOUS FORMS...SOME WERE SEEN AS **FAILURES**.

"OTHERS SERVED THE **MONETARY NEED** OF PROTECTING THE PLANET CORE UNTIL, GIVEN TIME, THE ENTIRE PLANET'S POPULATION MIGHT BE MUTATED INTO A **SUPER HUMANITY**.

"AND WHILE THE CELESTIALS AND EVEN THE ELDERS MIGHT HAVE CONSIDERED THE **POTENTIAL** OF THOSE RACES THEY MUTATED, DID THEY EVER CONSIDER THE **SOCIOLOGICAL EFFECTS** THOSE MUTATED RACES WOULD HAVE ON THOSE PLANETS WHOSE PEOPLE WERE NEVER MUTATED AT ALL?

"DID THEY EVER CONSIDER PEOPLES LIKE THE **KREE**? A RACE WHOSE AGGRESSIONS WERE NEVER MANIPULATED, BUT STILL LONGED FOR CONQUEST NONETHELESS?"

"ON EARTH, THE KREE MANIPULATED PART OF HUMANITY BY TRIGGERING THEIR LATENT **MUTAGENIC POTENTIALS**.

"THEY CREATED A RACE OF **INHUMANS** THAT THEY HOPED TO USE AS **WEAPONS** AGAINST THEIR ENEMIES. TO SERVE AS THE **SOLDIERS** THE KREE THEMSELVES COULD NOT BE.

"THIS RACE, THOUGH, WOULD **REJECT** THE NOTION OF BEING **WEAPONS**, AND REMAIN ON EARTH TO LIVE **SEPARATE** FROM MANKIND.

"THE KREE WOULD CONSIDER THE INHUMANS YET **ANOTHER FAILURE**.

"BUT WHEN THE KREE RETURNED TO EARTH, IT WAS **NOT** TO COLLECT THE INHUMANS. IT WAS FOR **CONQUEST** OF THE **MUTATED HUMANITY** ON EARTH. **MUTANITY** WOULD BE THEIR **ARMY**.

"ONE OF THEIR NUMBER, **MAR-VELL**, CAME AS A **SPY**. BUT HE LEARNED TO **LOVE** THIS WORLD, AND BECAME ITS **CHAMPION**.

"HE CAME TO LOVE THE PLANET'S **PEOPLES**; ITS **CULTURE**; ITS **HISTORY**; ITS **FAITHS**. THERE WAS NO BELIEF IN AN **AFTERLIFE** ON HIS NATIVE WORLD.

"AND SO HE **ADOPTED** ALL HE COULD OF EARTH. HE CONSIDERED THOSE HEROES HE CAME TO ENSLAVE AS HIS **FRIENDS AND ALLIES**.

"YET ONE DAY, HE **DIED**.

"AND IN THAT COLLECTIVE POOL THE ELDERS HAD CREATED, HE BEGAN TO PLAN HIS **ESCAPE**.

"MAR-VELL WAS **REBORN** IN THE PAST FEW YEARS TO LEAD THE HEROES OF THIS WORLD ON A **QUEST** TO COLLECT **WEAPONS**, **ARTIFACTS** AND **RAW MATERIALS** THAT HE TRANSPORTED TO THAT PART OF HIMSELF THAT STILL EXISTED IN THE **AFTERLIFE** COLLECTING POOL.

"MAR-VELL USED ONE WEAPON HE'D FOUND TO **NULLIFY** THE 'ELDER' KNOWN AS **DEATH**, THUS CREATING A **LEAK** IN THE COLLECTIVE POOL.

"IT WAS THROUGH THIS LEAK THAT THE INHABITANTS OF THE REALM OF THE DEAD COULD **ESCAPE** INTO...

"...A **PARADISE**.

"MAR-VELL USED EVERYTHING HE'D COLLECTED TO **BUILD** THIS PARADISE. THOSE THAT ESCAPED WITH HIM FOUND AN **AFTERLIFE** WHERE THEIR **WILDEST DREAMS** WERE WAITING TO BE REALIZED FOR THEM.

"MAR-VELL EVEN USED HIS POWER TO **FURTHER** **MUTATE** OR **TRANSFIGURE** CERTAIN CHAMPIONS OF THE PRIOR WORLD TO A STATE OF ALMOST **ANGELIC PROPORTIONS**.

"THESE WERE HIS CHAMPIONS TO COLLECT **MORE SOULS** FROM THE REALM OF THE DEAD FOR THIS PLACE...JUST AS THE **CELESTIALS** ONCE CREATED THE **DEVIANTS** AND **ETERNALS** TO PREPARE THE WORLD'S PEOPLE FOR ITS **MUTAGENIC CHANGES**.

"THE PARADISE BEGAN TO **EXPAND** WITH EACH NEW BEING MADE A CITIZEN OF IT, MOVING OUT INTO THE **NEGATIVE ZONE**.

"BY NOW THE EXPANDING PARADISE HAS DESTROYED **DOZENS** OF WORLDS, SWALLOWING THEM WHOLE. FEW RACES HAVE **SURVIVED** THEIR ATTEMPTS TO ESCAPE FROM ITS ONSLAUGHT.

"MANY THINK OF MAR-VELL AS A HERO, BECAUSE OF WHAT HE'S DONE FOR THEM... BUT FOR THOSE SURVIVORS THAT HAVE ESCAPED HIS ADVANCING PARADISE IS NOTHING LESS THAN **ARMAGEDDON**."

"PERHAPS THE GREATEST HERO ON EARTH, **REED RICHARDS**, THE MAN WHO FIRST DISCOVERED THE NEGATIVE ZONE, HAS NOW GONE TO **CONFRONT** MAR-VELL..."



"...TO DISCOVER IF, IN CREATING HEAVEN, **HELL** HAS ALSO COME. FOR ALL I KNOW, REED IS **DEAD**, MEDUSA. LIKE YOUR **HUSBAND**. LIKE **KING BRITAIN**."

SOME MIGHT SUPPOSE THAT MAR-VELL TOOK ONLY THOSE WEAPONS FROM EARTH THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN A **THREAT** TO HIM. I DON'T KNOW...

...PERHAPS THEY WERE REALLY ALL HE NEEDED TO **BUILD** THE PARADISE.

AS TO WHY MAR-VELL DIDN'T TAKE KING BRITAIN'S SWORD, **EXCALIBUR**, I CAN'T TELL YOU...

...BUT WHAT I **CAN** TELL YOU IS THAT EXCALIBUR IS THE **ONLY** WEAPON ON EARTH THAT DOESN'T SEEM TO HAVE AN **ORIGIN**.

THERE'S NO RECORD OF WHEN IT FIRST CAME TO EARTH OR EVEN **WHY** IT WAS CREATED. ALL THERE IS, IS A **MYTH** THAT STATES IT WAS CREATED IN **HEAVEN**.

MEPHISTO KILLED **BRIAN** WITH THAT SWORD--HE **KILLED** HIM!

LISTEN TO ME, MOTHER. WE STILL HAVE **ALLIES** IN THIS WORLD...I HAVE CALLED THEM...THEY ARE COMING.

NO, LISTEN TO **ME**, MY SON. BRIAN WAS KILLED BY THE **MAGIC SWORD**. IT **KILLED** HIM! NOW, MEPHISTO HAS THE **ONLY** WEAPON THAT CAN **STOP** HIM!

THERE'S NO ONE WHO CAN **CHANGE** THAT.

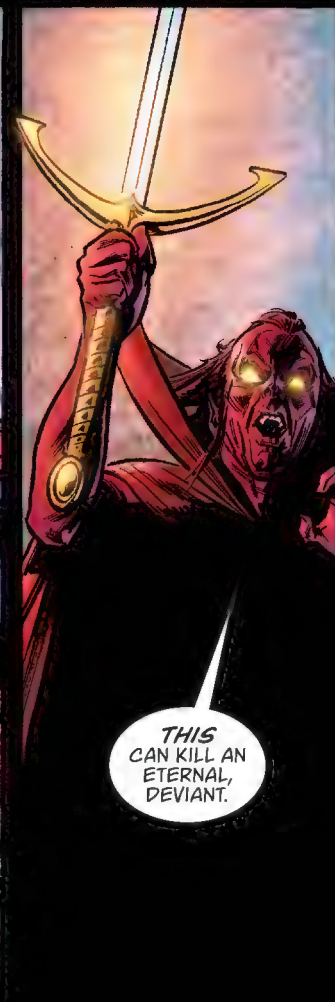
THAT'S NOT WHAT MY FATHER SAID.

YOUR FATHER? **BLACK BOLT**? BUT HE'S **DEAD**! HE'S--

MOTHER. HE WAS A **HERO** AND A **KING**.

WE MUST **BELIEVE** THINGS CAN BE **CHANGED**.







MY
SON JUDE
CAN.

I AM **NOT**
YOUR SON, MEPHISTO.
NOR WILL I **PRETEND**
TO BE ANYTHING BUT A
FRIEND TO THE
SUFFERING.

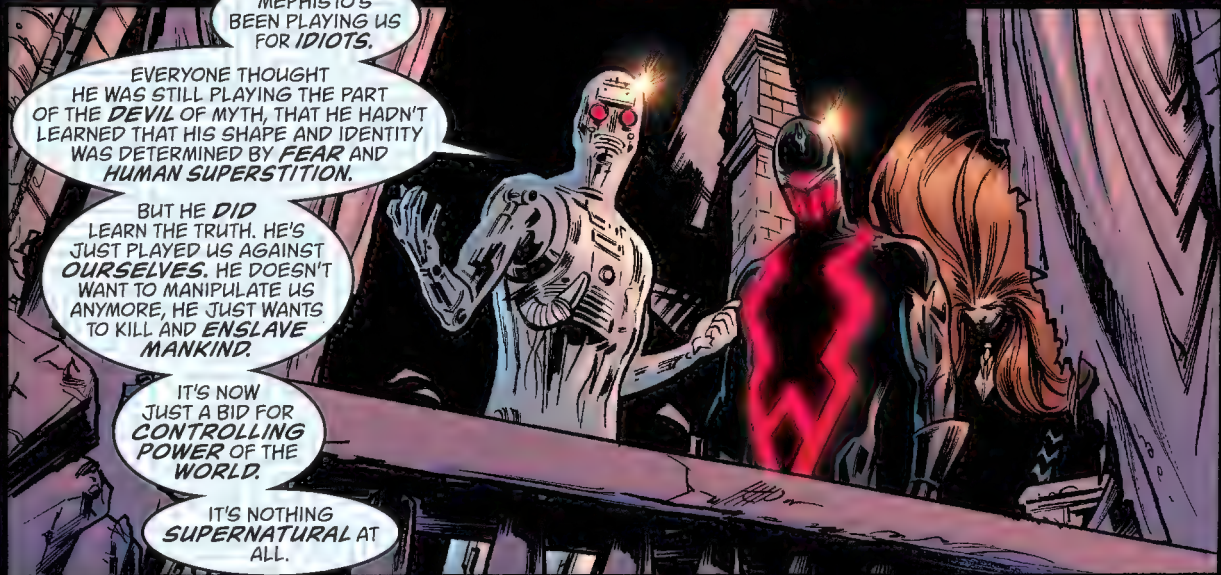
MEPHISTO'S
BEEN PLAYING US
FOR **IDIOTS**.

EVERYONE THOUGHT
HE WAS STILL PLAYING THE PART
OF THE **DEVIL** OF MYTH, THAT HE HADN'T
LEARNED THAT HIS SHAPE AND IDENTITY
WAS DETERMINED BY **FEAR** AND
HUMAN SUPERSTITION.

BUT HE **DID**
LEARN THE TRUTH. HE'S
JUST PLAYED US AGAINST
OURSELVES. HE DOESN'T
WANT TO MANIPULATE US
ANYMORE, HE JUST WANTS
TO KILL AND **ENSLAVE**
MANKIND.

IT'S NOW
JUST A BID FOR
CONTROLLING
POWER OF THE
WORLD.

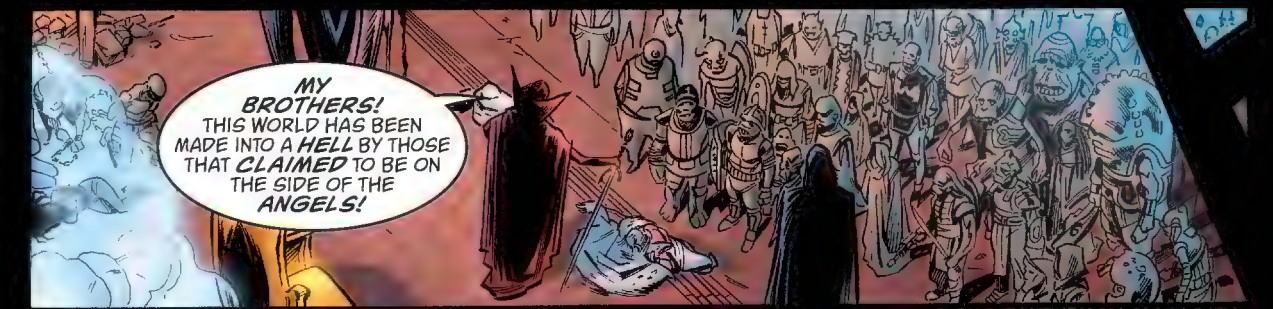
IT'S NOTHING
SUPERNATURAL AT
ALL.



BUT THAT DOESN'T
MEAN THOSE FORCES
HE ONCE MANIPULATED
DON'T STILL THINK OF
HIM AS AN **ENEMY**.

FORCES
HE **FORGOT**
ABOUT.





MY
BROTHERS!
THIS WORLD HAS BEEN
MADE INTO A HELL BY THOSE
THAT CLAIMED TO BE ON
THE SIDE OF THE
ANGELS!



AND
THEY CALL US
DEMONS.



WE HAVE
EACH BEEN
MANIPULATED
INTO BELIEVING WE
ARE SOMETHING
WE ARE NOT.

I WAS
SHAPED BY
HUMAN MYTH.
I BELIEVED THE
DESTINIES SET
UPON ME.



SUCH MYTH
WOULD HAVE ME
SLAIN ON THE POINT
OF THE SWORD I
NOW HOLD IN MY
HAND.



THE SAME
MYTHS SAY IT IS THE
ANGELS THAT WIN
DOMINANCE OVER THE
EARTH. THE MEER THAT
INHERIT THIS
WORLD.

I, FOR ONE,
AM TIRED OF BEING
CONTROLLED BY FAIRY
TALES.



DO YOU
HEAR ME, YOU
OVERBLOATED
FAIRY TALE?

TRY
LIVING HAPPILY
EVER AFTER
NOW!

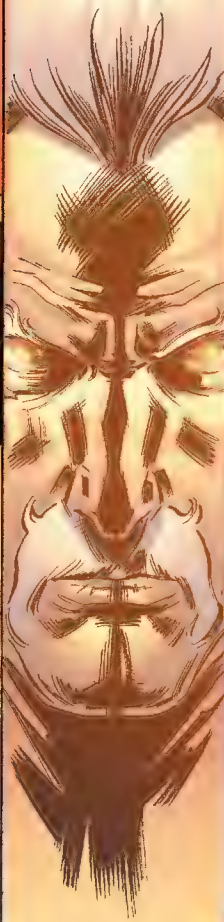
AH,
TIME FOR ONE
LAST ATTEMPT FROM THE
"HEROES" TO SAVE THE
DAY. YOU'D THINK THAT IN
LIGHT OF EVERYTHING THAT
HAS CHANGED, *THAT*
WOULD, TOO.



WHAT IS THIS,
MEPHISTO?



IT IS
A *TRICK*, MY
BROTHERS! A
TRICK!

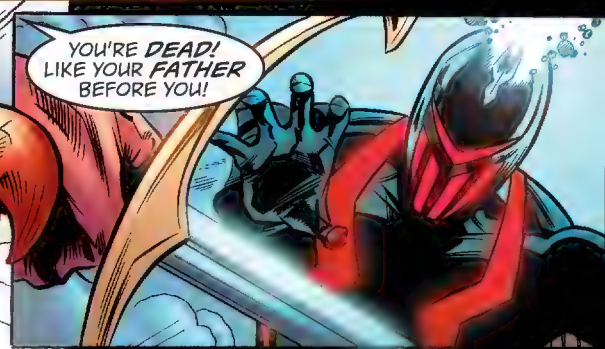
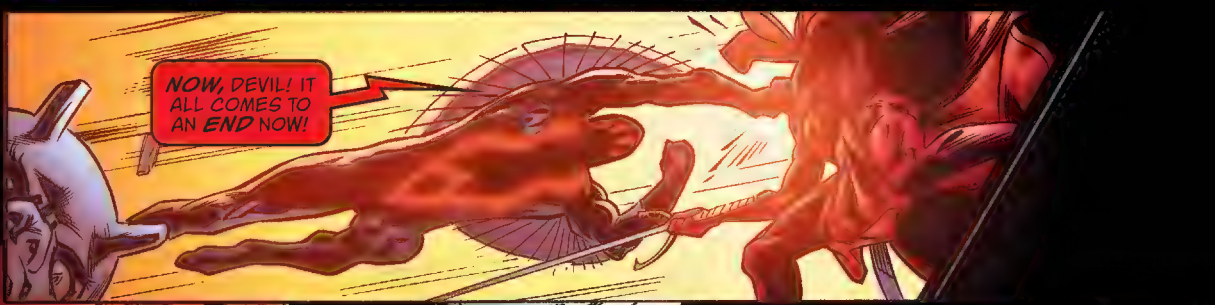


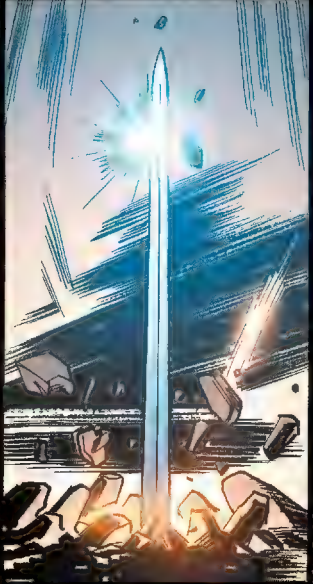
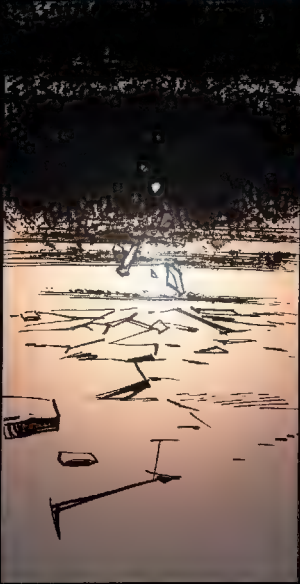
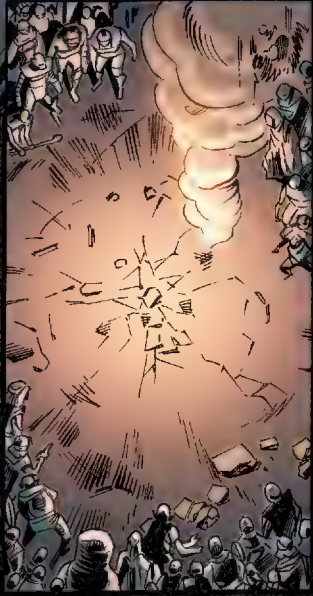
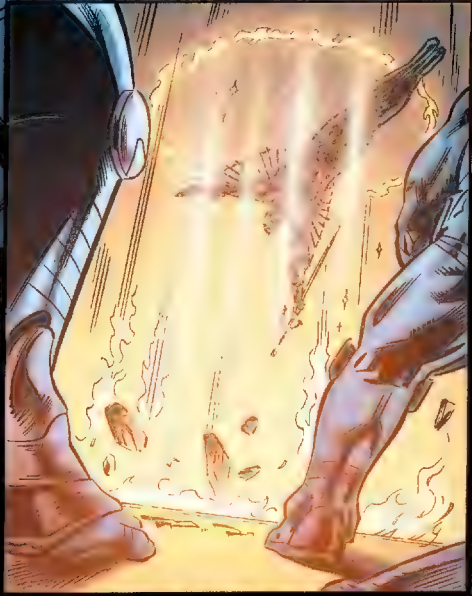
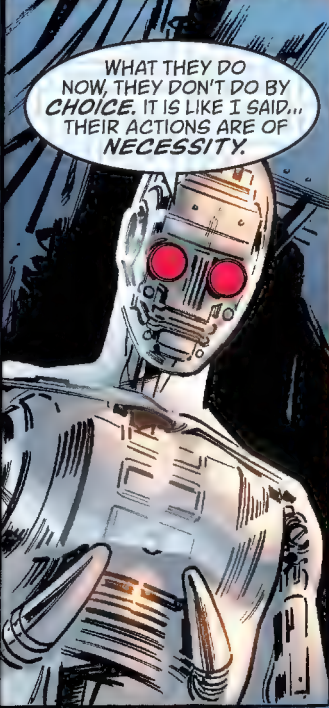
DECEIT IS
NOT OUR WAY,
MEPHISTO. IT IS
NOT THE WAY OF
THE ANCIENT
MAGICS.



THE
SWORD!

GET THE
SWORD!







YOU HAVE LOST, DEVIL!

COME, EMBRACE THE BLESSING, SAD ONE.

NO--!

WHAT?

AGHH!!

THE SWORD... IT...

"YES, IT CUTS THE MANIPULATED FROM THE MANIPULATION."

"IT *HEALS* THE HOST TO A DEGREE OF WHAT THE CELESTIALS DID TO IT. IT WILL *EQUALIZE* THE DEVIANTS TO THE ETERNALS. *BEAUTY* SHALL REIGN UNDER IT."

MY BROTHERS...
HEL...HELP-P-PP...ME...

THE SWORD
CAN DO THAT? WE CAN
BE LIKE...LIKE THE
ETERNALS?

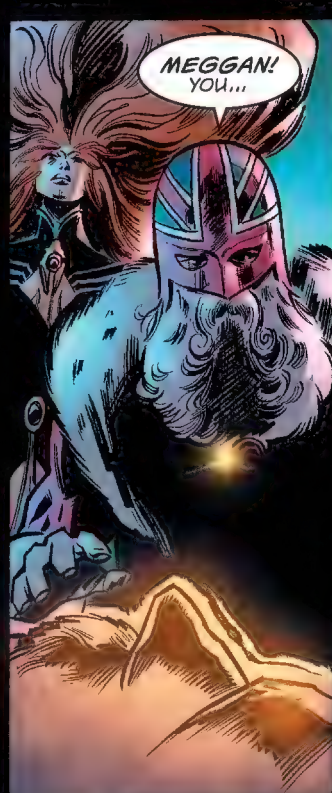
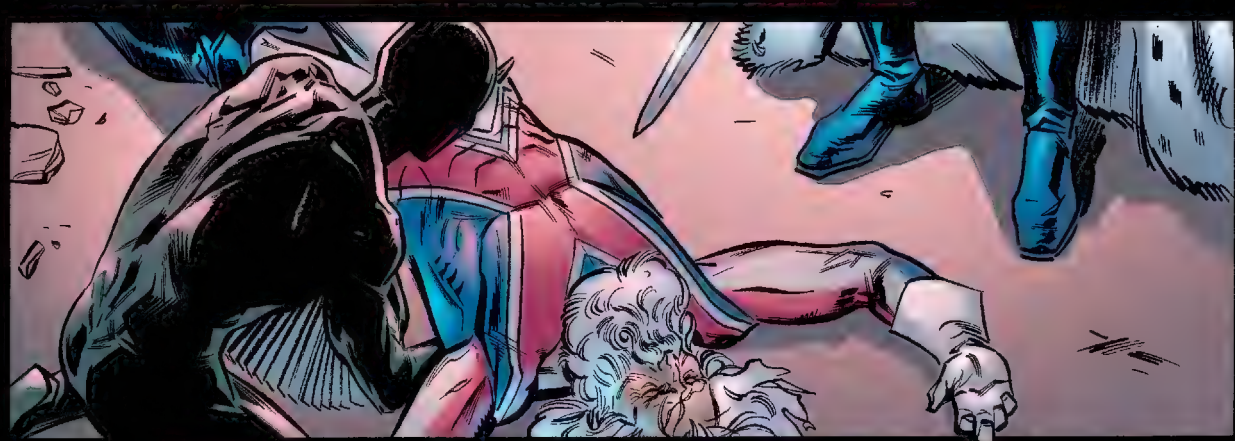
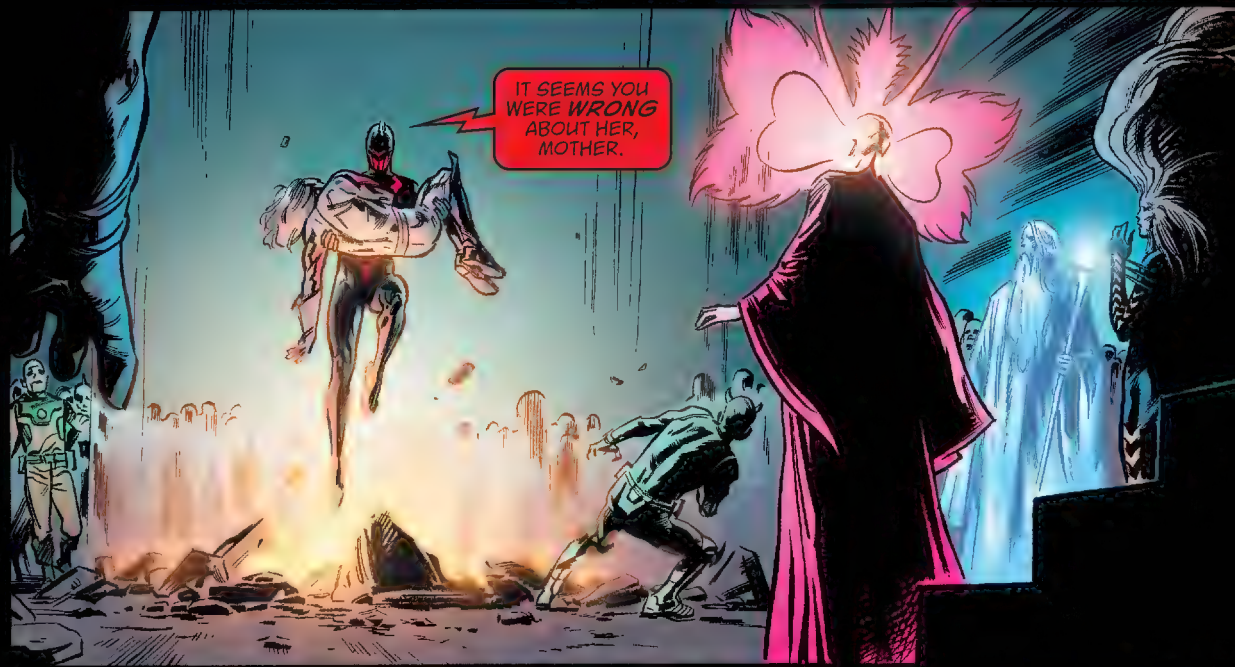
YES.

BUT...I...
KILLED YOU...

YOU DID,
BUT NOT THE
WAY YOU
THINK.

I...









"WHEN ARTHUR'S REIGN ENDED, HE WAS SENT INTO THE **SEA** TO COME TO A PLACE WHERE HIS BODY MIGHT **REST** FOR HIS EVENTUAL RETURN. WHERE HE MIGHT BE... **BLESSED**."

"I KNOW OF AN **ISLAND**, JUDE. IT WAS DISCOVERED BY THE **X-MEN** QUITE A WHILE AGO. I'M SUGGESTING THAT I GIVE IT TO YOU, THAT IT BE YOUR **PLACE OF OPERATION**. YOUR PLACE OF **BLESSING OTHERS**."

"WE DO NEED YOU, JUDE, BUT IT IS NOT A BLESSING TO THE HEALTHY, IT IS A **HORROR**. IT IS ONLY A **BALM** FOR THOSE READY TO GO JOIN THEIR LOVED ONES IN THE REALM OF THE DEAD."

"WE COULD BRING THEM TO YOU, IF YOU WERE **WILLING**."

"WE COULD **HELP YOU** IN YOUR CRUSADE TO **HELP MANKIND**."

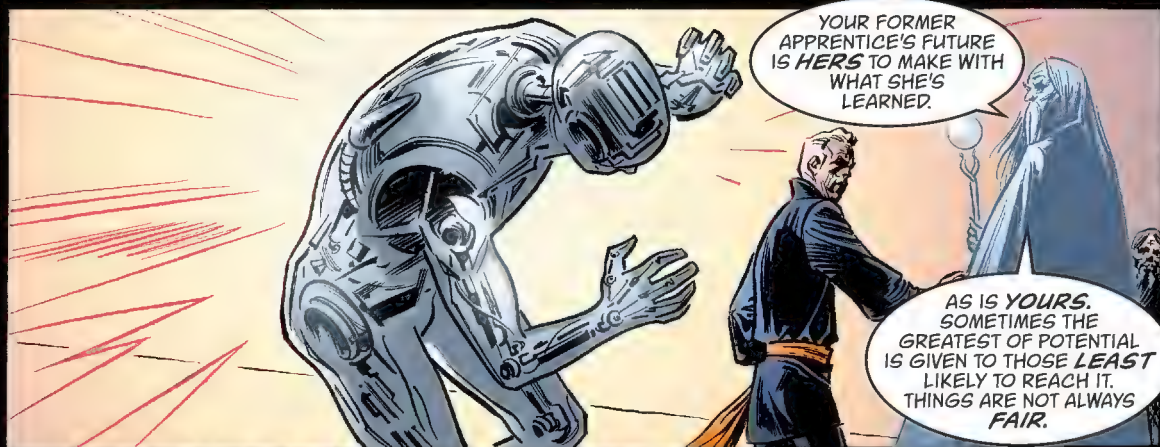
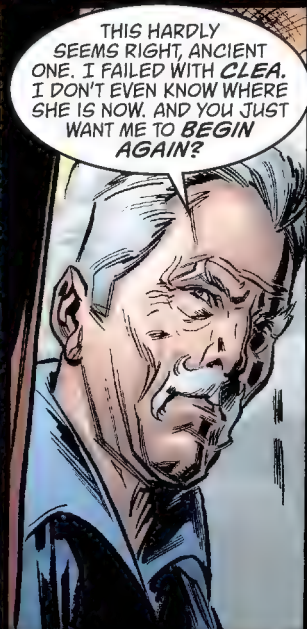


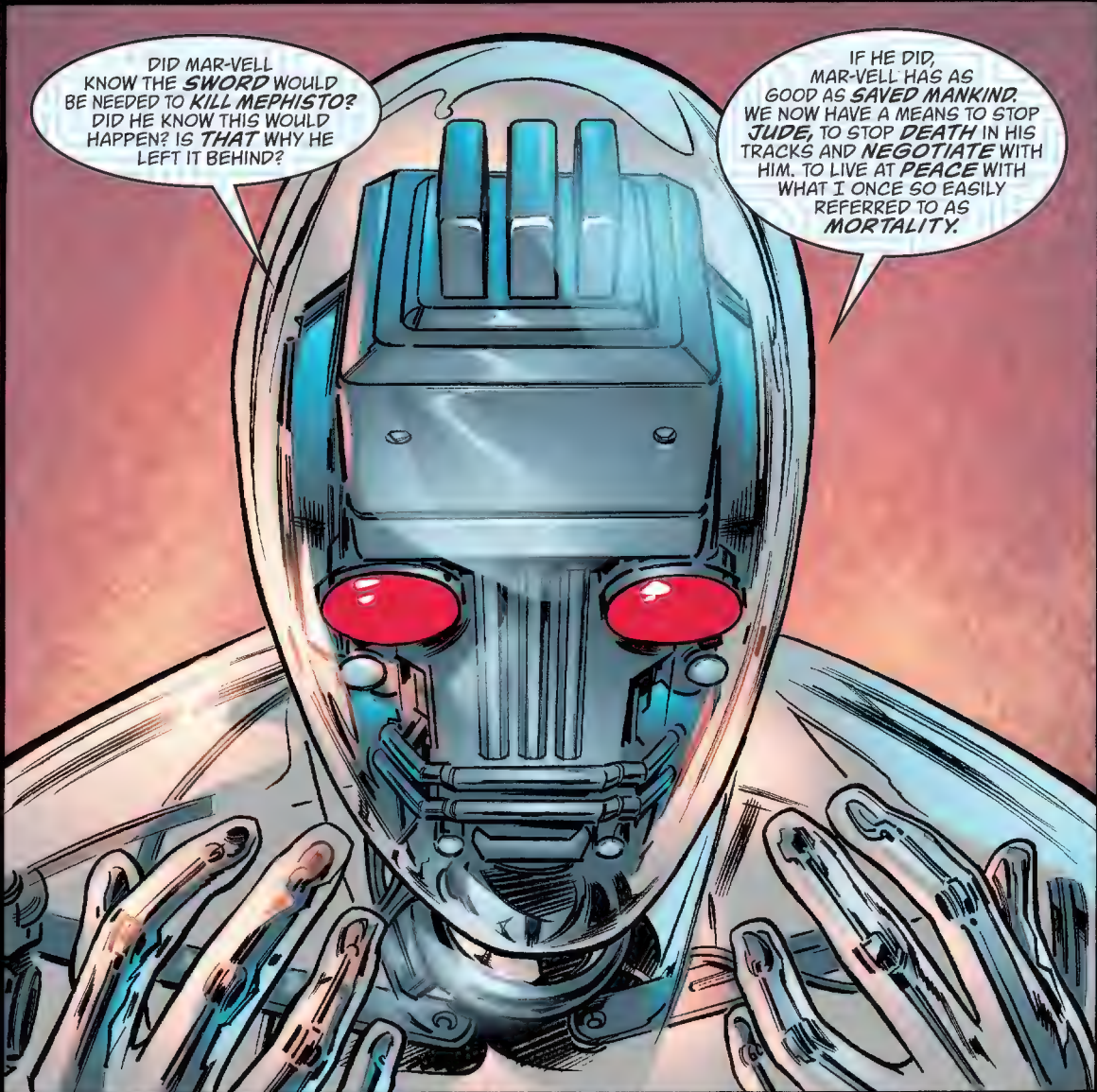
I AM **AFRAID** OF BEING ALONE AND **UNABLE** TO DO WHAT I **MUST**."



BELIEVE ME, I DON'T THINK YOU'LL HAVE **ANY FEAR** OF THAT NOW."

VERY WELL."





DID MAR-VELL
KNOW THE **SWORD** WOULD
BE NEEDED TO **KILL MEPHISTO**?
DID HE KNOW THIS WOULD
HAPPEN? IS **THAT** WHY HE
LEFT IT BEHIND?

IF HE DID,
MAR-VELL HAS AS
GOOD AS **SAVED MANKIND**.
WE NOW HAVE A MEANS TO STOP
JUDE, TO STOP **DEATH** IN HIS
TRACKS AND **NEGOTIATE** WITH
HIM. TO LIVE AT **PEACE** WITH
WHAT I ONCE SO EASILY
REFERRED TO AS
MORTALITY.

"OR IS IT **SOMETHING ELSE**? MAYBE MAR-VELL
DIDN'T LEAVE THE **SWORD** BEHIND FOR **US**, PER
SE, BUT TO GUARANTEE THAT A **FORM** OF DEATH
WOULD STILL EXIST ON EARTH...IF ONLY FOR THE
EXPANSION OF PARADISE.

"OR WHAT IF MAR-VELL DIDN'T TAKE THE
SWORD BECAUSE IT WOULD BE THE **ONLY**
THING THAT COULD BE USED AGAINST
MAR-VELL HIMSELF?

"IF **REED** DIED IN HIS ATTEMPT
TO REACH THE PARADISE, HE
MAY ALREADY BE THERE. AND
HE MAY BE UNDER **MAR-VELL'S**
CONTROL.

"IF NOT, RICHARDS IS ABOUT TO
DISCOVER WHETHER MAR-VELL
IS THE **ALLY** OF MANKIND HE
ALWAYS **SAID** HE WAS.

"OR IF, IN THE END, THE **KREE RACE**
OF WHICH HE WAS A CAPTAIN, AND
WHO NOW EXIST AS AN **ARMY** IN THE
LAND OF THE DEAD, HAVEN'T SUCCEED-
ED BEYOND EVEN THEIR WILDEST
IMAGININGS.

"THE **MULTI-UNIVERSE** MAY
NOW BELONG TO **THEM**."

"Wars are not won
by evacuations."
— Winston Churchill

MARVEL

A
PARADISE X

A

A PARADISE XTM SPECIAL



KRUEGER
BRAITHWAITE
REINHOLD

PARADISE X

I S S U E A

JIM KRUEGER
story and script

ALEX ROSS
story, cover and character designs

DOUGIE BRAITHWAITE
pencils

BILL REINHOLD
inks

PETE PANTAZIS
colors

TODD KLEIN
letters

MIKE MARTS & WARREN SIMONS
editors

JOE QUESADA
editor in chief

BILL JEMAS
president



I
CREATED THE
AVENGERS.



YOU
ALL KNOW
THIS, DON'T
YOU?



EARTH'S
MIGHTIEST
HEROES WOULD
NEVER HAVE EXISTED
AT ALL IF IT WEREN'T
FOR ME, LITTLE
OL' ME.



I KNOW WHAT
YOU'RE THINKING. I DIDN'T
REALLY CREATE THE AVENGERS,
I WAS THE ONE THEY GOT
TOGETHER TO FIGHT. I
WAS THE VILLAIN.



OKAY, THAT'S TRUE.
YOU GOT ME. BUT I WAS
MANIPULATED TO BE THAT WAY.
NURTURE CERTAINLY RULED OVER
NATURE IN MY CASE, AND
PERHAPS IN ALL OF
OURS.



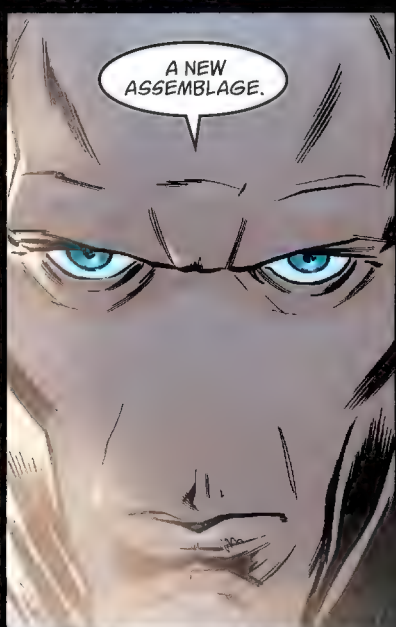
BUT THE
POINT IS...IT WAS
MY PARTY.



AND
IT STILL
IS.



I INTEND TO
CREATE A NEW TEAM,
GENTLEMEN.



A NEW
ASSEMBLAGE.

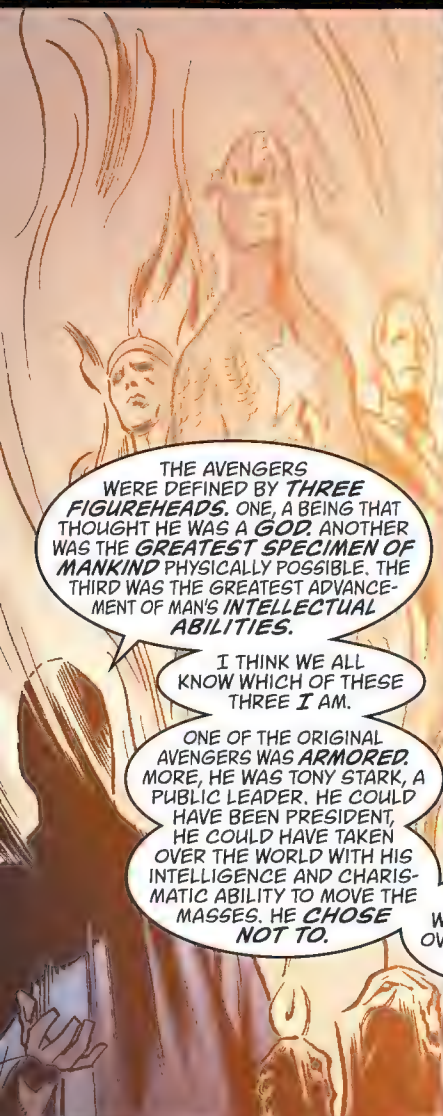


WHICH BRINGS ME TO YOU TWO.

AND YOU, **REJECT**, THE GLORIOUS DESTINY OF THE DEVIANTS PERSONIFIED.

THE **BLACK KNIGHT**...SON OF THE INHUMAN KING, **BLACK BOLT**.

I'D LIKE TO THANK YOU FOR JOINING ME TODAY. FOR HELPING ME REMAKE A REALITY THAT THIS WORLD WAS **NEVER** MEANT TO DO WITHOUT.



THE AVENGERS WERE DEFINED BY **THREE** **FIGUREHEADS**. ONE, A BEING THAT THOUGHT HE WAS A **GOD**. ANOTHER WAS THE **GREATEST SPECIMEN OF MANKIND** PHYSICALLY POSSIBLE. THE THIRD WAS THE GREATEST ADVANCEMENT OF MAN'S **INTELLECTUAL ABILITIES**.

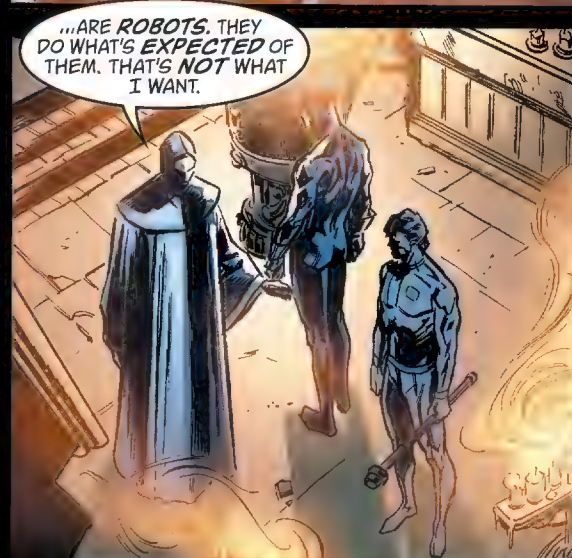
I THINK WE ALL KNOW WHICH OF THESE **THREE** I AM.

ONE OF THE ORIGINAL AVENGERS WAS **ARMORED**. MORE, HE WAS **TONY STARK**, A PUBLIC LEADER. HE COULD HAVE BEEN PRESIDENT, HE COULD HAVE TAKEN OVER THE WORLD WITH HIS INTELLIGENCE AND CHARISMATIC ABILITY TO MOVE THE MASSES. HE **CHOSE NOT TO**.

GOT YOU WRITTEN ALL OVER IT, **BLACK KNIGHT**.



BUT THERE IS A **TEAM OF AVENGERS**. THE **IRON AVENGERS**...



...ARE **ROBOTS**. THEY DO WHAT'S **EXPECTED** OF THEM. THAT'S **NOT** WHAT I WANT.



THE OTHER MEMBER OF THE "**BIG THREE**" WAS THE MOST **PERFECT** HUMAN IMAGINABLE. **STEVE ROGERS** WAS, REGARDLESS OF WHAT HE BELIEVED ABOUT HIMSELF, THE BEST THE RACE COULD BE.

YOU SEE A **PATTERN** HERE, **REJECT**?



THOR HAS GIVEN UP ON BEING THOR. HE WOULD RATHER BE A **MAN**--A DOCTOR.

STARK **DIED** FACING THE CELESTIALS. AND WE ALL KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO CAPTAIN AMERICA.

IN THEIR ABSENCE, WE CAN ALL BE WHO WE WERE **MEANT** TO BE.

THE ONLY **REAL** QUESTION IS...



...WHO
DO WE
FIGHT?



WE'RE HERE.
BUT THERE'S NO
MAR-VELL. NO ALL-
KNOWING GOD.
SOME REBELLION
IN HEAVEN THIS
IS.

HE'S HERE,
RICK. WE JUST CAN'T
SEE HIM. IF ANYTHING,
MURDOCK TAUGHT
ME THAT...

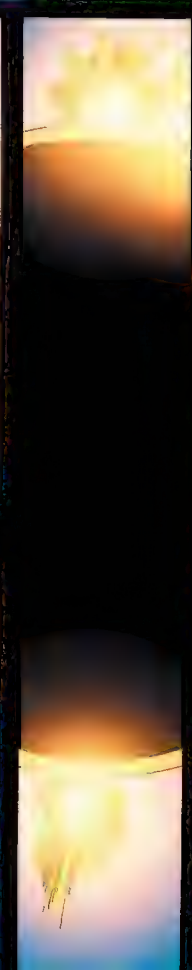


...OUR
EYES JUST
NEED TO BE
OPENED...

MY OLD
ENEMY, AT
LAST.

DID WE
COME HERE,
HUSBAND,
ONLY TO BE
DAMNED?

NO. I
CAME HERE
TO DAMN. YOU'VE
SAVED ME FROM
THAT.



I CAN'T
CONTROL THIS
MAR-VELL, DAD.
HE'S NOT LIKE
THE OTHERS.

YOU
COULDN'T. HE'S
KREE. UNTOUCHED
BY THE CELESTIALS.
THERE IS NO SEED
WITHIN HIM TO
CONTROL.

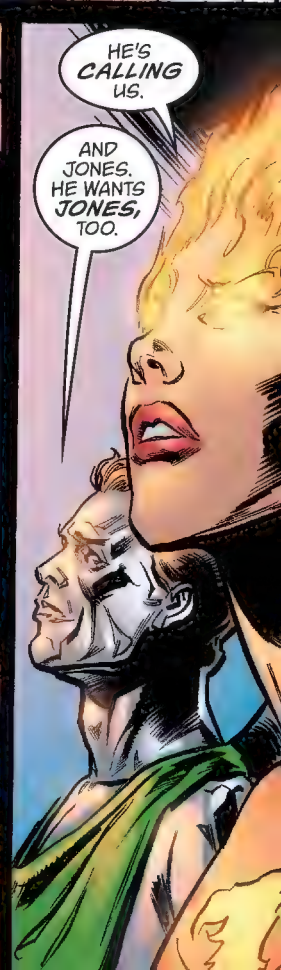
DOES
MAR-VELL
KNOW, CAP?
DOES HE
KNOW WHY
WE'RE
HERE?

HE
KNOWS.



HE'S
CALLING
US.

AND
JONES.
HE WANTS
JONES,
TOO.





WHY ME? YOU ALL,
I UNDERSTAND. BUT I'M NO
COSMIC ANGEL.

I DON'T
KNOW YOU, RICK.
BUT YOU KNEW HIM
BETTER THAN WE DID.
HE WAS YOUR
IDENTITY FOR A
LONG TIME.

I CAN'T
BELIEVE
THIS.

GODSPEED,
CAPTAIN
AMERICA.

ONCE
MORE, INTO THE
BREACH.



MARV?
IS THAT YOU,
MARV?



YOU SEEM
SURPRISED TO SEE ME,
RICK. DIDN'T YOU *WANT*
TO SEE ME?

MARV? BUT,
THIS CAN'T BE...DO
YOU HAVE *CANCER*
AGAIN?

STILL, RICK,
I HAVE THE BLACK
END *STILL*. IS THIS
NOT HOW YOU WANT
TO SEE ME?
SURRENDERING
TO THE INEVITABLE.

DEFEATED?



I DON'T UNDERSTAND THIS. THIS PARADISE IS ANOTHER PRISON, MARV. THIS HEAVEN YOU BUILT IS LIKE A HELL.

WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?



DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU ARE, RICK? DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU WOULD HAVE BECOME? WHAT ANY OF YOU MIGHT HAVE BECOME?



I MAKE UP PEOPLE. I CAN DRAW THEM OUT OF MY MIND.

SO MUCH MORE, RICK. SO MUCH MORE. YOUR MIND IS ONLY ONE PLACE FROM WHICH YOU GATHER CHAMPIONS...FROM THERE, FROM THE PAST, FROM DEATH'S REALM.



"REALLY, RICK, WITH PEOPLE LIKE MCCOY, RICHARDS, BANNER AND PYM, IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE NO ONE THOUGHT OF THIS. YOU ARE A LODESTONE FOR HEROISM.

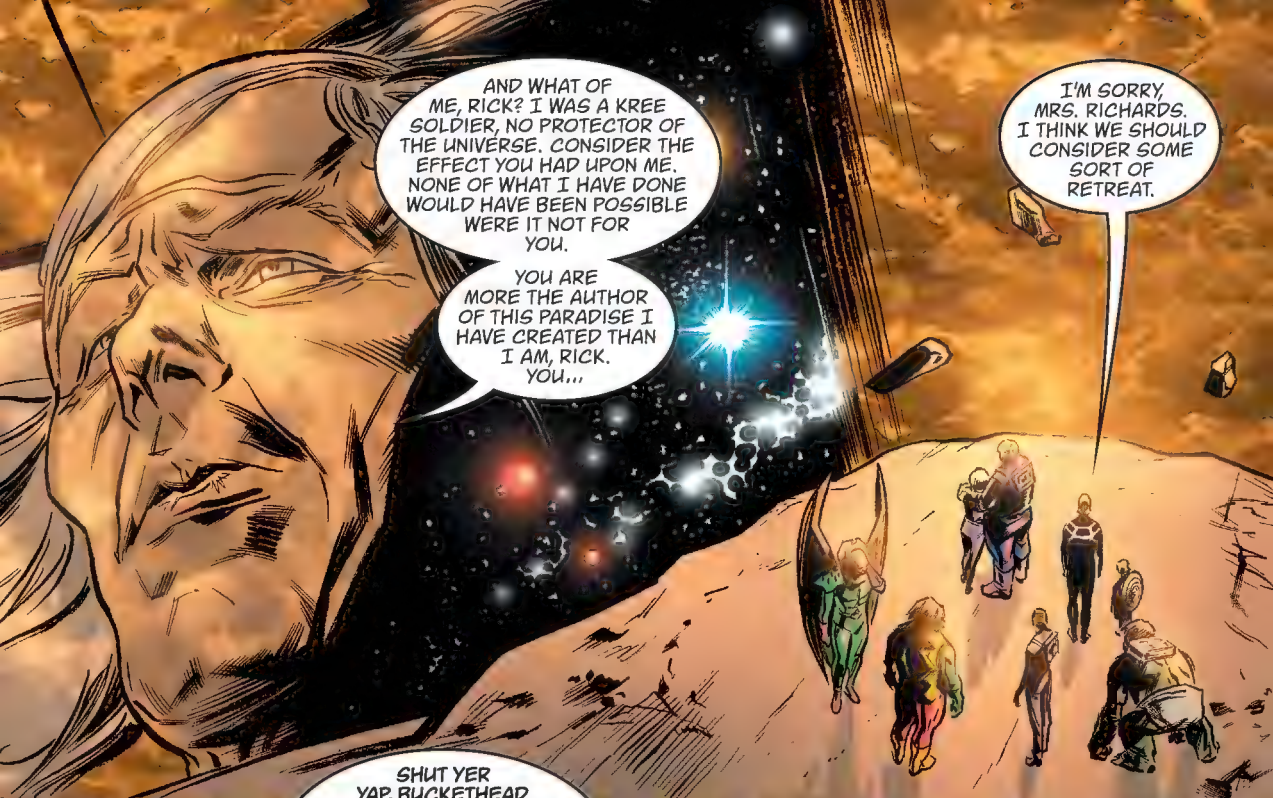
"YOUR CELESTIAL SEED WAS TRIGGERED IN THE SAME BLAST THAT TRANSFORMED BRUCE BANNER. AS IF A TRENCH COULD PROTECT YOU. YOU'VE BEEN A MUTANT ALL ALONG.

"YOU HAVE THE ABILITY TO MOVE PEOPLE BOTH PHYSICALLY AND METAPHYSICALLY. WHEN AFFECTED BY YOUR DESIRE, YOU CHOSE TO MAKE THOSE WITH POWER INTO HEROES.

"HOW ELSE COULD YOU EXPLAIN HOW BANNER, HAVING BECOME THE PERSONIFICATION OF THE BOMB, WOULD BECOME A HERO EVEN IN THE FORM OF THE HULK?

"LOKI STILL THINKS HE CREATED THE AVENGERS. BUT HE'S WRONG, RICK. YOU DID.

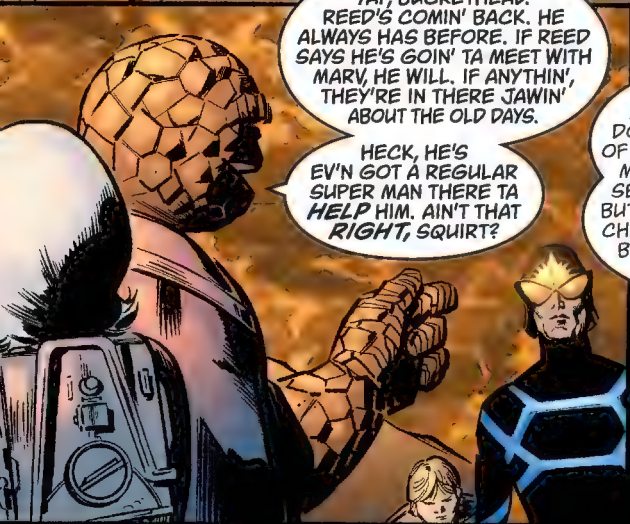
"YOU DIDN'T ASSEMBLE EARTH'S HEROES TO FIGHT OR TO AVENGE, BUT TO BE UNITED. YOU KNEW EVEN THEN THAT IF THEY WERE NOT TOGETHER, THEIR POWER WOULD CORRUPT THEM. YOU KNEW WHAT POWER DID. AND PERHAPS THIS FEAR IS WHAT KEPT YOU FROM SEEING THE POWER WITHIN YOURSELF."



AND WHAT OF ME, RICK? I WAS A KREE SOLDIER, NO PROTECTOR OF THE UNIVERSE. CONSIDER THE EFFECT YOU HAD UPON ME. NONE OF WHAT I HAVE DONE WOULD HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WERE IT NOT FOR YOU.

YOU ARE MORE THE AUTHOR OF THIS PARADISE I HAVE CREATED THAN I AM, RICK. YOU...

I'M SORRY, MRS. RICHARDS. I THINK WE SHOULD CONSIDER SOME SORT OF RETREAT.



SHUT YER YAP, BUCKETHEAD. REED'S COMIN' BACK. HE ALWAYS HAS BEFORE. IF REED SAYS HE'S GOIN' TA MEET WITH MARY, HE WILL. IF ANYTHIN', THEY'RE IN THERE JAWIN' ABOUT THE OLD DAYS.

HECK, HE'S EV'N GOT A REGULAR SUPER MAN THERE TA **HELP** HIM. AIN'T THAT **RIGHT, SQUIRT?**



I DON'T **KNOW**, BEN. I DON'T KNOW MUCH OF **ANYTHING** ANYMORE. MY OTHER SELF IS SPEAKING, BUT HIS FORM KEEPS CHANGING. I LISTEN, BUT I CAN'T HEAR ANYTHING.



HOW MANY GODS HAS REED FACED OVER THE YEARS? HOW AUDACIOUS TO THINK HE COULD WIN EVERY TIME. HOW WRONG.



THE PARADISE IS ALMOST UPON US...WE NEED TO LEAVE. MY HUSBAND WILL SOMEHOW MEET US THERE.



I DON'T
KNOW IF YOU
CAN **HEAR** ME,
RICHARDS.

OR IF YOU
ARE WATCHING THIS,
ROBOT. IF YOU CAN'T
SEE ME, THIS IS
HYPERION.

THE WORLDS
SWALLOWED BY THE
PARADISE HAVE NOT BEEN
DESTROYED.

THEY HAVE
NOT BEEN TRANSPORTED
TO THIS REALM OF THE DEAD
YOU SPEAK OF.

NOR
HAVE
I.

I HAD
BELIEVED THIS TRIP
WOULD END IN MY DEATH,
ROBOT. I HAD HOPED
YOUR WORD WOULD
BE KEPT.

BUT LIKE
THOSE INHABITANTS
OF THE WORLDS WITHIN
THE PARADISE, I AM
NOT DEAD.

THESE
WORLDS HAVE
BEEN **SHAKEN**
TO THEIR
CORE.

WHAT
IS THIS PLACE,
RICHARDS?

WHAT
WAS IT BEFORE
MAR-VELL MADE IT
INTO **THIS**?



CAPTAIN MARVEL? HOW'D HE GET SO BIG?

THIS IS NOT MAR-VELL. THIS IS **GENIS**. MAR-VELL'S CLONE.

• • • AM I? I • • •
+ SUPPOSE I AM. THE COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS CAN BE A CONFUSING THING • • •
+ FROM TIME TO TIME,,, • • •
+ OMNISCIENCE IS FLEETING IF YOU CAN'T LOOK EVERYWHERE AT ONCE. • • •



• YOU HAVE COME TO JUDGE ME FOR MY SHOW OF POWER, HAVEN'T YOU? •
+ IRONIC, ISN'T IT? BECAUSE YOU CAST NO REGRET ON YOUR OWN MISSED OPPORTUNITIES. •

• YOUR BRAINS ARE VERY SMALL. YOU ARE **GENIUSES** ON YOUR WORLDS, BUT STILL YOU DO NOT SEE IT •
+ IS SIMPLE MATH. •

• YOU BELIEVE •
• THAT **TWO** CANNOT BE **ONE**, AND ONE CANNOT POSSIBLY BE MORE THAN •
+ • THAT. • •



• • AND • •
• SO YOU LIMIT YOURSELVES. •



• YOU, STARK, WITH •
• ALL YOU COULD BUILD, WITH ALL •
• YOU COULD DO, HID BEHIND A •
• **MASK.** •

• HID BEHIND •
• A **DESK.** HID BEHIND A •
• **BOTTLE.** HID BEHIND PETTY •
• **AMBITION.** •

• AND •
• YOU, •
• **PYM.** •



• YOUR DISCOVERY •
• OF THE "PYM PARTICLE" •
• COULD HAVE **CURED** THE •
• MUTATIONS ON EARTH. YOUR •
• DISCOVERY COULD HAVE •
• ISOLATED THE CELESTIAL •
• SEED AND SHRUNK IT TO •
• NOTHINGNESS. •



• THE SAME GOES FOR •
• **CANCER,** HANK. FOR ALMOST •
• ALL VIRAL DISEASES. •



• LET ME •
• SHOW YOU WHAT •
• YOU MIGHT HAVE •
• BEEN... •

NO!
PLEASE,
NO!

STOP IT! IT'S
INHUMAN!



CAPTAIN MARVEL, MY OLD FRIEND.

HE IS NO FRIEND, KING BOLT. HE IS ONLY A **WARDEN** IN THIS PLACE.



BOLT?

MARVEL? WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?

★ YOU ALONE CALL ME FRIEND. ★

THIS IS WHAT YOU'VE BEEN WAITING FOR, ISN'T IT?

EVER SINCE CHRONOS HINTED AT WHAT YOU MIGHT BECOME? EVER SINCE HE GAVE YOU A PIECE OF THE COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS AND YOU FIRST SAW THE **FATE** OF MAN.

★ I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT HE WANTED ME TO DO. ★



★ I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT HE MEANT UNTIL THE CONSCIOUSNESS WAS FULLY ASSEMBLED. ★



WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO THE OTHERS?



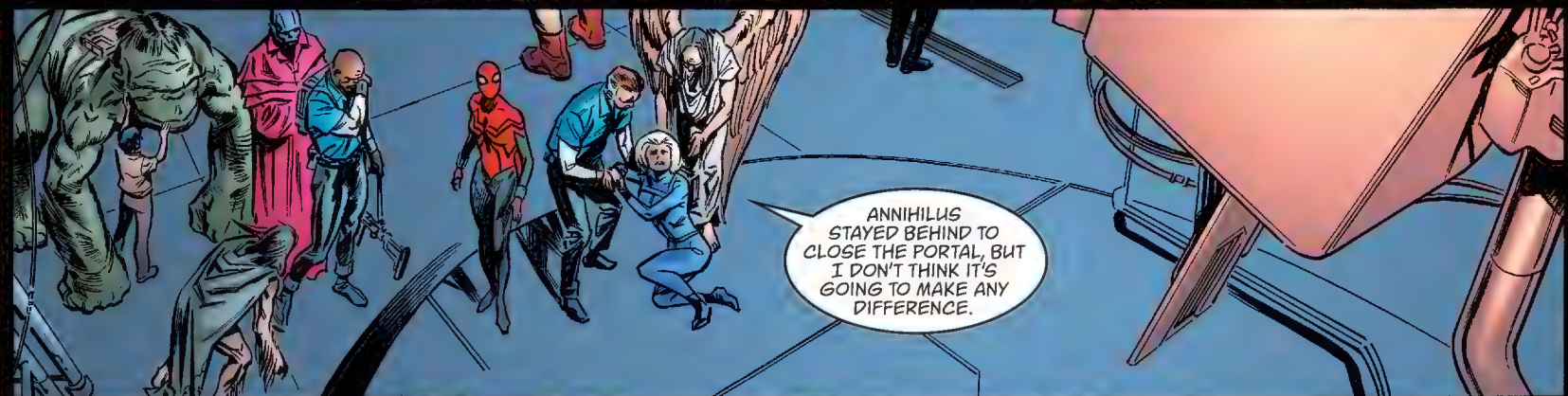
★ ONLY SHOWING ★
★ THEM WHAT THEY *MIGHT* ★
★ HAVE BEEN. ONLY YOU LIVED ★
★ **PERFECTLY**, KING OF THE ★
★ INHUMANS. THEY ★
★ DID NOT. ★

★ THEY SEE ★
★ SO EASILY THE ★
★ GOOD THEY DID, ★
★ BUT NOT THE GOOD. ★
★ THEY STILL MIGHT ★
★ HAVE DONE. ★

★ THEIR ★
★ EVIL IS MISSED ★
★ OPPORTUNITY. ★

"TO BE WHAT THEY MUST
BE, THEY MUST FEEL THE
PAIN OF DISCOVERED
REGRET."

"THEY MUST TASTE
AND FEED UPON THE
GOOD THEY MIGHT
HAVE DONE, BUT DID
NOT."





SCOTT, IF YOU CAN HEAR ME...

...REMEMBER THAT I **LOVE** YOU. I WILL LOVE YOU ALWAYS, EVEN WHEN...

WHAT ARE YOU DOING, MAR-VELL? THIS WAS SUPPOSED TO BE **PARADISE**.



I KNOW YOU'RE DISAPPOINTED. BUT THAT IS HOW IT IS WITH **SOLDIERS**. WE ARE **SOLDIERS**, YOU AND I. WE KNOW ABOUT ORDERS. WE KNOW THE DIFFICULTY OF FOLLOWING BAD ORDERS FROM POOR LEADERS THAT CARE NOTHING FOR US. WE KNOW WHAT IT IS LIKE TO WAIT FOR THE CALL TO SEND IN THE TROOPS...

...WHILE THOSE MOST IN NEED OF HELP ARE SLAUGHTERED.



WE KNOW ABOUT **SACRIFICE**. WHAT IS NECESSARY FOR VICTORY.



MAR-VELL?

DO NOT TURN AROUND, GREY. THIS IS NOT FOR YOU TO SEE. YOU SEE ME ONE WAY. HE MUST, ANOTHER. I AM NOT THE SAME TO ANYONE WHO **SEES** ME.



YOU WANT THIS **POSITION** I HAVE, DON'T YOU, STEVE?

EVER SINCE THE DRAFT BOARD SAID YOU WEREN'T FIT TO FIGHT, AND YOU KNEW IN YOUR **HEART** THAT YOU WERE, YOU WANTED TO CHOOSE WHO WAS WORTHY.

NO.



BUT FOR ALL THOSE YEARS, YOU KEPT IT HIDDEN. YOU FOUGHT WARS, FOLLOWED ORDERS, ALLOWED YOURSELF TO BE **RULED** BY THE MAJORITY.

NEVER LISTENING TO YOUR OWN DESIRES, NEVER GIVING VOICE TO YOUR OWN **INDIVIDUALITY**.

NO.



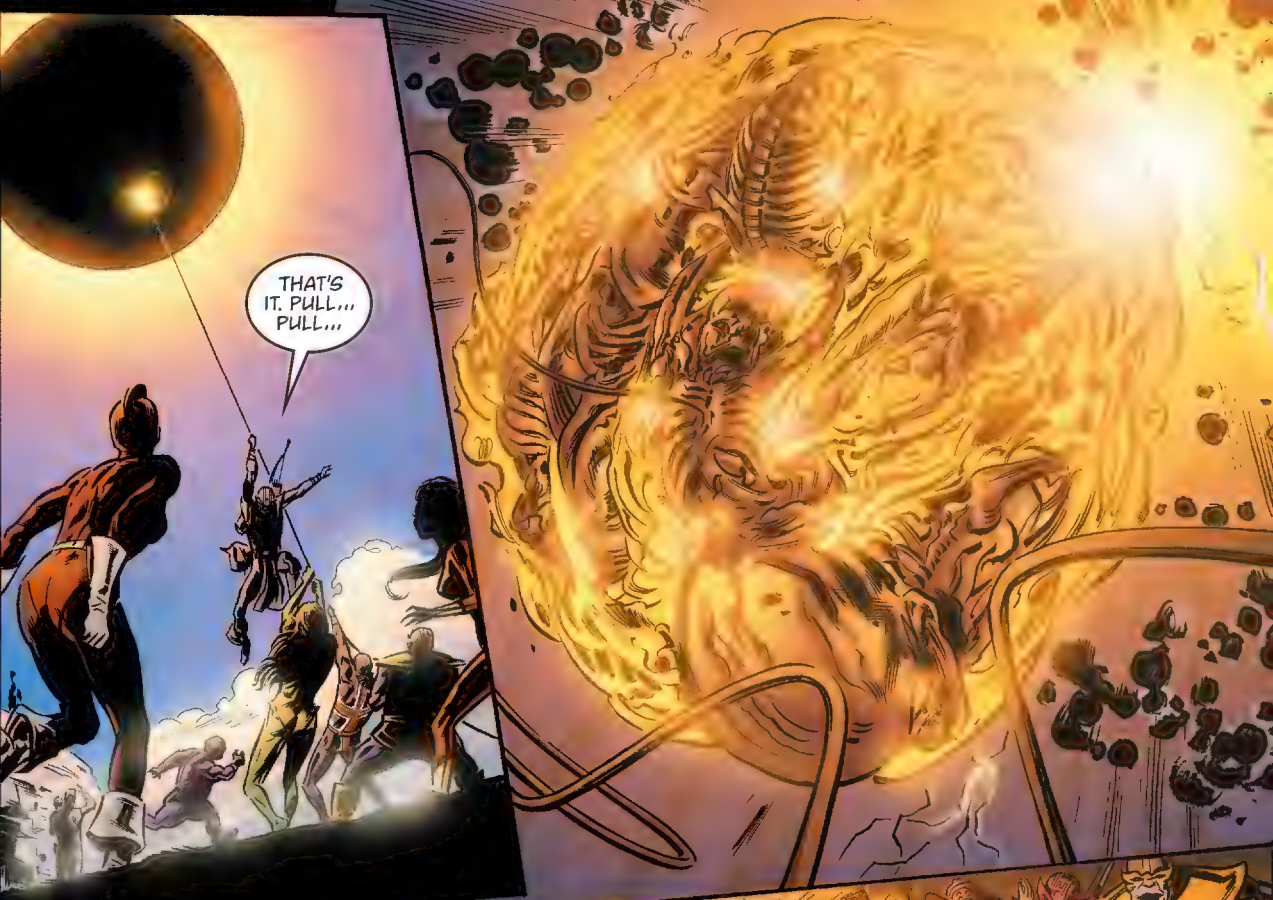
YOU WATCHED AS LESSER MEN LED **MILLIONS** TO RUIN. AND YOU TOOK YOUR ORDERS, LETTING THEM CONTINUE.

YOU CAN HAVE MY POWER NOW, STEVE. IT'S YOURS FOR THE ASKING. YOU CAN RULE PARADISE IF YOU WANT. JUST ASK.



NEVER!



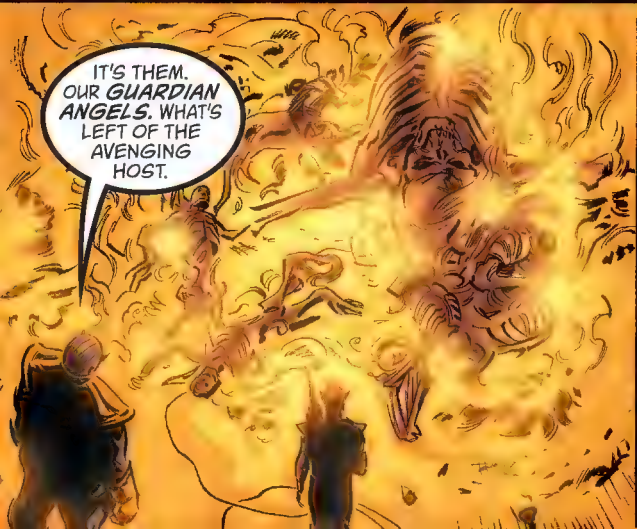


THAT'S
IT. PULL...
PULL...



WHAT
IS IT?

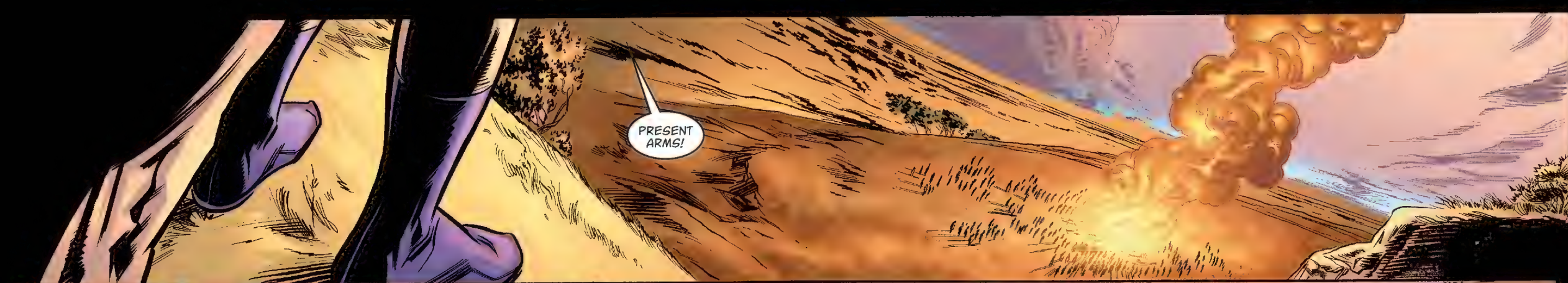
DON'T
YOU
SEE?



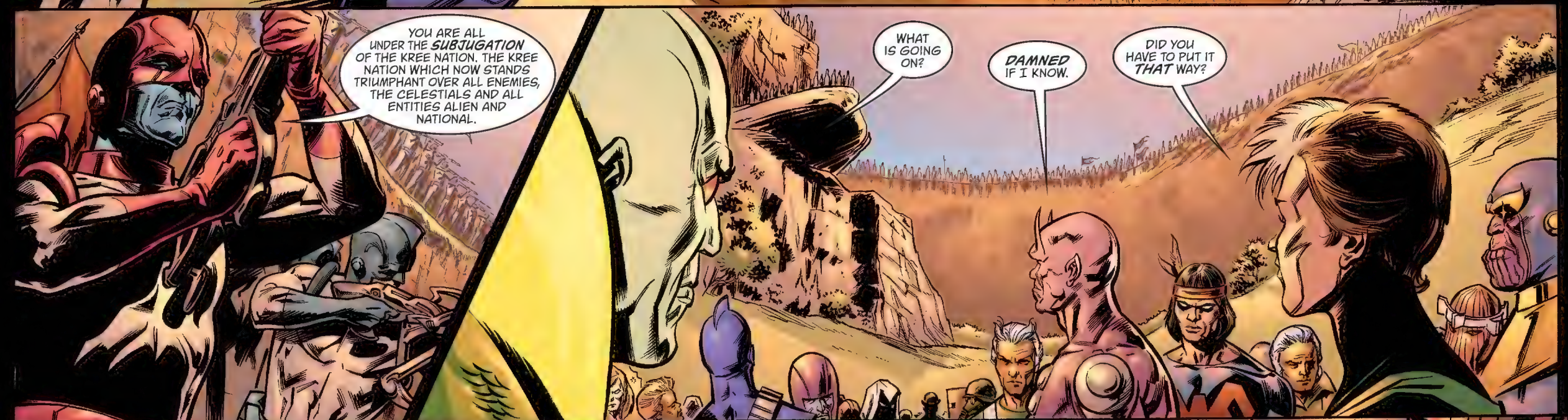
IT'S THEM.
OUR **GUARDIAN**
ANGELS. WHAT'S
LEFT OF THE
AVENGING
HOST.



IT'S **STEVE**...
I THINK I KILLED
STEVE.



PRESENT
ARMS!



YOU ARE ALL
UNDER THE *SUBJUGATION*
OF THE KREE NATION. THE KREE
NATION WHICH NOW STANDS
TRIUMPHANT OVER ALL ENEMIES,
THE CELESTIALS AND ALL
ENTITIES ALIEN AND
NATIONAL.

WHAT
IS GOING
ON?

DAMNED
IF I KNOW.

DID YOU
HAVE TO PUT IT
THAT WAY?



THE KREE
NATION DOES HEREBY
ESTABLISH A COLONY HERE
IN THE HEART OF THE NEGATIVE
ZONE. ALL NON-KREE PEOPLES
ARE HEREBY CONSIDERED
SUBJECTS OF HE WHO
COMMANDS THE COSMIC
CONSCIOUSNESS.

THE
OMNISCIENT
ONE.

IN ALL
THAT IS, THE *SUPREME*
INTELLIGENCE.

"Ethan got knocked down. When he stood up again, his mouth was full of dirt, and he had taken a knee to the eye, and his nose was bleeding. But he was still holding onto the ball."
— Michael Chabon, *SUMMERLAND*

MARVEL

X

TM

PARADISE



KRUEGER

BRAITHWAITE

REINHOLD

PARADISE X

I S S U E X

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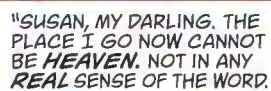
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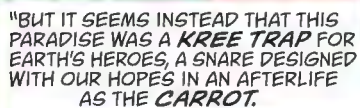


"SUSAN, MY DARLING. THE PLACE I GO NOW CANNOT BE **HEAVEN**. NOT IN ANY **REAL** SENSE OF THE WORD.

"I KNOW THIS BECAUSE YOU ARE NOT HERE **WITH ME**.

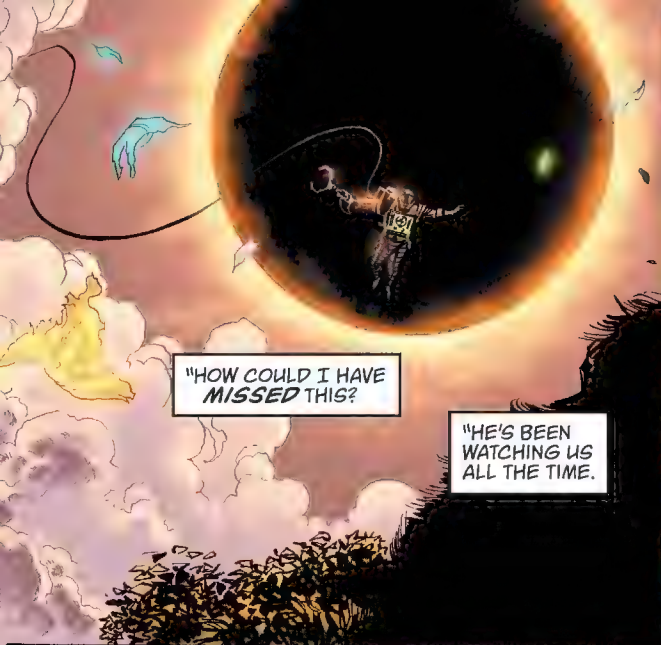
"THIS IS **MAR-VELL'S PARADISE**. WE HAD BELIEVED THIS TO BE A PLACE HEROES GO WHEN THEY DIE. IN THE ABSENCE OF A TRUE VALHALLA, MAR-VELL **BUILT** ONE. WE EVEN HELPED HIM DEFEAT **DEATH** TO CREATE A WAY FOR HIM TO BUILD THIS PLACE.

"I HAD THOUGHT THAT SOMEHOW OUR BELIEF SYSTEMS HAD **IMPACTED** MAR-VELL DURING HIS TIME ON EARTH, THAT OUR MYTHS AND HOPES OF AN **AFTERLIFE** HAD SOMEHOW **CHANGED** HIS KREE BELIEF SYSTEM. THAT HE'D ADOPTED SOMETHING OF **HUMAN FAITH**.



"BUT IT SEEMS INSTEAD THAT THIS PARADISE WAS A **KREE TRAP** FOR EARTH'S HEROES, A SNARE DESIGNED WITH OUR HOPES IN AN AFTERLIFE AS THE **CARROT**.

"IN A STRUGGLE BETWEEN GODS, MONSTERS AND MUTANTS, HUMANITY WON. BUT NOT **EARTH'S** HUMANITY."

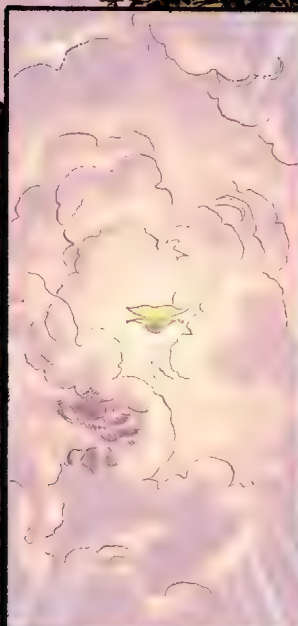
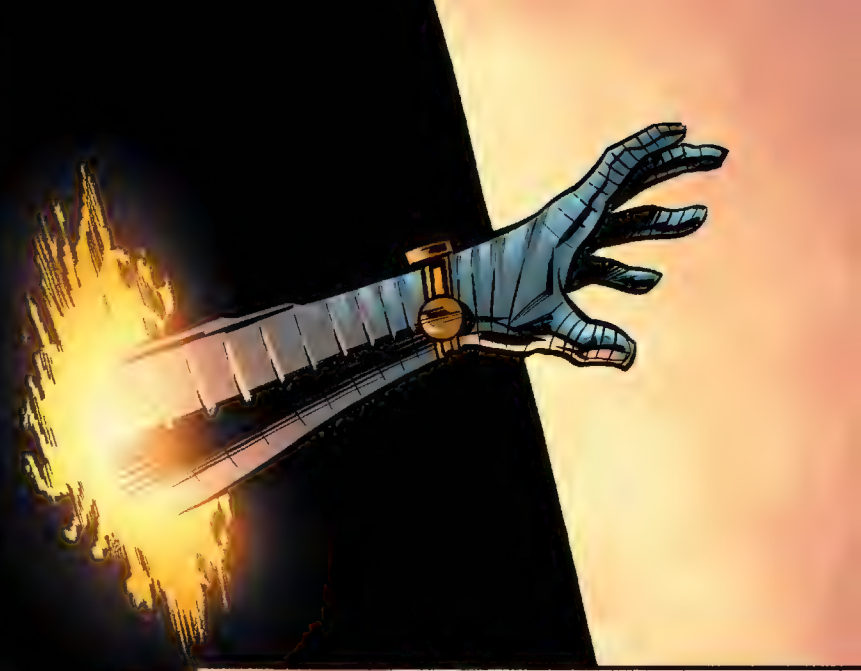


"HOW COULD I HAVE MISSED THIS?"

"HE'S BEEN WATCHING US ALL THE TIME."



"I'M IN *WAY* OVER MY HEAD, SUSAN. YOU WERE WRONG. YOU *DON'T* WANT TO SEE ME HERE."



RICHARDS...



ANOTHER ONE.

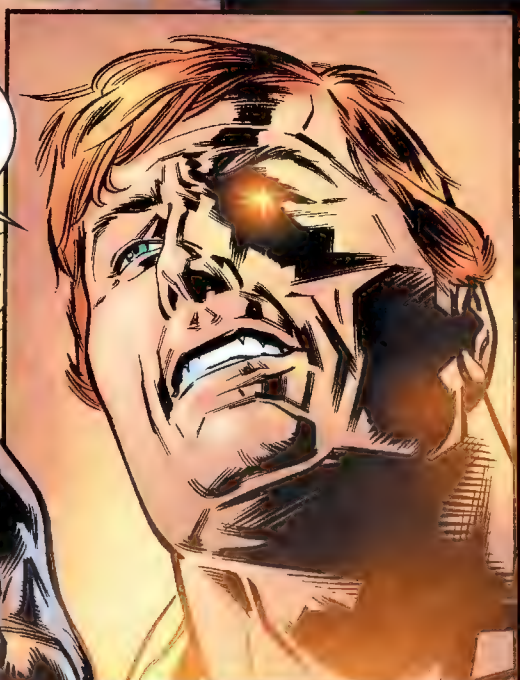
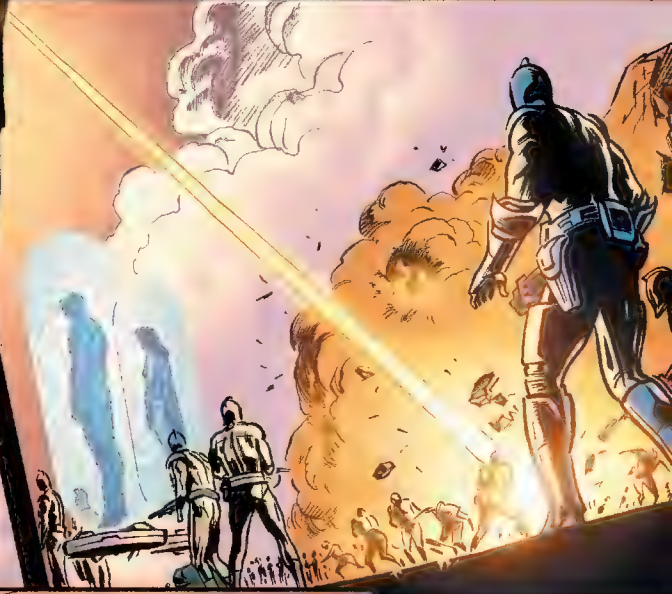
SHOOT HIM.



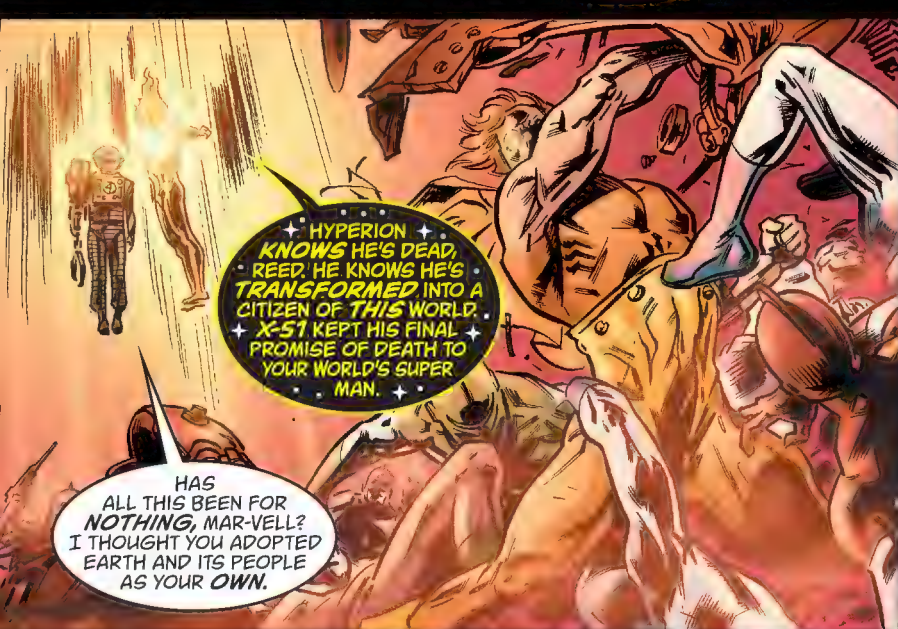
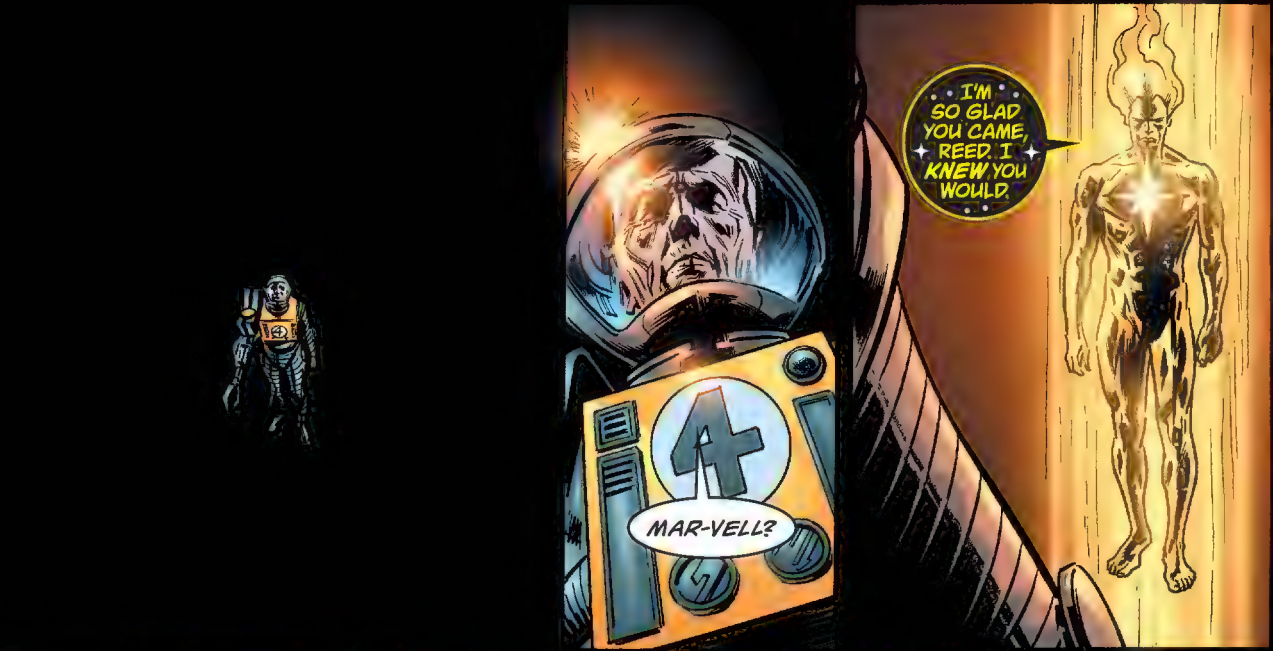
ZARDA...

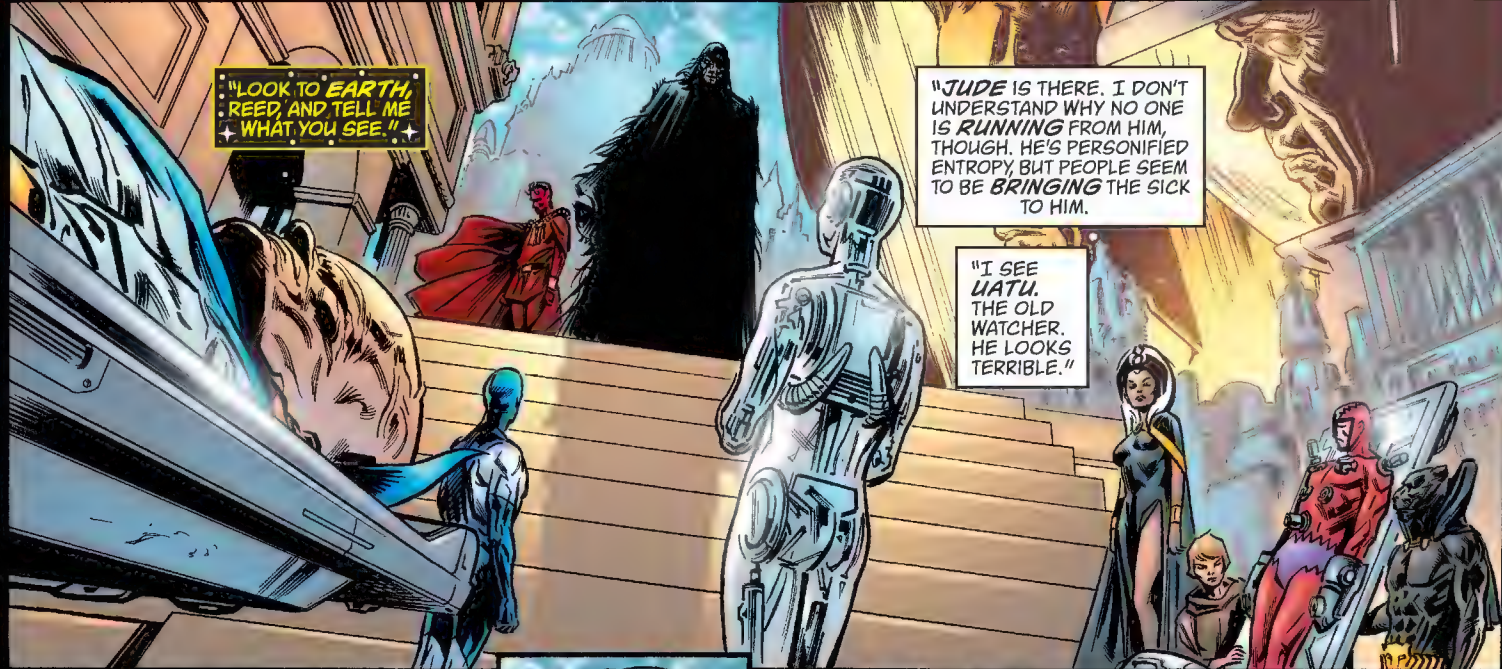
SHOOT ME?

YOUR GUNS DIDN'T HAVE ANY EFFECT ON ME WHEN I WAS ALIVE. WHAT MAKES YOU THINK THEY WILL NOW?









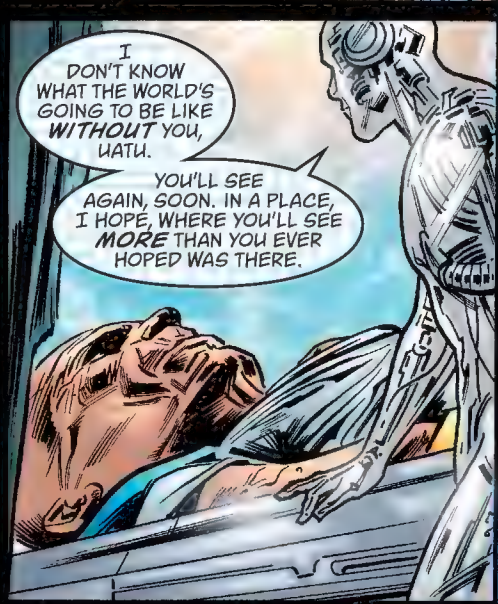
"LOOK TO EARTH, REED, AND TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE."

"JUDE IS THERE. I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY NO ONE IS RUNNING FROM HIM, THOUGH. HE'S PERSONIFIED ENTROPY, BUT PEOPLE SEEM TO BE BRINGING THE SICK TO HIM."

"I SEE UATU. THE OLD WATCHER. HE LOOKS TERRIBLE."



HERE HE IS, JUDE. THANK YOU.

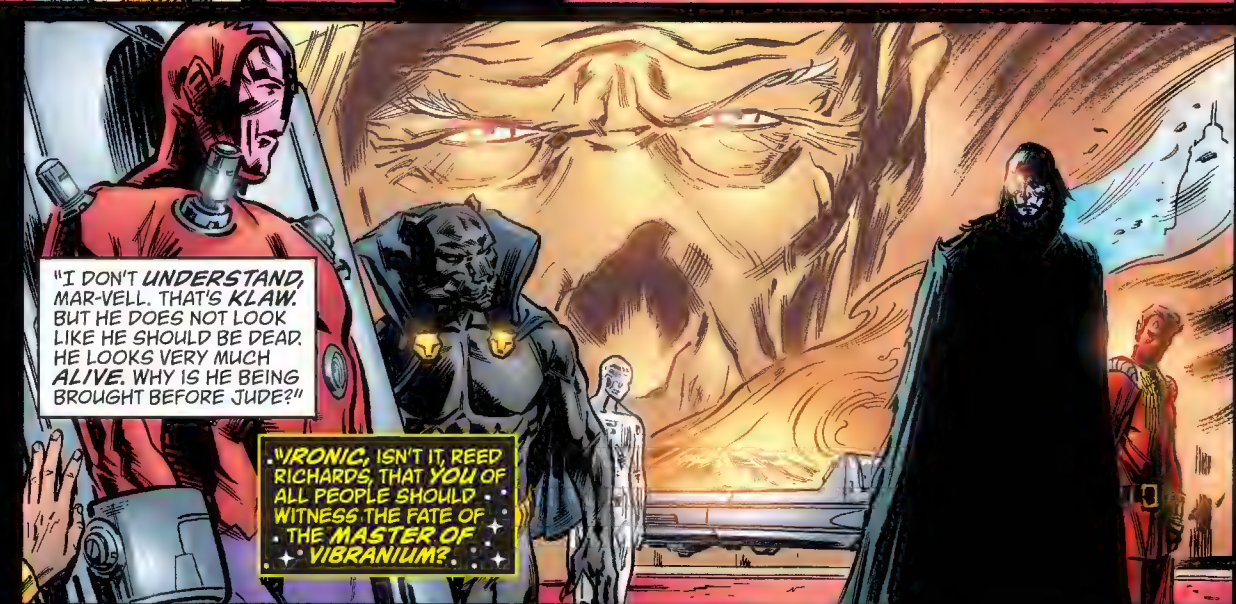


I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE WORLD'S GOING TO BE LIKE WITHOUT YOU, UATU.

YOU'LL SEE AGAIN, SOON. IN A PLACE, I HOPE, WHERE YOU'LL SEE MORE THAN YOU EVER HOPED WAS THERE.



GOOD-BYE.



"I DON'T UNDERSTAND, MAR-VELL. THAT'S KLAU. BUT HE DOES NOT LOOK LIKE HE SHOULD BE DEAD. HE LOOKS VERY MUCH ALIVE. WHY IS HE BEING BROUGHT BEFORE JUDE?"

"VIRONIC, ISN'T IT, REED RICHARDS, THAT YOU OF ALL PEOPLE SHOULD WITNESS THE FATE OF THE MASTER OF VIBRANIUM?"



"KLAU IS NOT BEING GIVEN TO JUDE, REED. HE'S BEING GIVEN TO KURT WAGNER... BELASCO."



WHY?



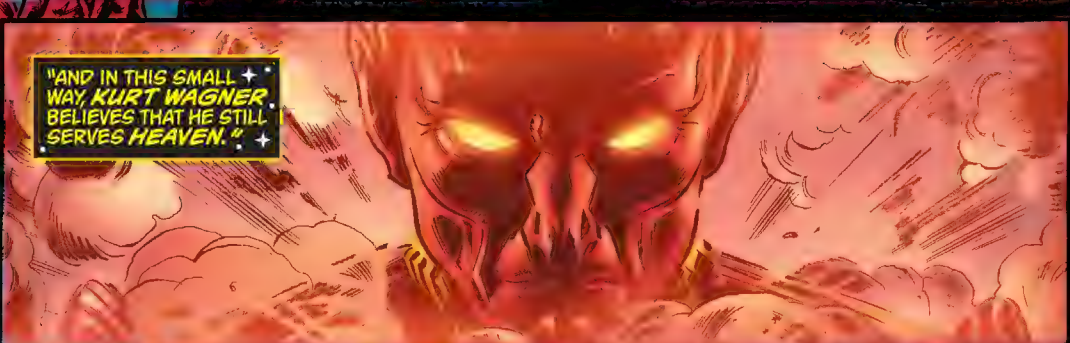
"JUDE WAS CORRECT. HIS TOUCH WAS A GIFT. ONE YOUR FELLOW MAN BELIEVES KLAU IS NOT WORTH RECEIVING."

"THE ILL THAT SHOULD HAVE DIED ARE BROUGHT TO THIS ISLAND TO BE TOUCHED BY JUDE, REED. SO THAT THEY MAY ONE DAY REACH THIS PLACE."

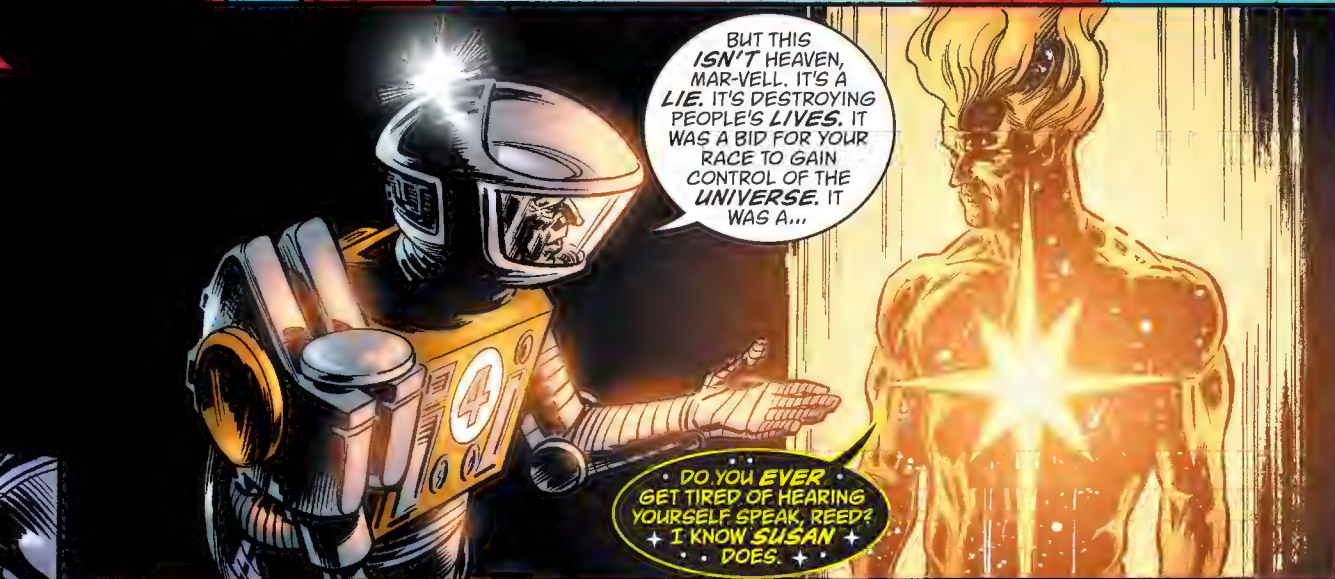


"IT'S **INHUMAN**. WHO ARE **WE** TO DECIDE..."

"OTHERS, LIKE **KLAW**, ARE BROUGHT HERE TO **LIMBO**. I TOLD **STEVE ROGERS** ONCE THAT THIS PLACE WOULD BE **HELL**."

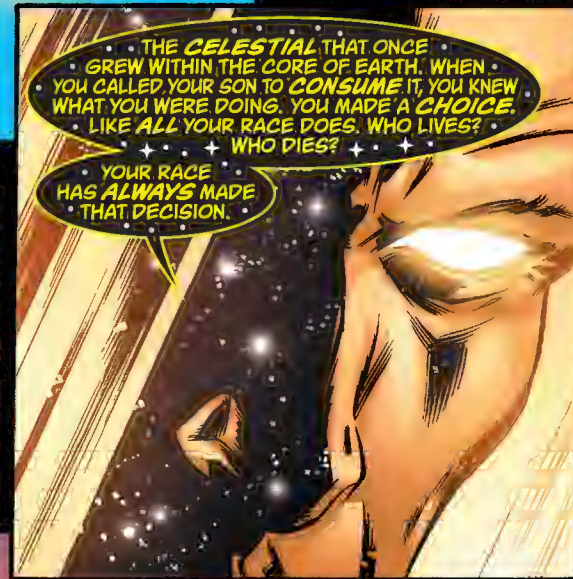


"AND IN THIS SMALL WAY, **KURT WAGNER** BELIEVES THAT HE STILL SERVES **HEAVEN**."



BUT THIS **ISN'T** HEAVEN, **MAR-VELL**. IT'S A **LIE**. IT'S DESTROYING PEOPLE'S LIVES. IT WAS A BID FOR YOUR RACE TO GAIN CONTROL OF THE **UNIVERSE**. IT WAS A...

DO YOU **EVER** GET TIRED OF HEARING YOURSELF SPEAK, **REED**? I KNOW **SUSAN** DOES.



THE **CELESTIAL** THAT ONCE GREW WITHIN THE CORE OF **EARTH**. WHEN YOU CALLED YOUR SON TO **CONSUME** IT, YOU KNEW WHAT YOU WERE DOING. YOU MADE A **CHOICE**. LIKE **ALL** YOUR RACE DOES. WHO LIVES? WHO DIES?

YOUR RACE HAS ALWAYS MADE THAT DECISION.



BUT NOT JUST YOUR PEOPLE, **REED**. **MINE** AS WELL.



IF YOUR HATRED AND HOSTILITY CAN BE TRACED TO THE **CELESTIAL MANIPULATION** OF YOUR SPECIES, WHY DID IT ALSO EXIST IN THE **KREE**, AN **UN-MANIPULATED** SPECIES?

WHY ARE WE SO **AGGRESSIVE** THAT GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO REACH A PARADISE WE NEVER **BELIEVED** IN, WE INSTANTLY CLAIM IT AS A **COLONY**?



"MY PEOPLE'S WARS AND WANTS NEVER **END**, **REED**. NEITHER DO **YOURS**."



WHY HAVE YOU **COME** HERE, MURDOCK? YOU HAVE NO **RIGHT** TO ME. I **REJECTED** WHAT YOU HAD TO OFFER.

★ **EVEN AFTER HAVING BEEN DEAD, THE KINGPIN SEEKS HIS OLD POWER--**

★ **--SEEKS TO MANIPULATE THOSE AROUND HIM. HE'S ABOUT TO LEARN A TERRIBLE LESSON.**



YOUR GUNS HAVE NO **POWER** HERE.

I'M NOT HERE FOR **YOU**, KINGPIN...



...YOU **HAD** YOUR CHANCE. WE'RE HERE FOR **VANESSA**, YOUR WIFE.

SHE SHOULD GET **HER** CHANCE FOR HEAVEN.



ME?



YOU KNOW I **LOVE** YOU, WILSON. YOU **KNOW** I DO. BUT YOU **SCARE** ME SO...



I DON'T
KNOW WHY, BUT
I SEEM TO
REMEMBER
YOU...

...I FEEL
LIKE YOU'RE A
KIND MAN...A
GOOD MAN.



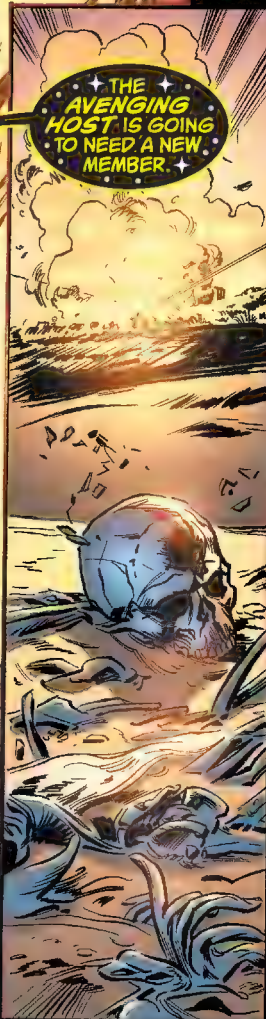
NOOOOO!



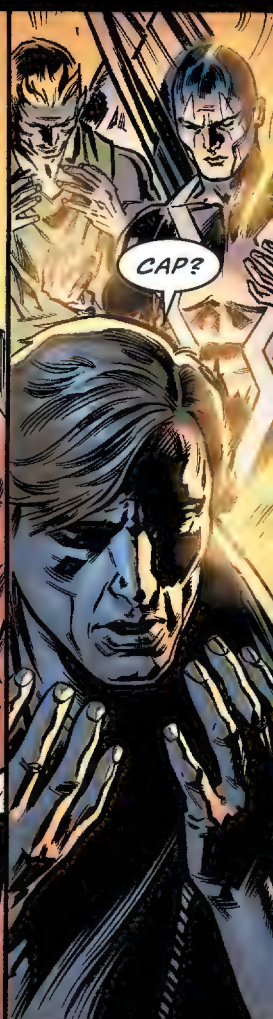
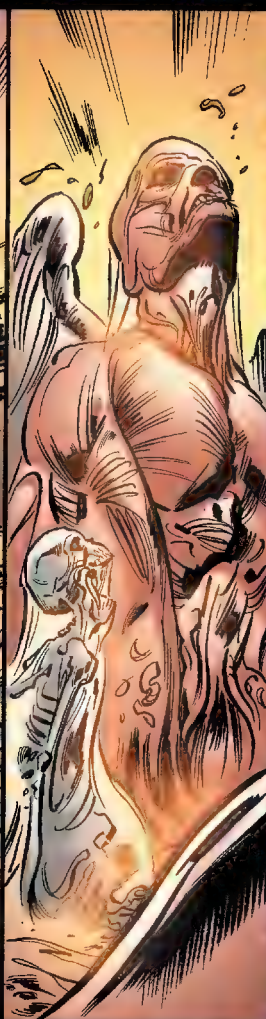
THERE ISN'T
A PERSON YOU CONTROL
IN THIS REALM OF THE
DEAD THAT I CAN'T TAKE
AWAY FROM YOU, WILSON.
YOU HAVE NO POWER
HERE.



★ MURDOCK'S GOING TO STAY **HERE**, IN THIS PURGATORY, IF ONLY TO MAKE CERTAIN THE PEOPLE OF HELL'S KITCHEN HAVE A CHANCE AT THE **HEAVEN** THAT'S BEING BUILT. IF ONLY TO **PROTECT** THEM FROM WILSON FISK. ★



★ THE **AVENGING HOST** IS GOING TO NEED A NEW MEMBER. ★



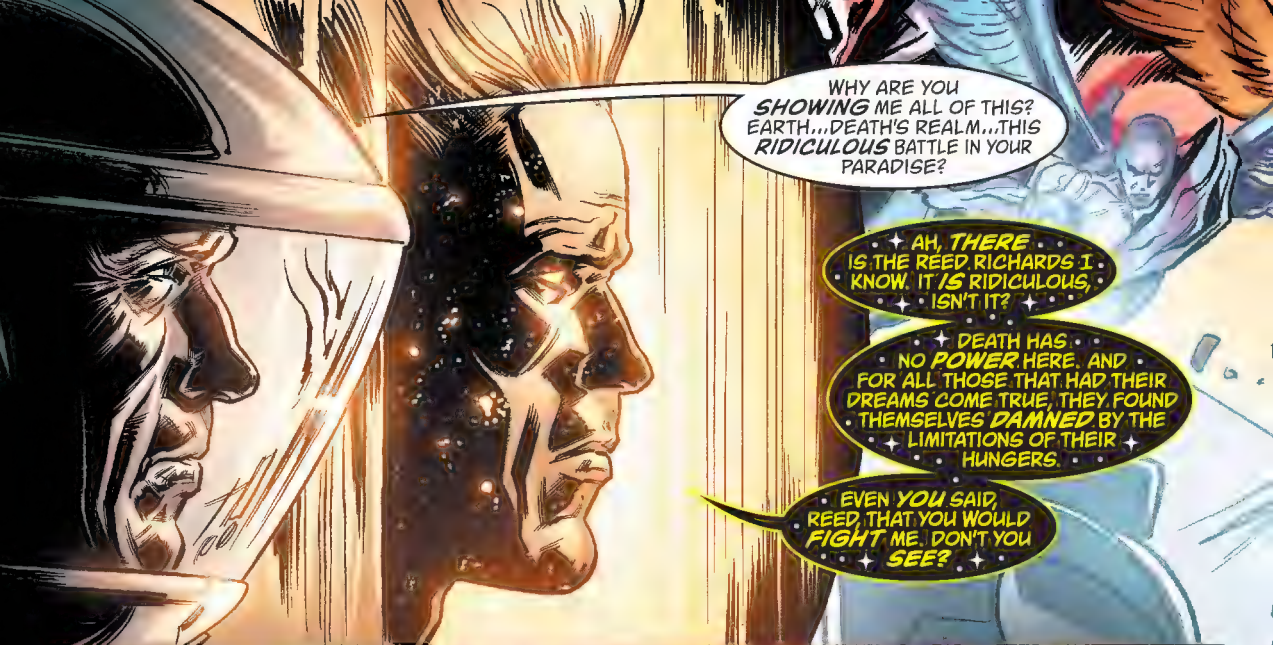
CAP?



FREE THE OTHERS, RICK.

ASSEMBLE THEM. THAT'S WHAT YOU DO.





WHY ARE YOU
SHOWING ME ALL OF THIS?
EARTH...DEATH'S REALM...THIS
RIDICULOUS BATTLE IN YOUR
PARADISE?

★ **AH, THERE** ★
IS THE REED RICHARDS I
KNOW. IT **IS** RIDICULOUS,
ISN'T IT? ★

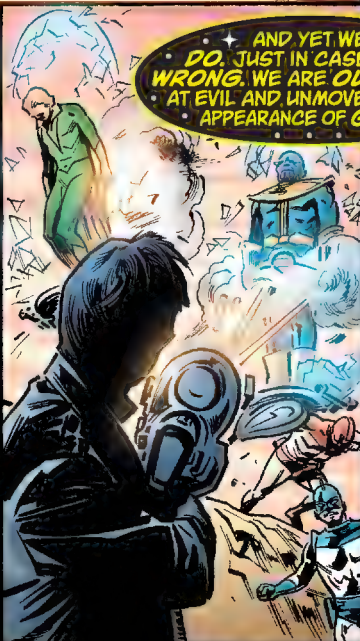
★ DEATH HAS
NO **POWER** HERE. AND
FOR ALL THOSE THAT HAD THEIR
DREAMS COME TRUE, THEY FOUND
THEMSELVES **DAMNED** BY THE
★ LIMITATIONS OF THEIR
HUNGERS. ★

★ EVEN YOU SAID,
REED, THAT YOU WOULD
FIGHT ME. DON'T YOU
★ **SEE?** ★

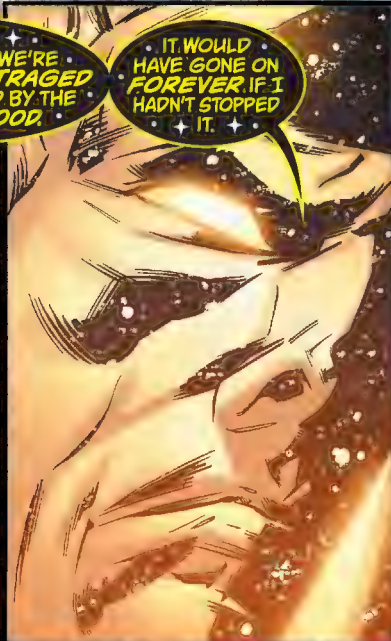
"IN THE ABSENCE OF ANY **REAL**
GOOD OR EVIL, IN THE ABSENCE
OF ANY **REAL HOPE** FOR THIS
HEAVEN, WHY FIGHT AT **ALL?**"



★ AND YET WE
DO. JUST IN CASE WE'RE
WRONG. WE ARE **OUTRAGED**
AT EVIL AND UNMOVED BY THE
★ APPEARANCE OF **GOOD** ★



★ IT WOULD
HAVE GONE ON
FOREVER IF I
HADN'T STOPPED
★ IT. ★



"SO ETERNITY
IS **DEAD**,
JUST LIKE
WE'D HEARD."



"NOT YET. BUT **SOON**,
RELATIVELY SPEAKING.
THE **OLD** ETERNITY. AT
LEAST, THE ONE THAT
★ SURVIVED WHAT WAS
BEFORE THIS UNIVERSE
AND KEPT TRYING TO
BRING IT **BACK** AGAIN. ★

ARE YOU
BECOMING THE **NEW**
ETERNITY?



★ NO,
REED, MY OLD
FRIEND.

★ YOU
ARE ★



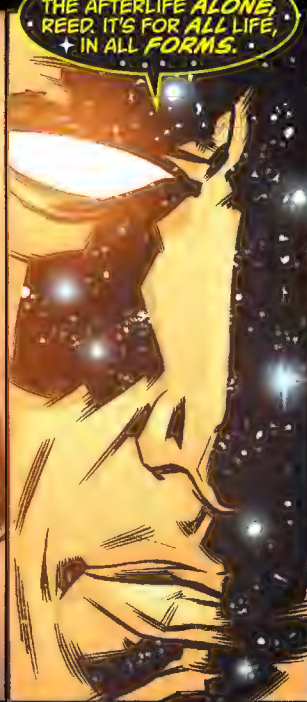


"THE PARADISE IS THE
THIRD WAY, REED."

"LOOK AT THEM, REED. STILL
CONTROLLED BY THE HOSTILITIES
THAT GREW LIKE BOILS OUT OF
THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE
CELESTIALS AND THE ELDERS.
FIGHTING WARS THAT HAVE ALL
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DUST
BEING BLOWN ACROSS AN
ANCIENT STAGE."



THIRD
WAY?



IT ISN'T FOR
THE AFTERLIFE ALONE,
REED. IT'S FOR ALL LIFE,
IN ALL FORMS."



I DON'T
UNDERSTAND.



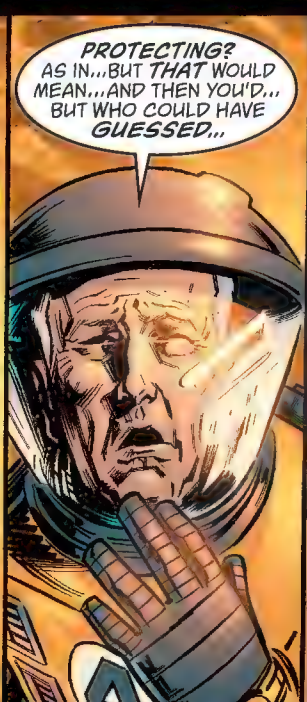
"IT'S GROWTH IS FUELED
BY EACH NEW LIVING
WORLD IT ABSORBS AS
WELL AS EACH NEW
DEATH, NOW THANKS TO
YOU AND YOUR RESURREC-
TION OF JUDE."

"IT'S GROWING.
ALMOST SELF-
FULFILLING NOW."



BUT IT'S
KILLING WHOLE
RACES, CONSUMING
WHOLE
WORLDS.

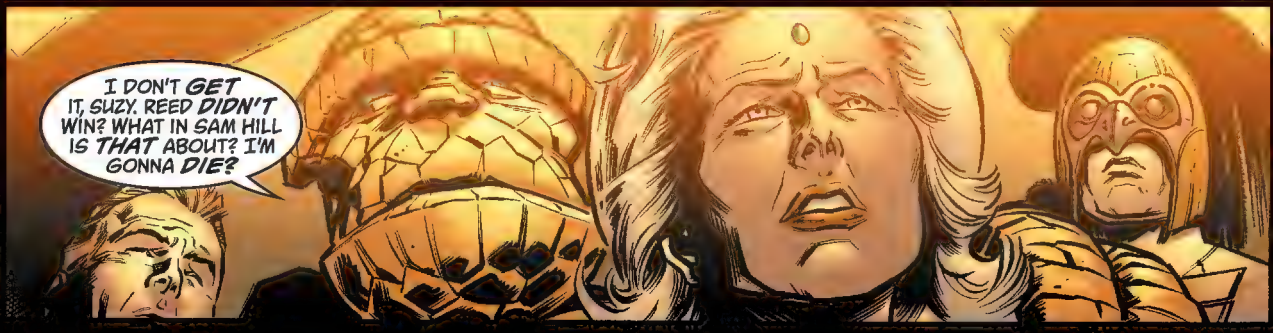
NO IT'S
NOT, REED. IT'S
PROTECTING
THEM."



PROTECTING?
AS IN...BUT THAT WOULD
MEAN...AND THEN YOU'D...
BUT WHO COULD HAVE
GUESSED..."



...IT'S A
WALL.



I DON'T GET IT, SUZY. REED DIDN'T WIN? WHAT IN SAM HILL IS THAT ABOUT? I'M GONNA DIE?

"IT IS A WALL, ONE THROUGH WHICH WORLDS AND PEOPLE YOU WERE SO CONCERNED ABOUT MAY PASS, BUT CERTAIN OTHERS CANNOT."

"YOUR CREATION OF A PORTAL FROM YOUR WORLD TO THE NEGATIVE ZONE WILL BE THE PATH OF EARTH'S SALVATION."

"I GOT THE IDEA FROM THE SWORD, EXCALIBUR. I DIDN'T TAKE ARTHUR'S SWORD IN MY COLLECTION OF WEAPONS BECAUSE IT'S NOT A WEAPON, REED. YES, FOR SOME, LIKE MEPHISTO, IT BRINGS DEATH. BUT FOR OTHERS, LIKE THE DEVIANTS, IT BRINGS HEALING. IT'S ALIVE, REED, DO YOU KNOW THAT?"

"IT CHOOSES WHO TO SAVE AND WHO TO CLAIM. AS DOES THE PARADISE."

REED. IT'S MY REED.

SUZY? HOW COME I AIN'T DEAD?

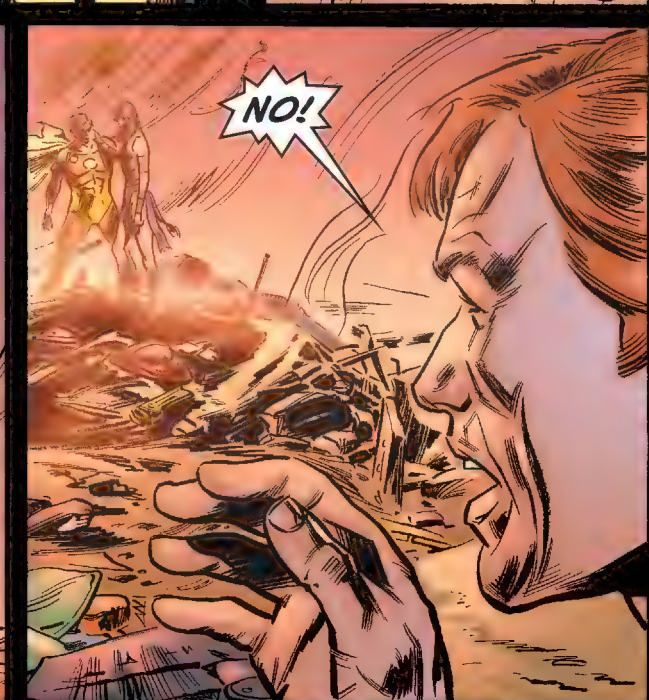
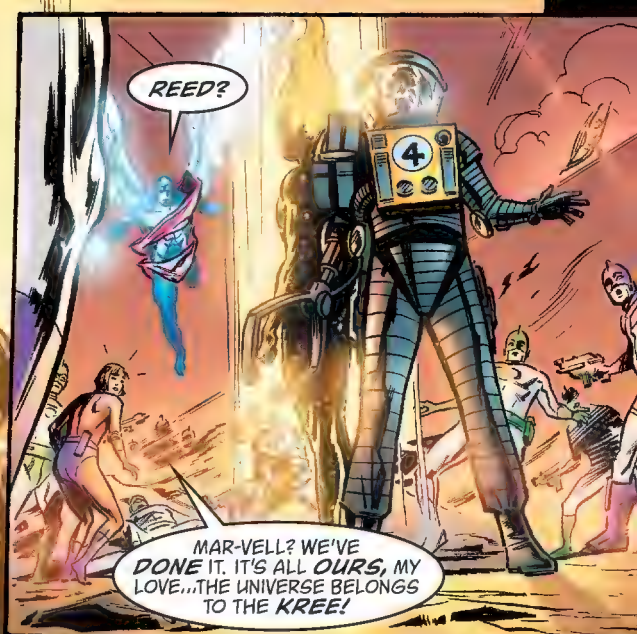
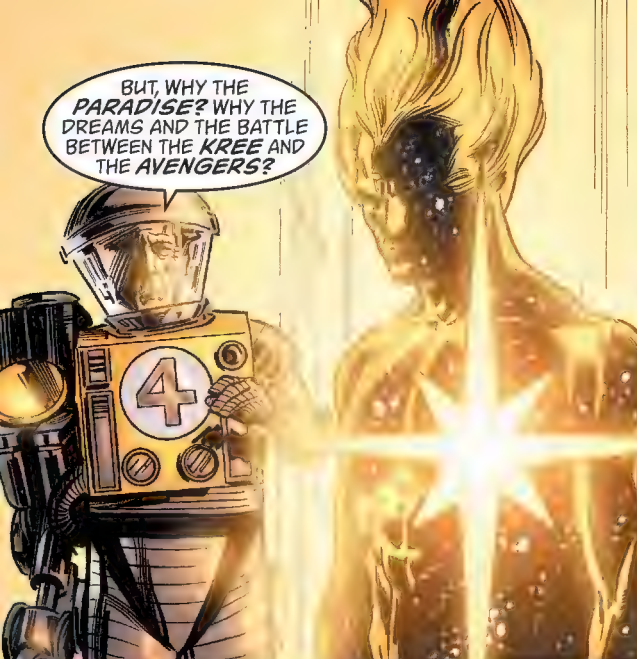


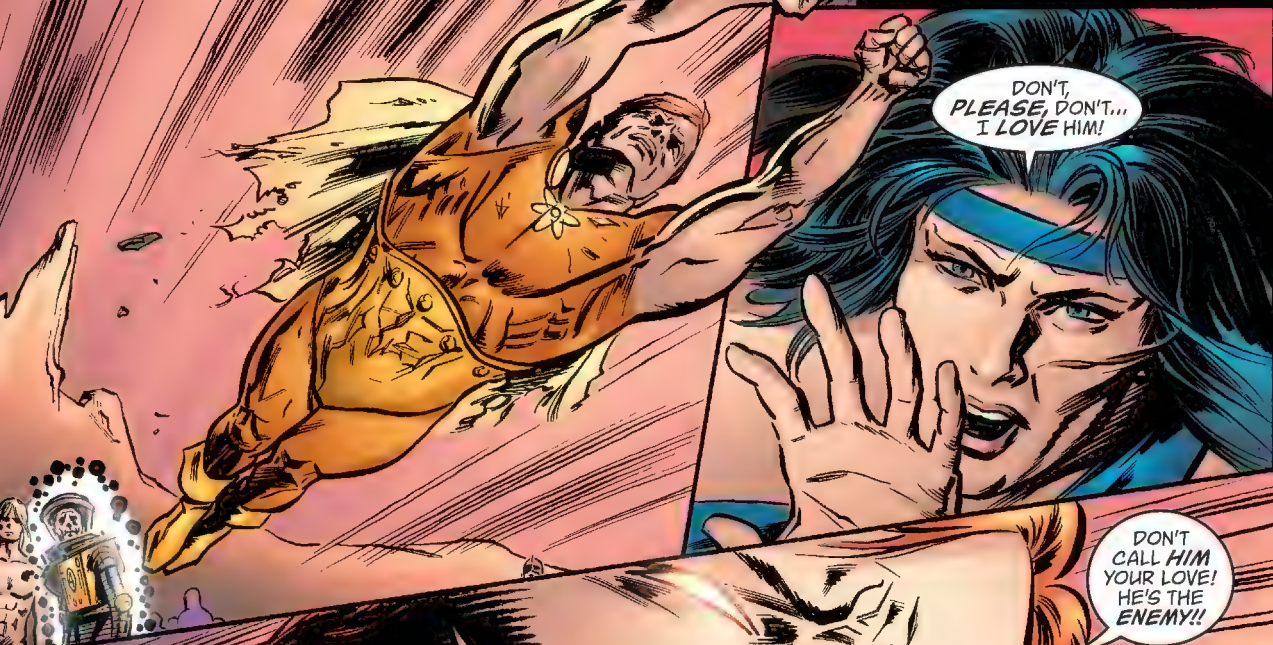
"IT WILL SAFEGUARD ALL LIFE FROM THE CELESTIALS AND THE ELDERS. IT WILL END THE MANIPULATION OF YOUR, MY, AND ALL OTHER PEOPLES FOR ALL TIME."

"IT WILL ALLOW EACH WORLD THE OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD ITS OWN PARADISE, IF SUCH AN END IS PROPER."

"THE CHOICE, VERY SOON, WILL BE THEIRS, WHETHER THEY KNOW IT OR NOT."







DON'T,
PLEASE, DON'T...
I LOVE HIM!

DON'T
CALL HIM
YOUR LOVE!
HE'S THE
ENEMY!!



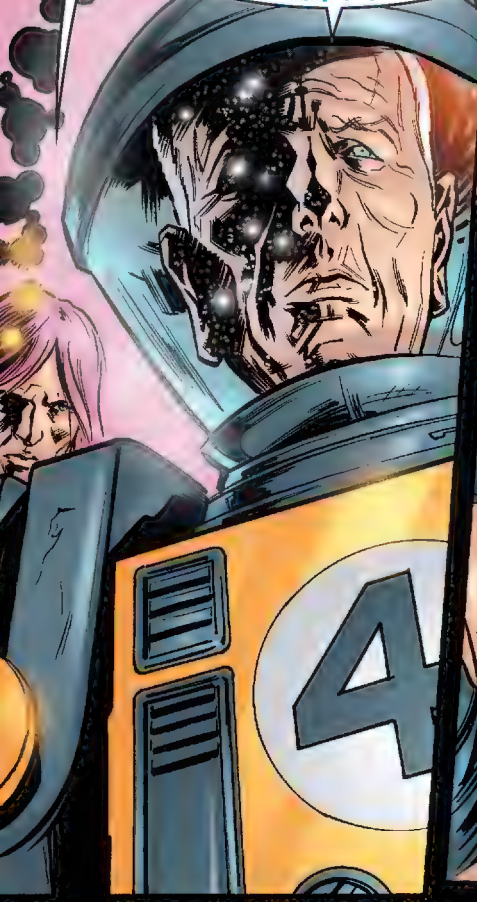
YOU NEED TO
DO SOMETHING ABOUT
THIS, REED. YOU'RE OMNISCIENT
NOW. ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS *THINK*
ABOUT THEM, AND YOU'LL KNOW
THE PERFECT ANSWER. YOU
COULD *STOP* THIS...

◆ I'M NOT CERTAIN ◆
◆ IF I CAN CALL THAT *THINKING*, ◆
◆ MAR-VELL. PERHAPS THE PERFECT ◆
◆ ANSWER IS NOT *FITTING* FOR AN ◆
◆ IMPERFECT PEOPLE. ◆

I KNOW YOU
THINK HE'S A *SPY* FOR
THE ELDERS. HE'S *NOT*,
NOT ANYMORE. HE LOVES
ME. I LOVE HIM.



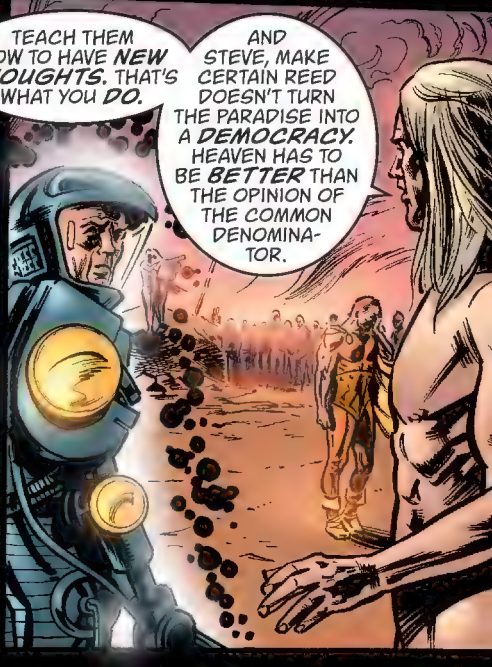
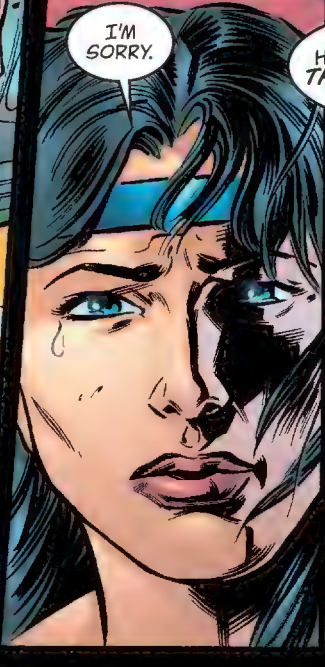
BUT I
DIED! I CAME
HERE TO *SAVE*
YOU.

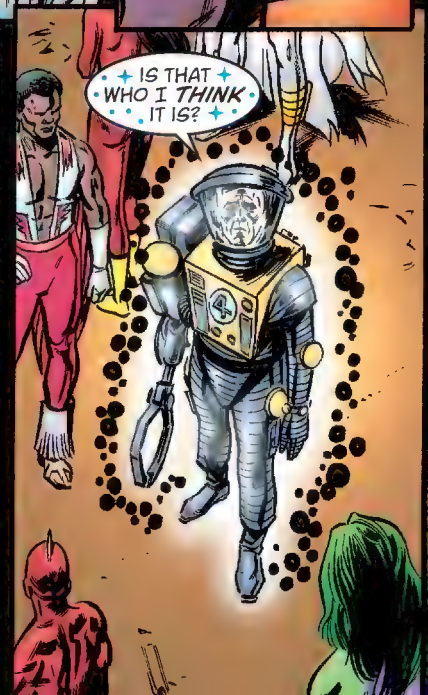
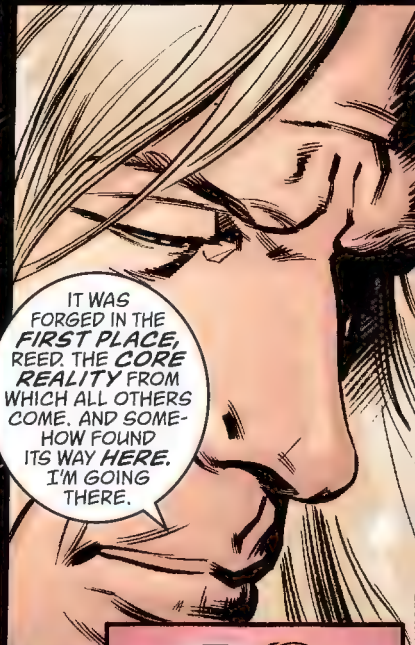
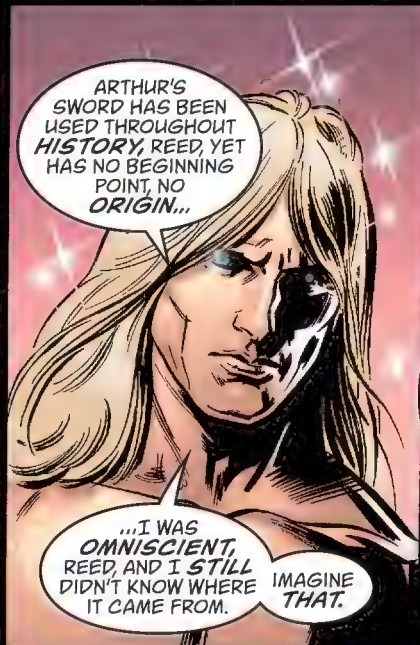


I'M
SORRY.

TEACH THEM
HOW TO HAVE *NEW*
THOUGHTS. THAT'S
WHAT YOU DO.

AND
STEVE, MAKE
CERTAIN REED
DOESN'T TURN
THE PARADISE INTO
A *DEMOCRACY*.
HEAVEN HAS TO
BE *BETTER* THAN
THE OPINION OF
THE COMMON
DENOMINA-
TOR.





MY NAME IS **JOHNNY STORM**. AND I'M **FREE**.

I DON'T HAVE TO
SAVE THE WORLD.
I NEVER **DID**.

IT CAN GO TO **HELL** WITHOUT ME, AND
I DON'T **CARE**. I HAVE BEER. AND I
HAVE GIRLS. WHAT ELSE **IS** THERE?

DARN, IT'S **WARM**.
WHERE'S **BOBBY
DRAKE** WHEN
YOU NEED HIM?
OH YEAH...

ANYHOW,
LIKE I WAS
SAYING...

...WHAT WAS
I SAYING?

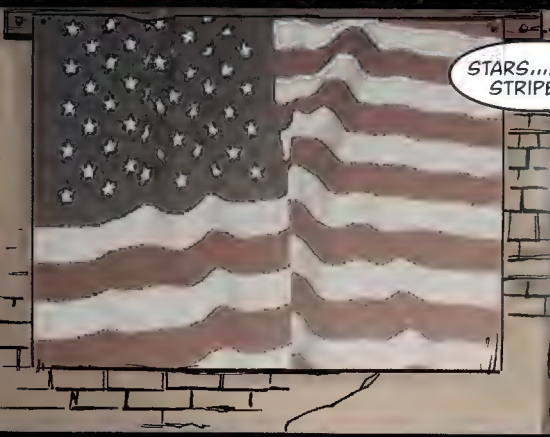
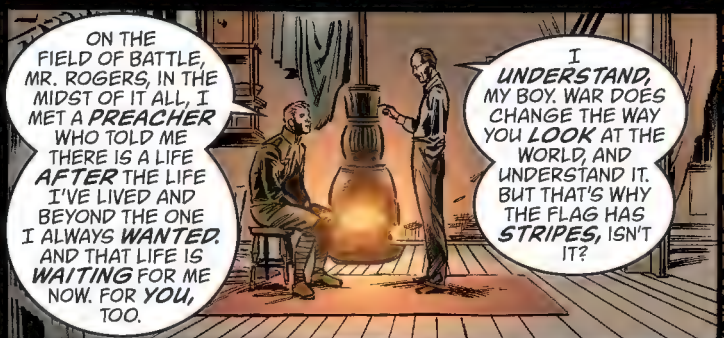
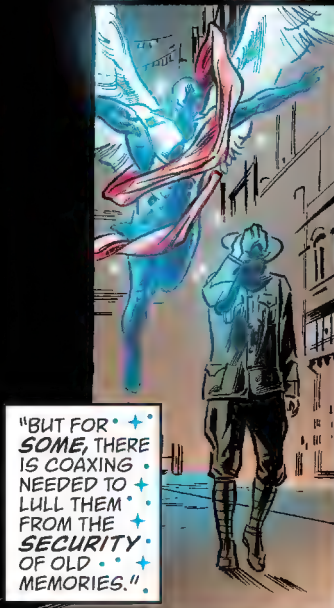
NO **SISTERS...**
NO BEN **GRIMM...**
AND NO **REED
RICHARDS...**

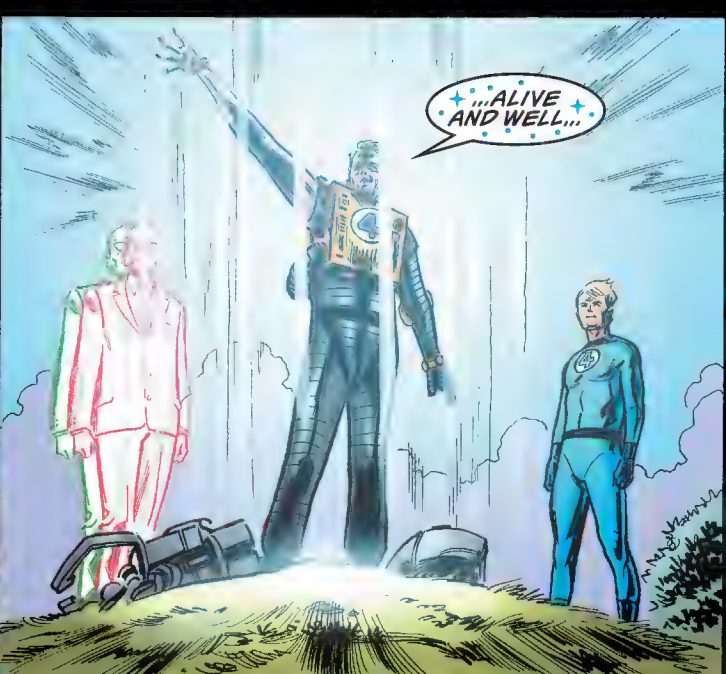
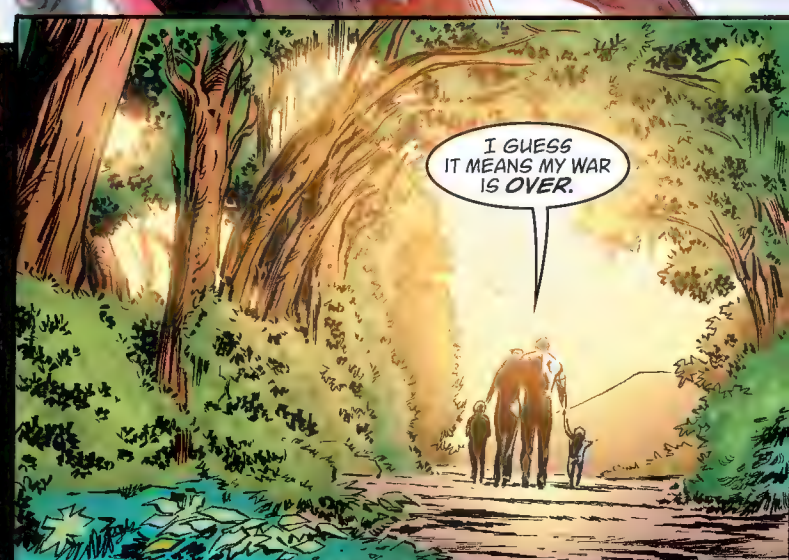
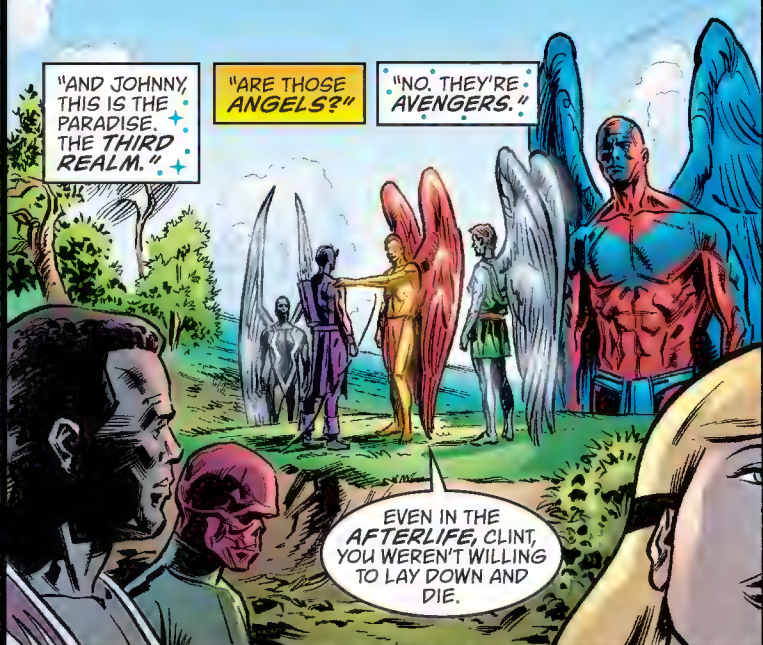
NOT EVEN OL'
PROFESSOR
STRETCH-ARM
**STRING-
BEAN** CAN
REACH ME
HERE.

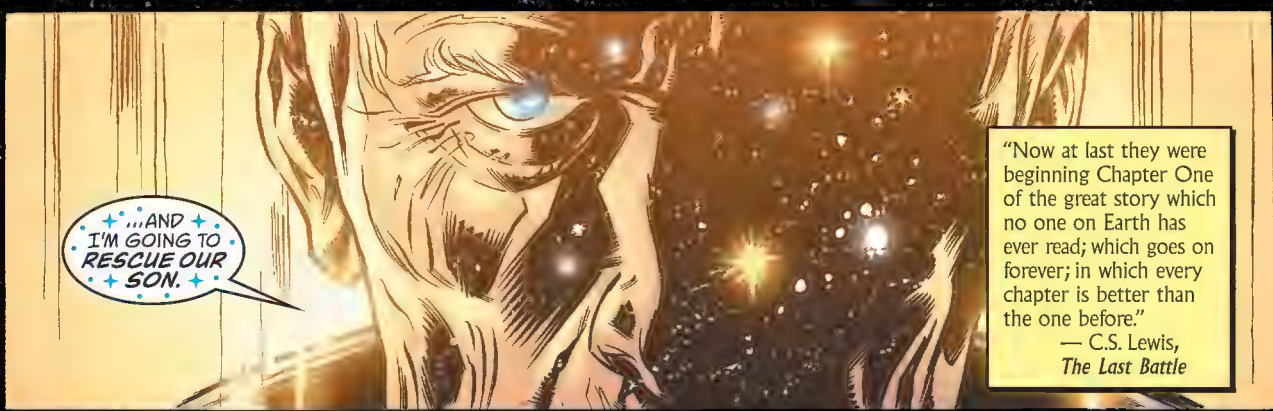
OH...**REED...**
GOOD, YOU'RE HERE.
I WAS **WONDERING**
WHEN YOU'D SHOW
UP.

DO WE
GOTSTA SAVE
THE **WORLD** AGAIN?
'CAUSE I DON'T
WANNA. I GOT A
LIFE HERE. I'M
HA...I'M
HAPPY.

TIME
TO **GROW UP,**
JOHNNY.







...AND
I'M GOING TO
RESCUE OUR
SON.

"Now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the great story which no one on Earth has ever read; which goes on forever; in which every chapter is better than the one before."

— C.S. Lewis,
The Last Battle

"I imagine that Mar-Vell is now at the core, the first world from which even this reality of which I am the watchman is derived. I don't know, but I'd like to think this Earth, with its heroes and its struggles, is close to that core. Closer than most of those realities I have looked upon. Still, this desire could be little more than good old human pride. I thank my father for giving it to me.

"I wonder what they, whoever lives there in that core, will think of him. And I wonder, I suppose, what they will think of us, of the world he comes from. What they will think of this, the Marvel Universe."

Alex Ross and Jim Krueger
would, with great respect and gratitude for their
contributions to the X trilogy, like to thank the following for
their contributions to this saga:

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Bob Harras, Bill Jemas and Joe Calamari.

MARVEL

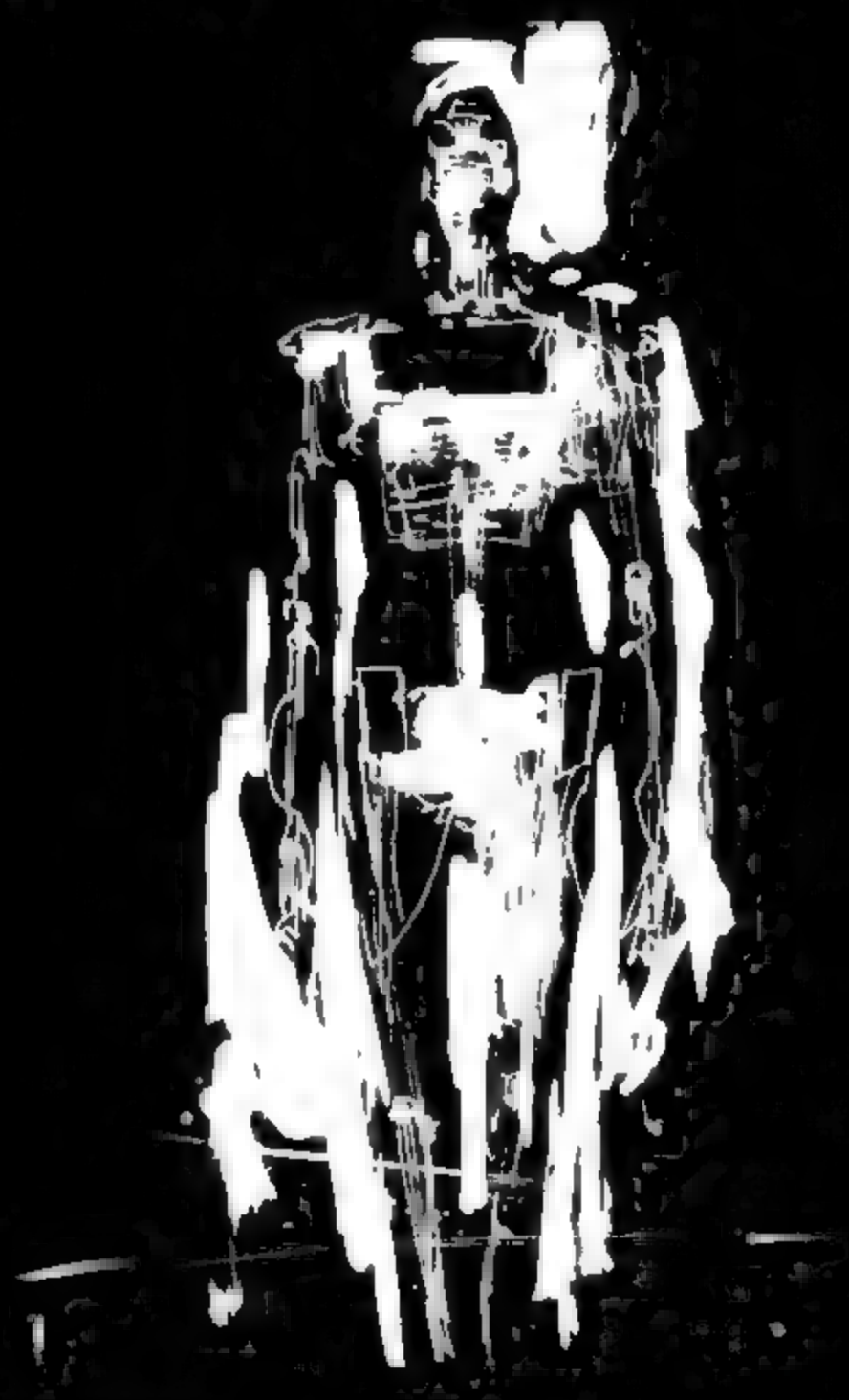
EARTH

TRILOGY

COMPANION



C O D E X



All artwork is by Alex Ross
except where noted:

JPL = John Paul Leon

BR = Bill Reinhold

It all began with a fat Spider-Man.

Over four years ago, Wizard magazine asked me to do a series of sketches showing my interpretation of the future Marvel Universe. Initially, my only thought was to parody the typical spandex-wearing hero by just showing the normal process of aging (getting old and out of shape). A year after the initial Wizard proposal, I was still asking myself what I might do if I actually took the idea seriously - if I tried to find an individual approach to each major character's nature. Each personal history would come full circle to a possible future incarnation. I applied this ethic to the whole Marvel Universe as an entity different from any Differing Company's heroes.

Before re-engaging Wizard about the sketch project, I contacted Jim Krueger to enhance my loose concepts with more background text material. I wanted to tease people with a seemingly more elaborate plan than I truly had. I'd known Jim as a fantastic creative force from his work on many comic proposals we had commiserated over and from his own creator-owned book, *The Foot Soldiers*. Jim's work on the alternate Marvel Universe *Timeslip* series in *Marvel Vision* magazine put him in my mind as the best man for the job of developing an intriguing backstory for a simple, fun sketchbook article. I initially had no other intentions than that. I posed to Jim the simple conceit that the Earth X superhero future was different because everyone throughout this world was now superhuman - that a mutant plague of sorts was the cause for a mystery tale/whodunnit. He came back with a solution to the mystery that had me reeling.

Jim's answer to the question of what caused this mutated world was more thought out than anything I had previously imagined. It led us to a creative session that resulted in both of us taking Earth X much more seriously as a real comic proposal and a worthwhile work for the medium. Before we even got started with the sketchbook article in Wizard - which had now evolved into a bound-in comic - we envisioned a lengthier Marvel series than I could physically paint. We hoped that one of our favorite artists, John Paul Leon, would illustrate Earth X.

John's work for *Challengers of the Unknown* and various limited series, annuals and covers impressed us as some of the most realistic and graphically impressive comic art in ages. John's schedule and interest became open to us right when Marvel expressed interest in publishing Earth X. Through this we assembled all parts of the creative team we wanted above all else, with my good friend and John's *Challengers* inker, Bill Reinhold; my longtime collaborator, the multiple award-winning letterer Todd Klein; and the award-winning Matt Hollingsworth (another *Challengers* alumnus) on coloring.

Jim and I have invested over two years of thought into Earth X and have a vision of far more than one will see even in the initial limited series. Only everything we ever loved or conceived about the Marvel characters is making its way into this work and we hope to eventually tell all of it to you.

ALEX ROSS



X-51

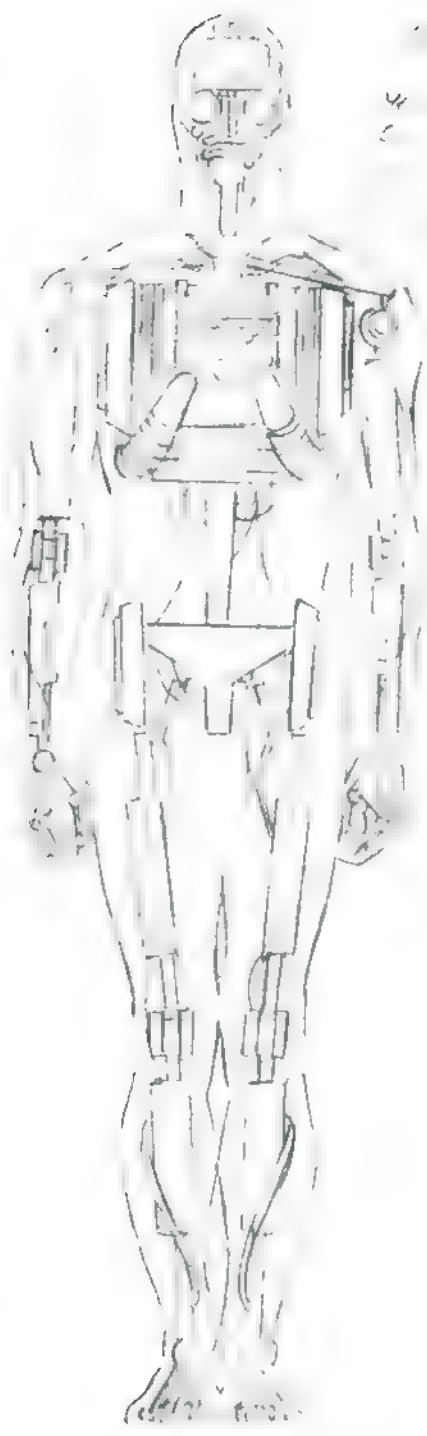
THE MACHINE MAN

The face was the key to the program. Able Stack knew this. If his creation,

X-51, the world's first thinking computer, was to truly believe itself human, to truly believe itself to have what theologians and philosophers through the ages have called a soul, it would have to look human.

Its face would need to complete the circuit between the primary program that it was truly alive and the knowledge that it was built of wires and pistons and rivets and metal.

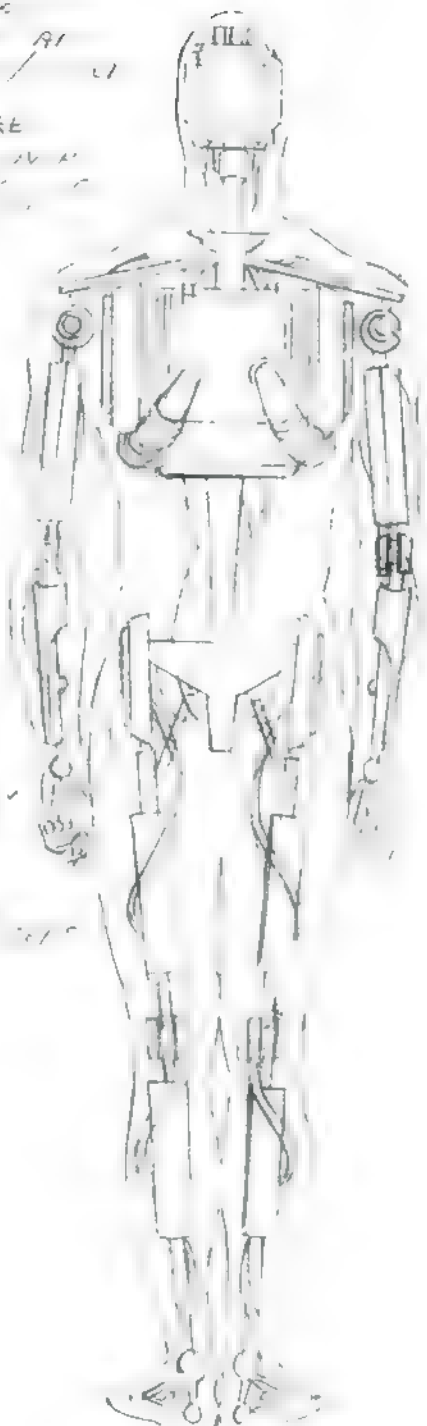
For without a face... without this fastened and draped prop, what would become of a machine programmed to believe itself a man?



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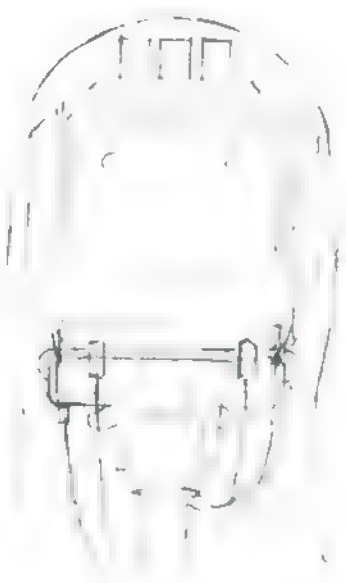
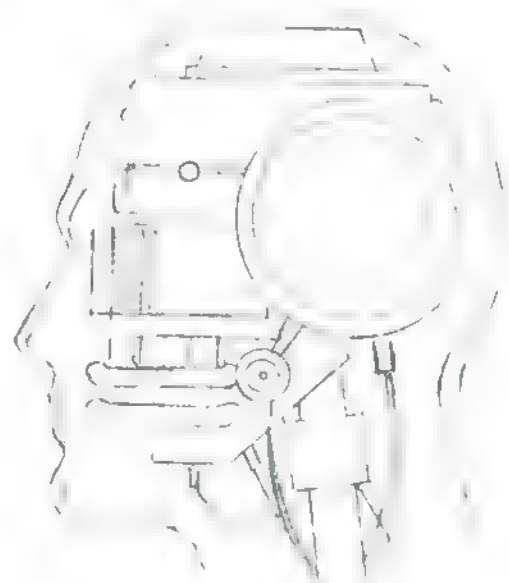
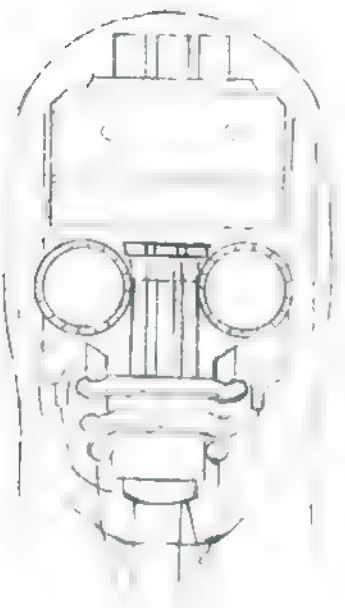


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X-51 AND THE WATCHER'S CITADEL

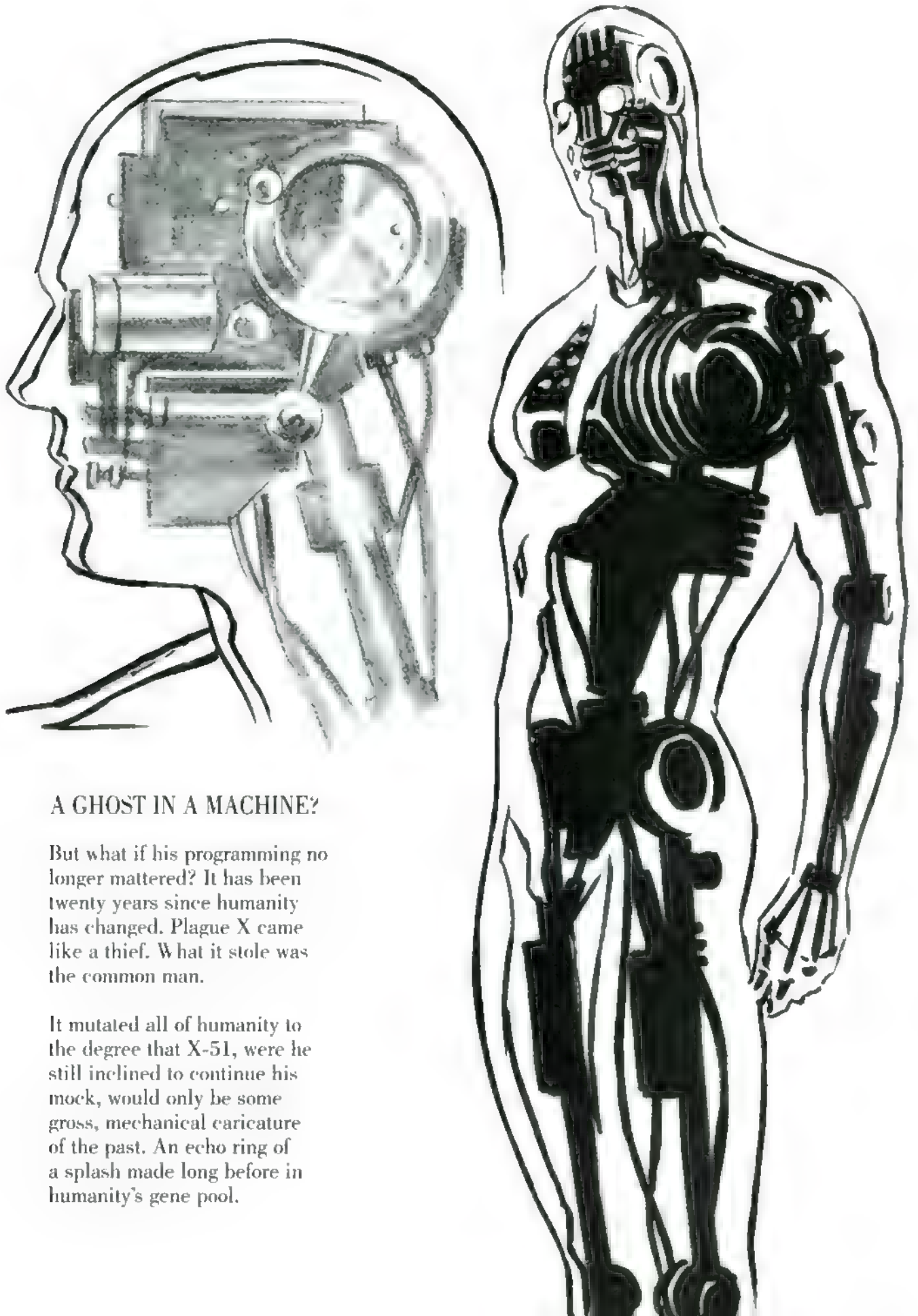
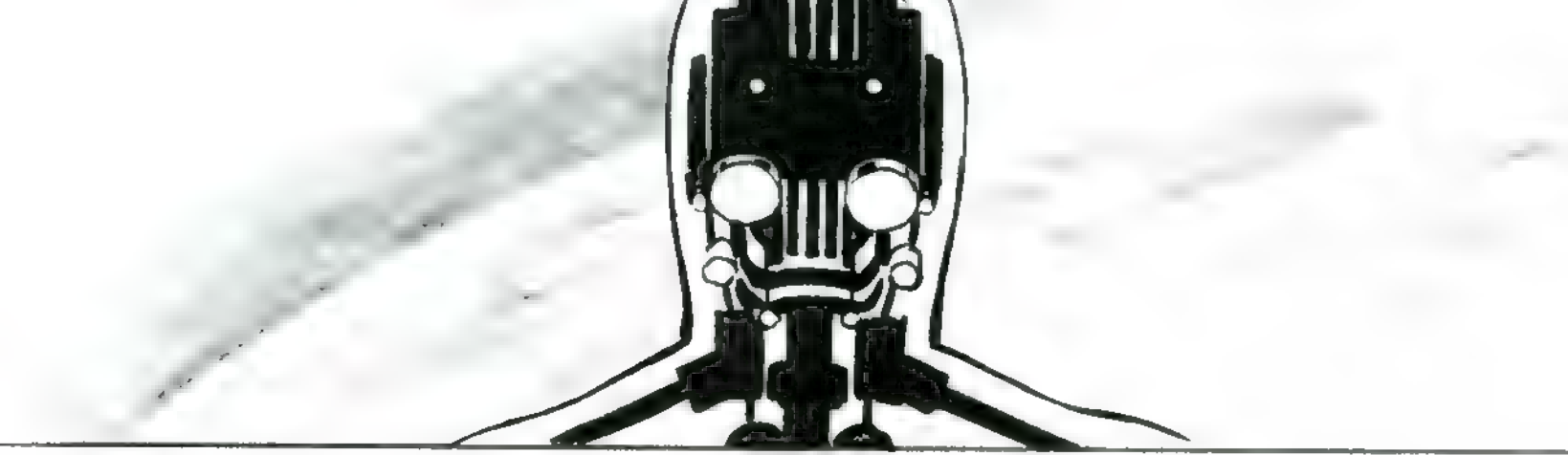
If humanity no longer existed for X-51 to emulate, what would X-51 do then?

Where would he go, when no place on Earth could be home for him?



X-51 in the
home of Uatu...
the Watcher.





A GHOST IN A MACHINE?

But what if his programming no longer mattered? It has been twenty years since humanity has changed. Plague X came like a thief. What it stole was the common man.

It mutated all of humanity to the degree that X-51, were he still inclined to continue his mock, would only be some gross, mechanical caricature of the past. An echo ring of a splash made long before in humanity's gene pool.

C A P



Steve Rogers is all that remains of
the American dream.

A dream that is now an ashen and
decayed banner in the annals of
history that drapes over him more
like a shroud than a costume.

To Cap, America is synonymous
with Freedom. And now he fears
that that very Freedom is not so
much forgotten, but is an altogether
new notion... an altogether
undiscovered country.

He may be the last super
hero in a world of super
humans.



He has watched his country become something other than the land of the free. He has watched democracy become the weapon of national suicide. For here, his people were free to vote... for their own shackles and gags. The shackles of wealth. The gags of status. Here, they were independent enough to become dependent on the government that had always served them too well. If liberty were truly a tree, Cap has seen a united people cut off the limb they rested upon. Cap has sworn that there will be a reckoning. That freedom will be avenged.



Pencil sketch JPL

STEVE ROGERS

His entire life could be said to be prologue for his confrontation with the Skull. Or perhaps, he fears, this is his sad and strained epilogue.





CAP & REDWING vs. HYDRA

Cap thought that the alien Hydra were a new form of species who had come to earth to gain possession of its people. In reality, the Hydra were a plot to gain control of Captain America through his friends and allies devised and perpetuated by the corrupt President of the United States.

Cap thought he could save them, free them of this slavery. But he was wrong. They were dead already. And their freedom would need to take a different form.



REDWING

Wyatt Wingfoot, the one-time ally of the original Fantastic Four, is now Cap's partner. Plague X has made him a being of spirit and feather and totem and rage. His partnership with Cap evolved out of both men's losses—the loss of his love, Jennifer Walters (the She-Hulk), and the loss of both Sharon Carter and Sam Jones (the Falcon) to Cap.

Loss is not all these two men have in common. Redwing was the last of his people long before the fall of America and the germination of Plague X. And so, his relationship with Cap is different than any other partnership Cap has had before.

He may be the first partner America's Sentinel of Liberty has ever had... who is truly his equal.

DAREDEVIL



Who is Daredevil? Some have thought his bike suggests Johnny Blaze, the original Ghost Rider. But Blaze has long ago Exorcised the demons that haunted him. Others say Deadpool, whose ability to reanimate his own lifeless corpse suggests this new Daredevil's inability to be killed. Others say he's Mr. Immortal from the Great Lakes Avengers. Others suggest Night Raven, whose immortality resulted from a rare herb given to him by the crime-lord, Yi Yang.

No one knows for certain who this immortal is. Or why he lives forever. His bike, though, is not immortal. This is the 17th in a series of motorcycle comebacks from the dead.

Plague X freed this man from all inhibitions and human fears. Much like the mutants of old, who were protected by healing factors, he is resilient to any injury and all pain.

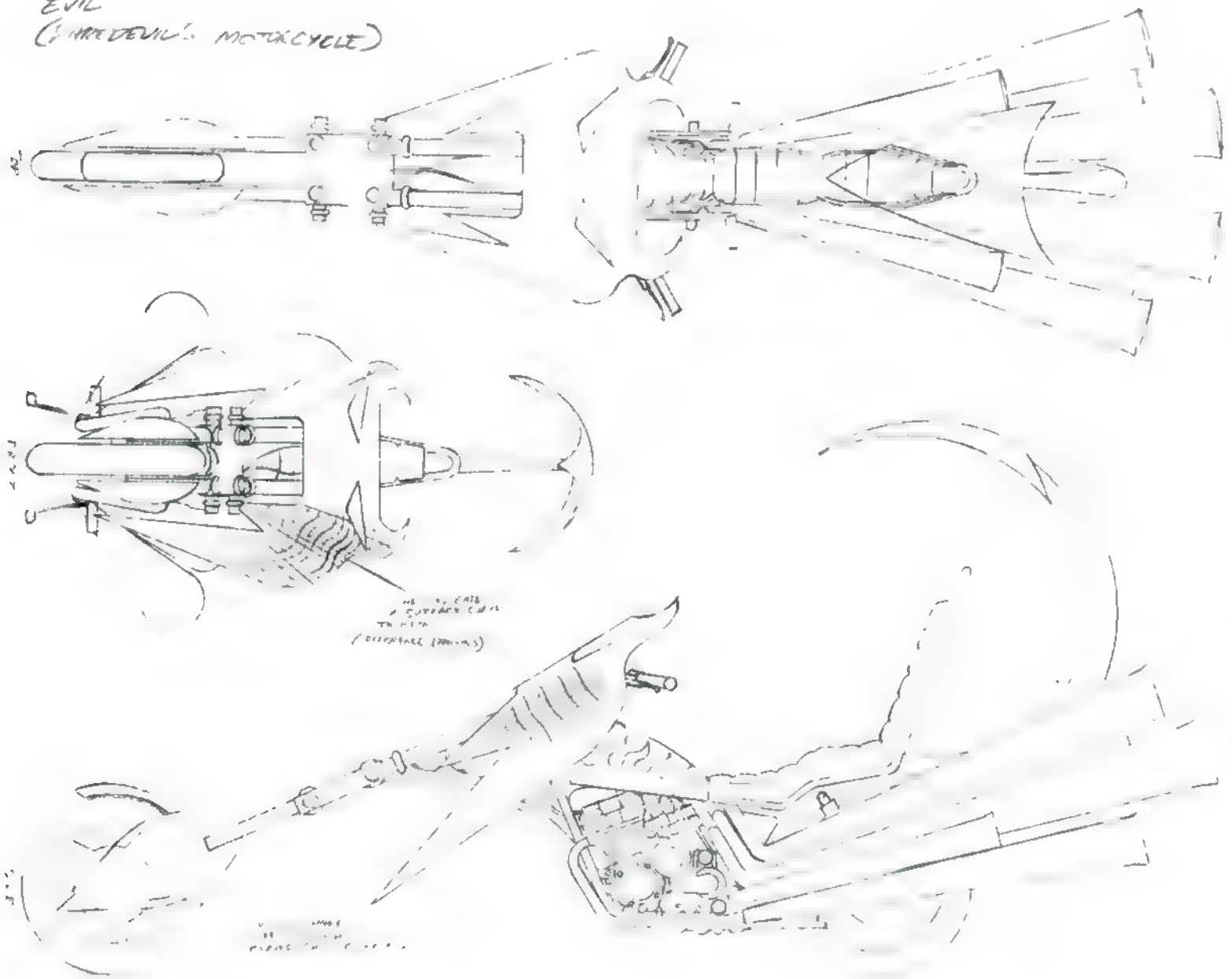
He's become an entertainer known only as Daredevil and travels from city to city with a troupe of circus performers like a vagabond of old, performing feats so treacherous that his audiences have, at times, not always survived his performances. Some believe he is Houdini himself, who swore at his death that he would one day return. Others believe he is the original Daredevil, Foggy Nelson, come back to life. But all agree that he is a living legend who cannot die.

Audiences are invited to stab him, burn him, even shoot him. But he risks nothing. Every threat is a joke. And in a world where death has no meaning, he is a man without fear.

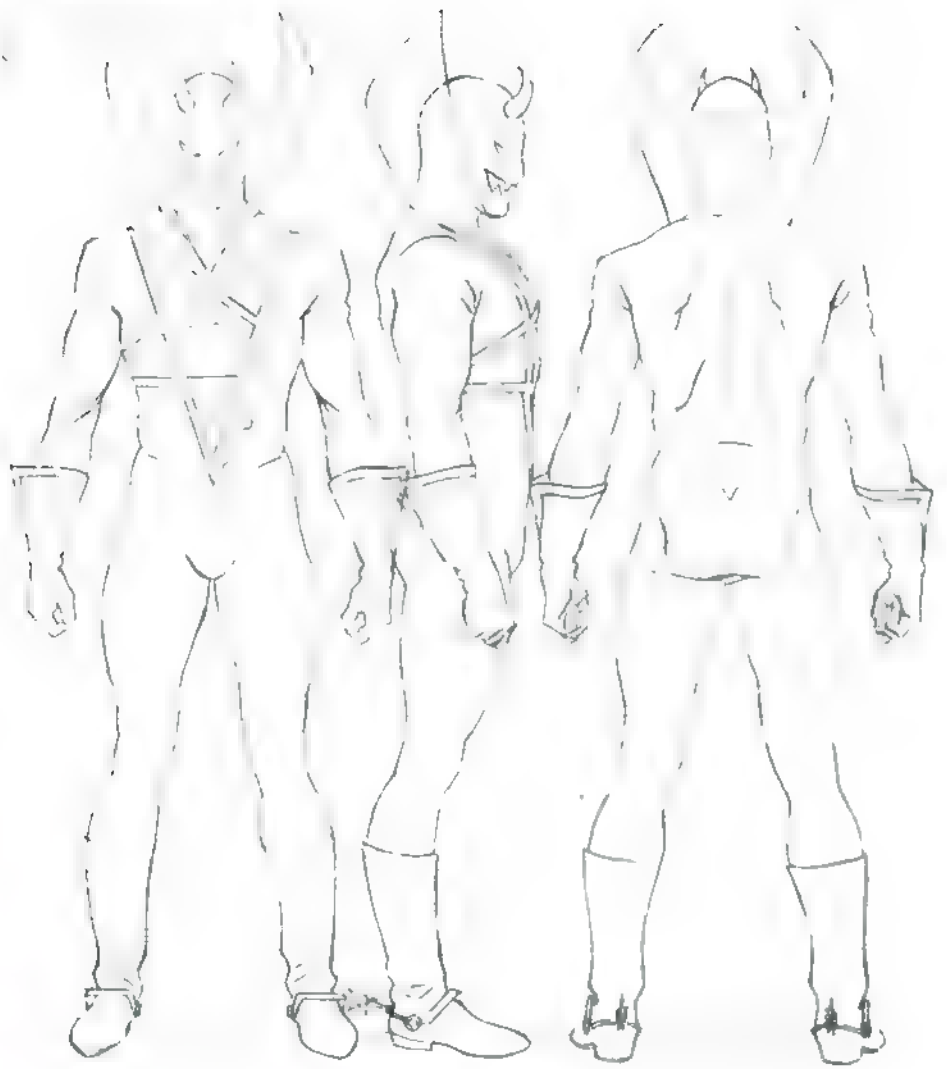
EVIL DAREDEVIL'S MOTORCYCLE

No one knows for certain who this immortal is. Or why he lives forever. His bike, though, is not immortal. This is the 17th in a series of motorcycles which, unlike their rider, do not come back from the dead.

EVIL
(DAREDEVIL'S MOTORCYCLE)



OFFICIAL



Pencil sketch JPL

THE FANTASTIC FOUR

THE MARVELS

Alicia, using her father's (that is, the Puppet Master's) clay, has molded an army of heroes as they once appeared. This army of heroes look exactly like those that existed in "The Marvel Age," a period years before when people needed champions and thrilled to the dangers that broke their daily routines. These heroes are mindless and prone to Alicia's direction just as they once were to the Puppet Master's himself.

BEN GRIMM

Ben Grimm married his long-time love, Alicia, and the two of them settled down on Yancy Street. Plague X blessed Alicia as well with the power to ignite life, which is evidenced by the birth of her improbable two children—boys—twins who are now known to the world as...The Brothers Grimm.

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This new Fantastic Four is a family now more than ever.

Pencil sketch JPL

DR. RICHARD'S DOOM

The original Fantastic Four are no more. Sue Richards died. Johnny Storm died. Namor was cursed. Franklin disappeared. And few know the truth of what happened to Dr. Doom because Reed Richards himself has become Dr. Doom.

Doombots, the rusted and malfunctioning remains of Dr. Doom's robot avatars, maintain the castle for their new master, leaving him alone with his thoughts. Thoughts which condemn and curse him to work day and night.



Reed blames himself for Plague X and what has happened to the world. He believes that he is the reason humanity has mutated and is now on the brink of oblivion—he believes that it was his experiments to develop a way to power the world using Vibranium as a source of energy and steel that caused all the damage to the gene pool.

Just as he felt responsible for Ben Grimm's deformity, he now bears the weight of the entire world's mutation upon his shoulders.



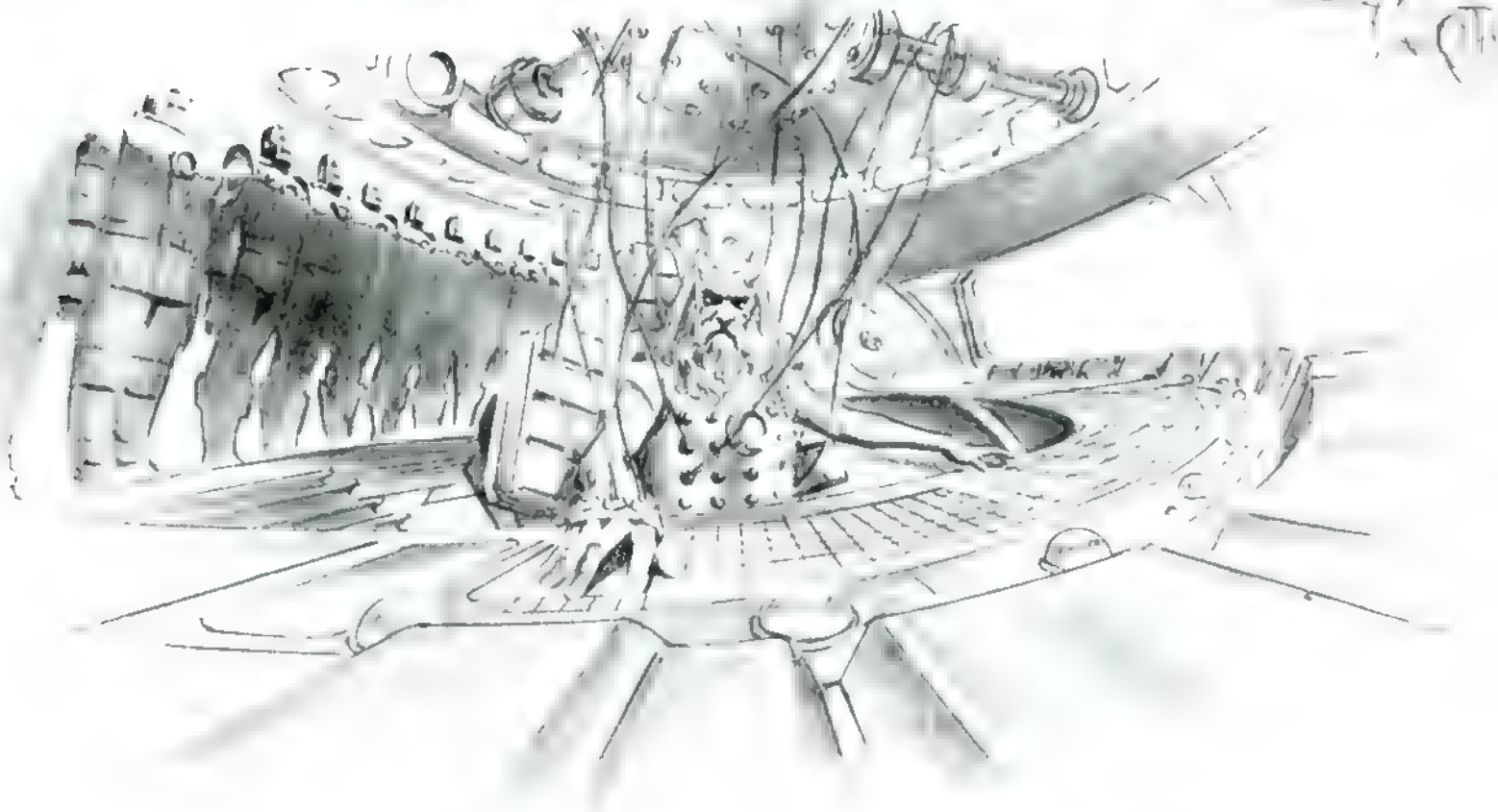
Ironically, he now speaks to his work, calling it Sue. When his wife was alive, he ignored her. Now, he speaks to her... and she is not there at all.



STARK



Earth's Mightiest Heroes are no more. Most are dead. A few fled to the other side of the world. Only one remains. Tony Stark is the last man alive. That is, he is untouched by whatever it is that has mutated his world. He is the man in the armored bubble—the man who has expanded his armor around himself so far that he lives in utter isolation and utter sterilization.

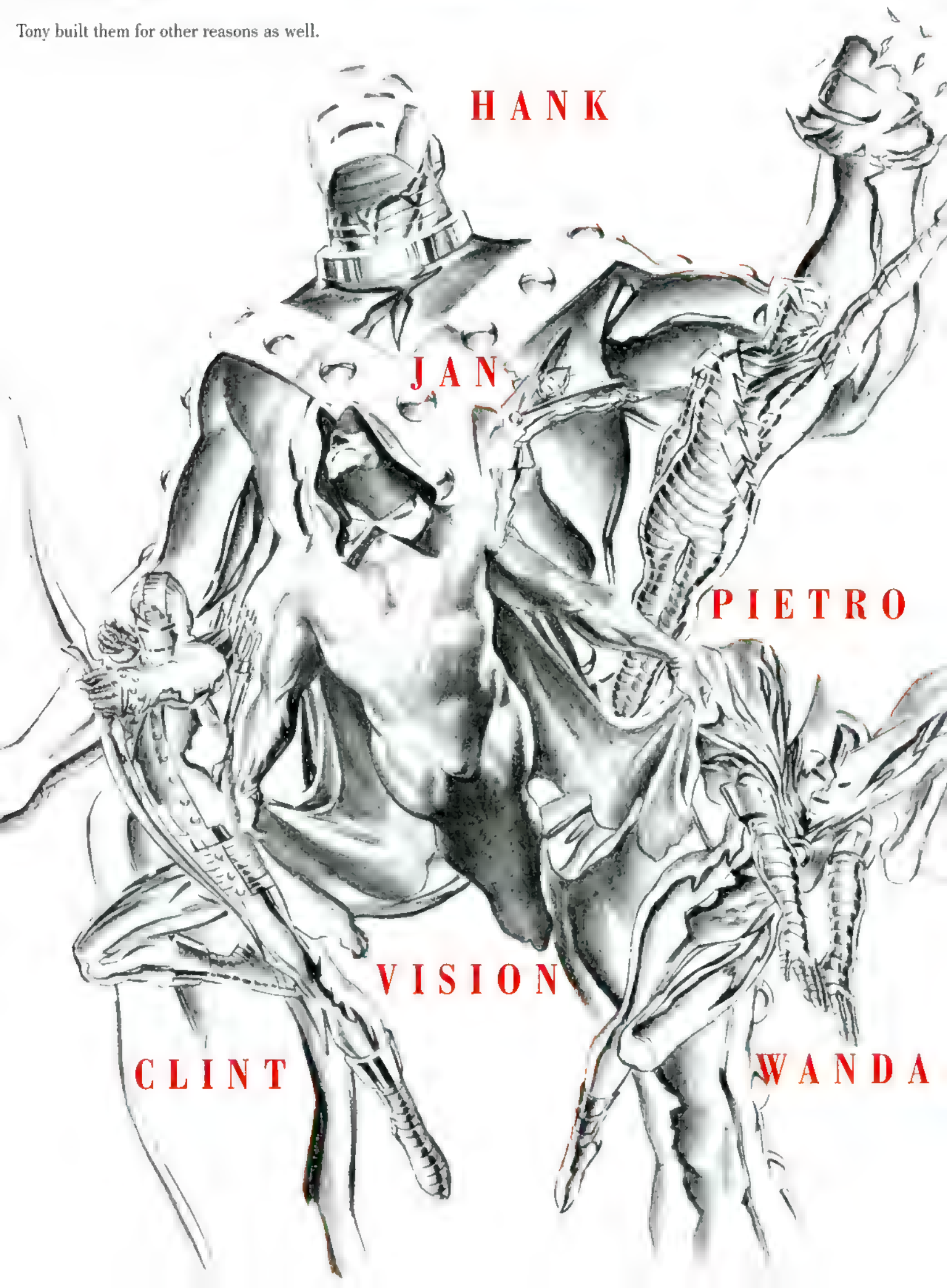


In his own way, though, Tony Stark has also lost his humanity. For humanity has a social existence. And he is alone and too proud to admit that in holding on to his natural form, he has become a stranger to the world.

IRON AVENGERS

To protect himself from attacks on his home from the mutated masses around him, Tony built the Iron Avengers. These are robots designed with Iron Man technology and programmed with the personalities and characteristics of all the dead Avengers.

Tony built them for other reasons as well.



HANK

JAN

PIETRO

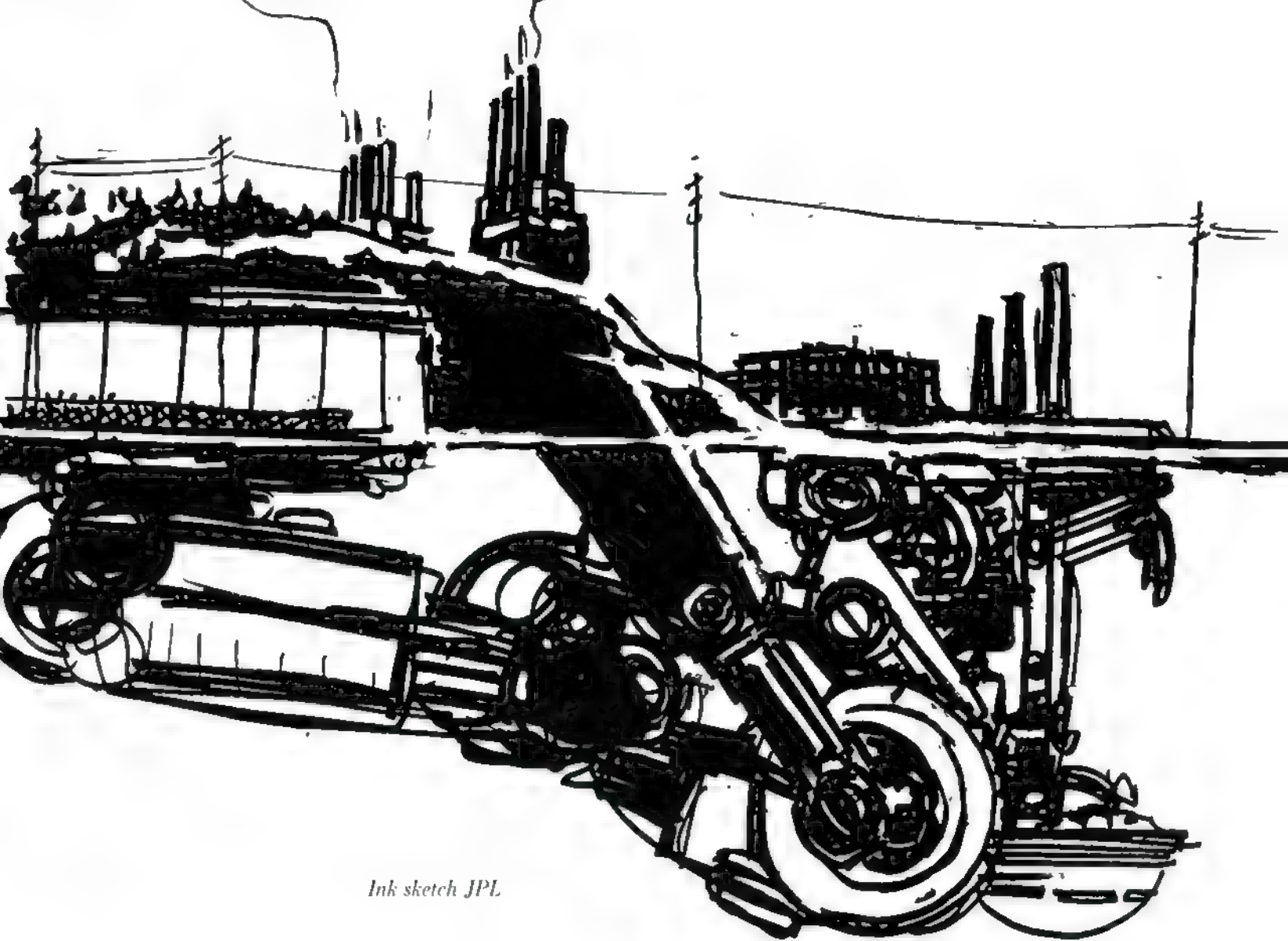
VISION

CLINT

WANDA

IRON MANOR

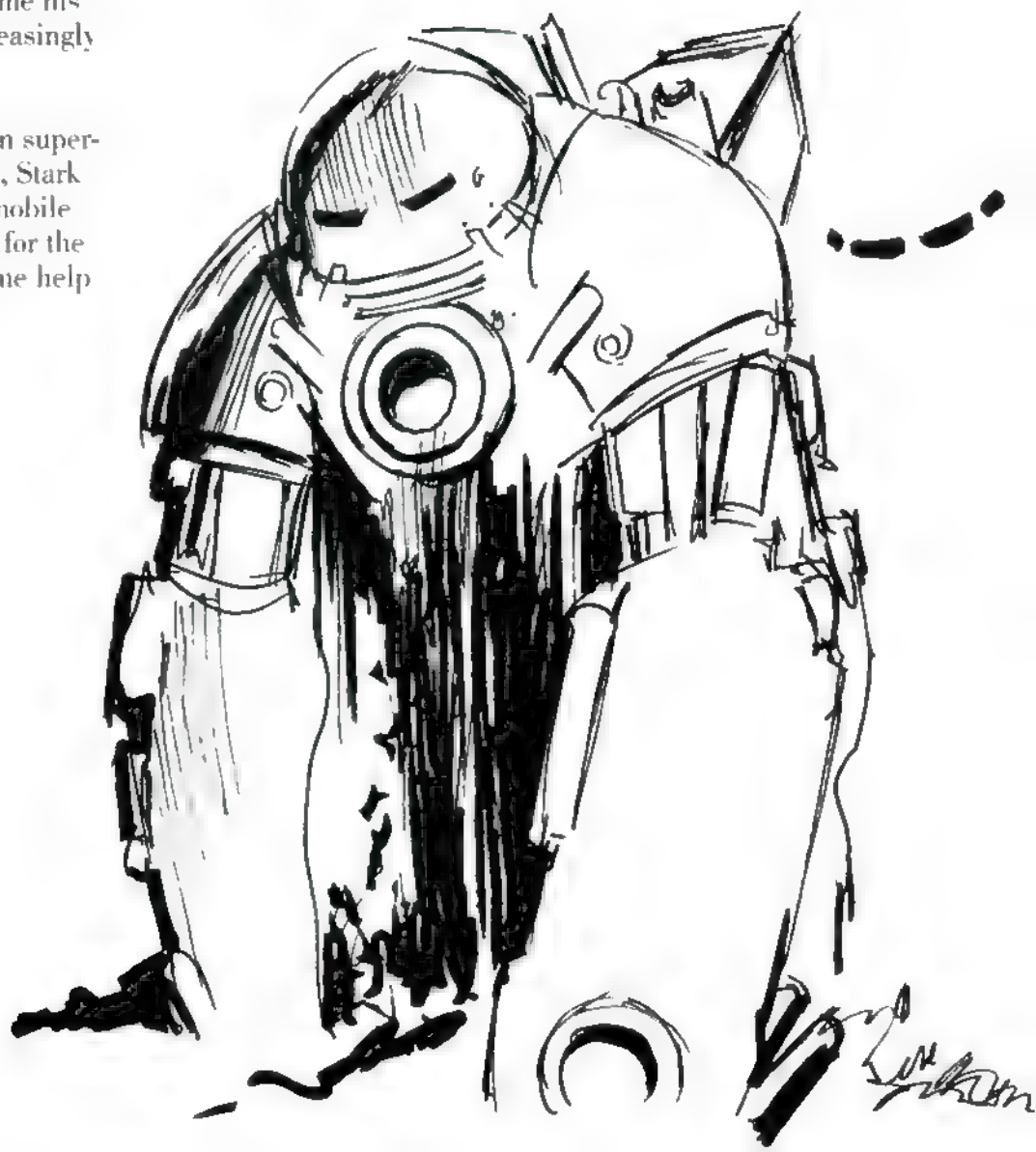




Ink sketch JPL

For Tony Stark, his home was more than a castle or a fortress, it would become his armor against a world growing increasingly hostile to humanity.

Using the remains of the Red Ronin super-assembly from the Godzilla Project, Stark built the iron manor, the ultimate mobile home, for the purpose of preparing for the day when the meek would need some help in inheriting the Earth.



THOR: GODDESS OF THUNDER

After the whispered tediums and poisoned pleasantries of Loki had reached their fill within Odin's ears, the All-Father decided that Thor would once again be taught a lesson in humility. Apparently, as Loki explained to his Father, Thor had not learned to control his pride when he was forced to walk the Earth as a human being instead of a god. He has since used his power to lust after and lord himself over Midgard's peoples.



Alternate design by Lynette Ross



Pencil sketch JPL

Perhaps, suggested Loki to the once all-seeing, now half-blinded Odin, it would be more appropriate to learn humility were Thor forced to live as a woman, the object of human men's lusts.

"Let it be so!" declared Odin.

But woe to the trickster brother of Thor, for the fates have written that Loki too may drink from the cup of humility should he now be bested by the likes of a woman.

LOKI

He is the brother of Thor. The shape-shifting god of trickery. He has chosen a shape that feeds the superstitions of men and inflames the fears of the skeptical. But perhaps, the trick is upon him... for no other form could so deftly approach his true nature.



Not only has he tricked his father Odin into transforming Thor into a woman, but he has cast a spell on the Rainbow Bridge leading to Asgard.

This magic is an entrapment of ancient power; were Thor ever to return to the home of the Norse Gods to show Odin his brother's folly, Thor would be unable to return to Earth. And that would leave Loki free to act upon his whims.

PLAGUE X DIDN'T CHANGE THE X-MEN. IT KILLED THEM.

X - M E N

No reason existed to fight for a peaceful coexistence between man and mutant once all men had become Homo Superior. Prejudice was now an archaic concept. A quaint lesson in history. And with the death of Professor X, the X-Men disbanded and each went his own way.

Remembering that the original X-Men were formed to fight Magneto and other mutants who used their power for selfish gain and evil purposes, Mr. S (Scott Summers, who cannot abide anyone calling him Professor) forms a new team out of the performers that were part of Daredevil's traveling thrill show. Mr. S cites that it's not the enemy that's changed... only their potential number.

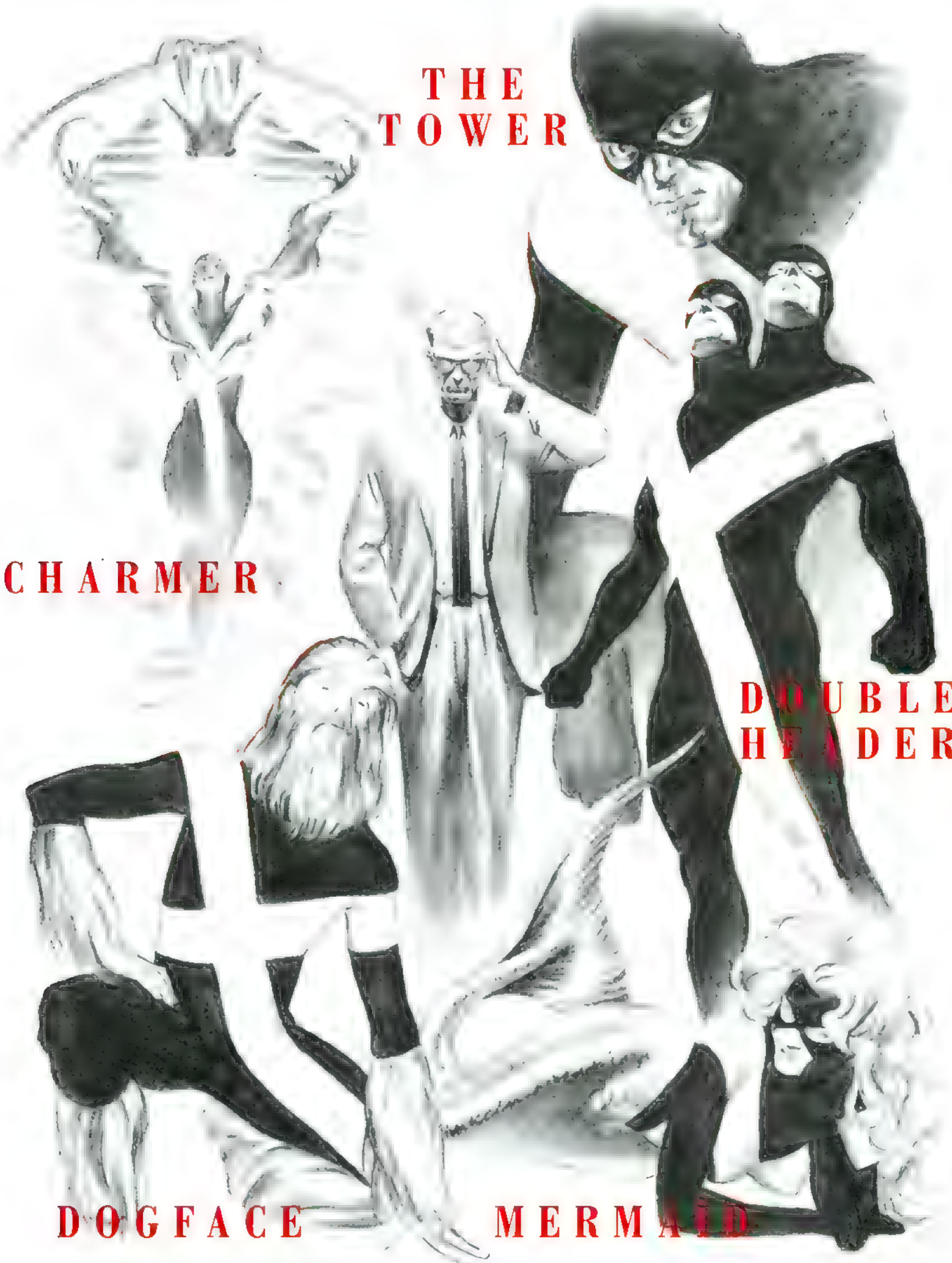
THE TOWER

CHARMER

DOUBLE
HEADER

DOGFACE

MERMAID

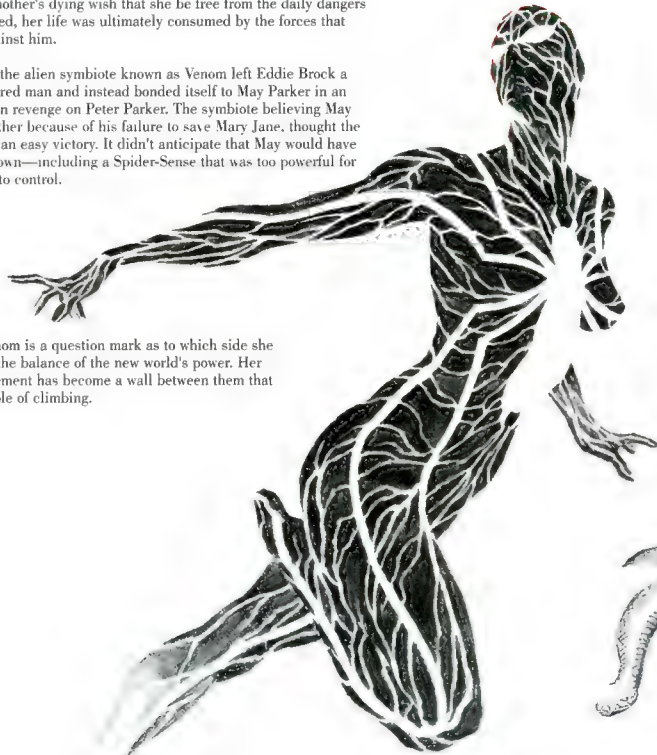


THE SPIDER MEN

VENOM

Peter and Mary Jane Parker's daughter, May, was affected by the strange world her father was a part of as the web-spinning Spider-Man. Despite her mother's dying wish that she be free from the daily dangers her father faced, her life was ultimately consumed by the forces that conspired against him.

Years before, the alien symbiote known as Venom left Eddie Brock a useless and tired man and instead bonded itself to May Parker in an attempt to gain revenge on Peter Parker. The symbiote believing May to hate her father because of his failure to save Mary Jane, thought the girl would be an easy victory. It didn't anticipate that May would have power of her own—including a Spider-Sense that was too powerful for the symbiote to control.



This new Venom is a question mark as to which side she will cling in the balance of the new world's power. Her father's retirement has become a wall between them that he is incapable of climbing.

THE SPIDERS MAN



OL' SPIDEY

LACES GOING
DOWN BACK OF
HEAD LIKE
FOOTBALL

STITCH LINE
IN MASK

HAIR COMING
OUT
FROM
UNDER MASK

SPIDER
FACE
SYMBOL
ON BACK
INSTEAD OF

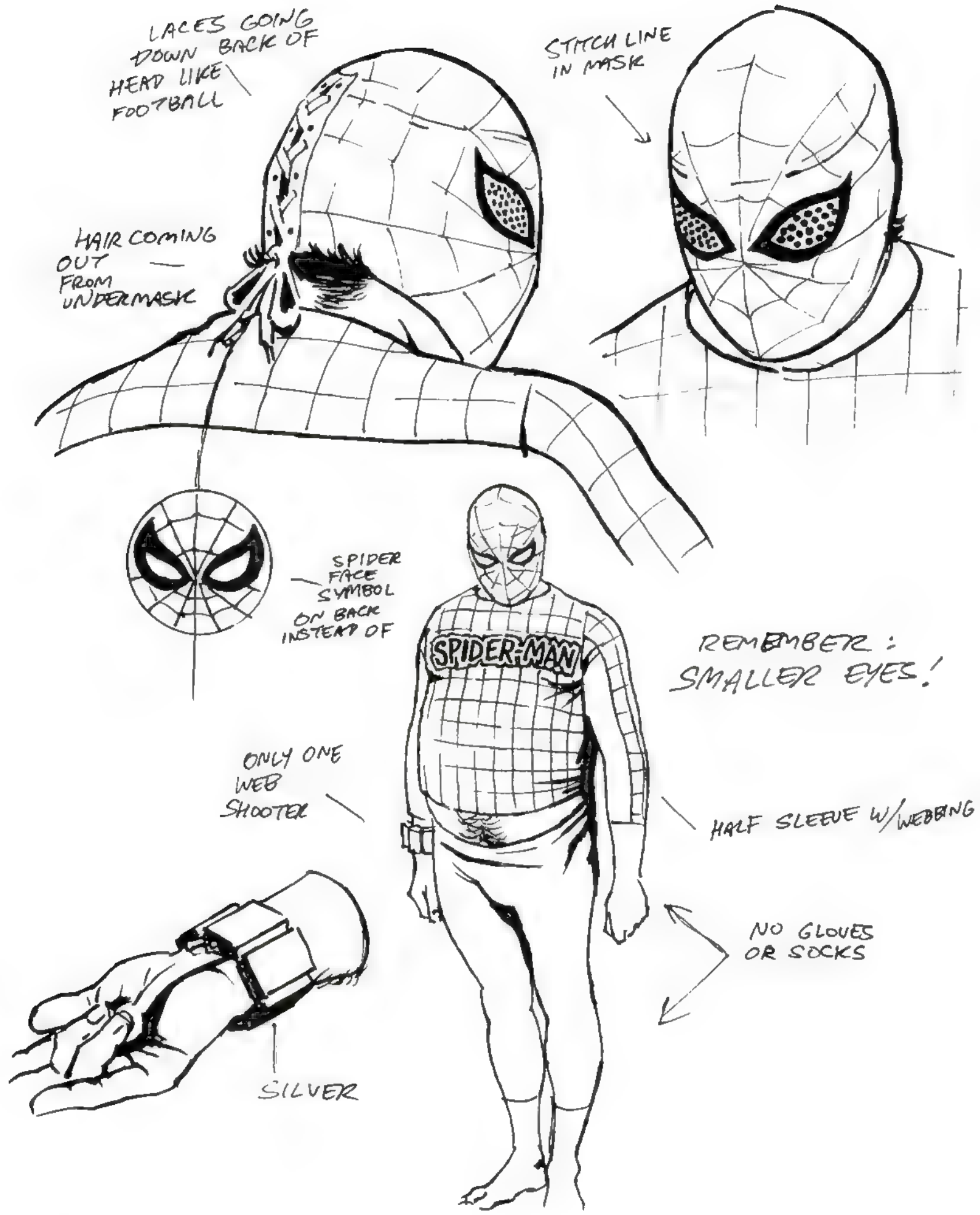
REMEMBER :
SMALLER EYES!

ONLY ONE
WEB
SHOOTER

HALF SLEEVE W/WEBBING

NO GLOVES
OR SOCKS

SILVER



Peter Parker has retired from the ranks of super heroes. More and more he has become the vision and physique of his late Uncle Ben, the image of his greatest failure, the man he failed to save when he could have. His days as Spider-Man are long over. But every once in a while, he will try on his old costume. "How stupid," he thinks and puts it away. It wasn't Mary Jane's death that led to his surrender. Not completely. It was everything. Johnny Storm, his long-time friend and ally from the Fantastic Four, was murdered. The Daily Bugle closed. His worst enemy, the Green Goblin, became the figurehead of what's left of America. And his daughter "May" became Venom. Peter Parker has learned that life is something of which we are all casualties. Everyone had powers now. And in a world where he no longer has great power... he no longer feels great responsibility.

PETER PARKER



MAY PARKER



THE SPIDERS MAN

One of the closest subjects of the Skull, Spiders Man was once a man without a future. He was gutter trash. A used-up member of a world that cared nothing for him and had thrown him out with the garbage. He is the poster child of the lowliest of homeless despair. Plague X deformed him, transforming him from a man people once ignored and walked over into a monster they can't bear to look at.

Now, with powers that defy logic and an outlet for them as the Skull's puppet, Spiders Man is one of the new inheritors of New York. His ability to cast web-like illusions over people causes them to see things that aren't there, forcing their fears to create phantoms from their past with the slightest of whims.

Spiders Man adores the Iron Maiden, who is also in league with the Skull. But his attempts to profess this love seem lost and chaotic—almost nondescript.

He is the most vulnerable aspect of super humanity—fearsome power within a scarred and fragile shell.



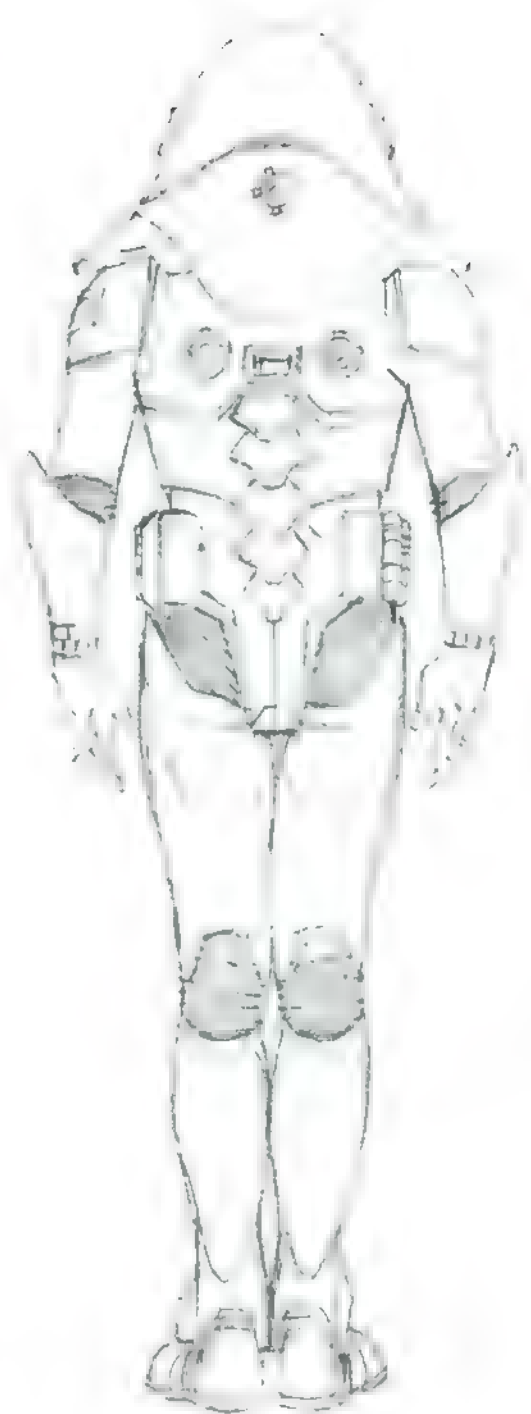


JOHN JAMESON

MAN-WOLF



Pencil sketches by BR



The fear that overcame humanity when the mutations first began led to the systemized collection of known mutants including the son of J. Jonah Jameson. But John Jameson was also a "national hero" and had a certain debt to be owed to him by Nick Fury, the director of S.H.I.E.L.D. The former astronaut opted to secretly relocate himself and his immediate family to the moon rather than accept the controls that would have been placed upon him in the twilight days of Earth's Homo-Sapiens.



SORCERESS SUPREME

Clea, the one-time disciple of Dr. Strange, has become the Mistress of the Mystic Arts — the Sorceress Supreme. Her spells and bewitchments have kept her young and beautiful, completely unaffected by Plague X and untouched by an ugly world. This vanity seems new to those who know her. Or perhaps this trivial flaw was hidden during the years of her discipleship.

Nonetheless, Clea's magic has foretold a terrible destiny coming from the stars for the inhabitants of Earth; and so, to decipher what she has found, she has sought out two of Stephen's old allies. With their help, she hopes these new Defenders can avert the coming disaster.





Art by BR

DOCTOR STRANGE

And what of the Master of the Mystic Arts himself? Wong waits patiently over the withering body of his master, feeding it with herbs and teas, vainly hoping that the doctor will return to the mortal shell that once housed him. He misses his Master's stories of the most — desperate battles in the Dark Dimensions against enemies like Baron Mordo, Dormammu and Mephisto.

Wong wonders from day to day, who it was who left his master a mindless one.

HULK & BANNER

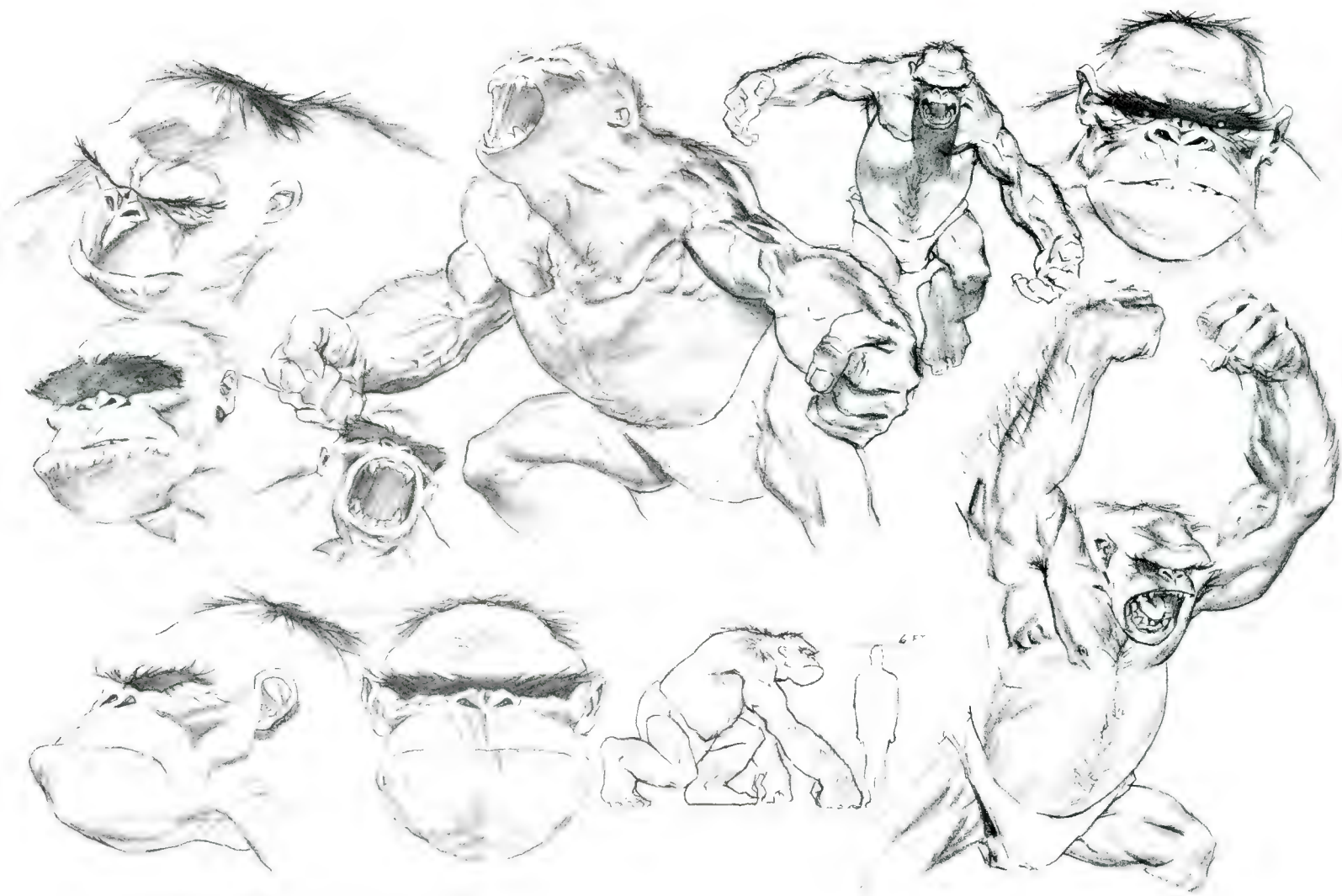
The Hulk has undergone the strangest of all transformations as a result of Plague X. The mutating plague split apart his feuding Hulk and Banner personae. Somehow, because the anger that birthed the Hulk was first unleashed as a result of the abuse Banner suffered as a child, a child is what Dr. Bruce Banner has become. And all that rage, exorcised from Bruce, has been given form in the Hulk, but not voice. The apish beast known as the Hulk is subject to Bruce's direction and is mute.



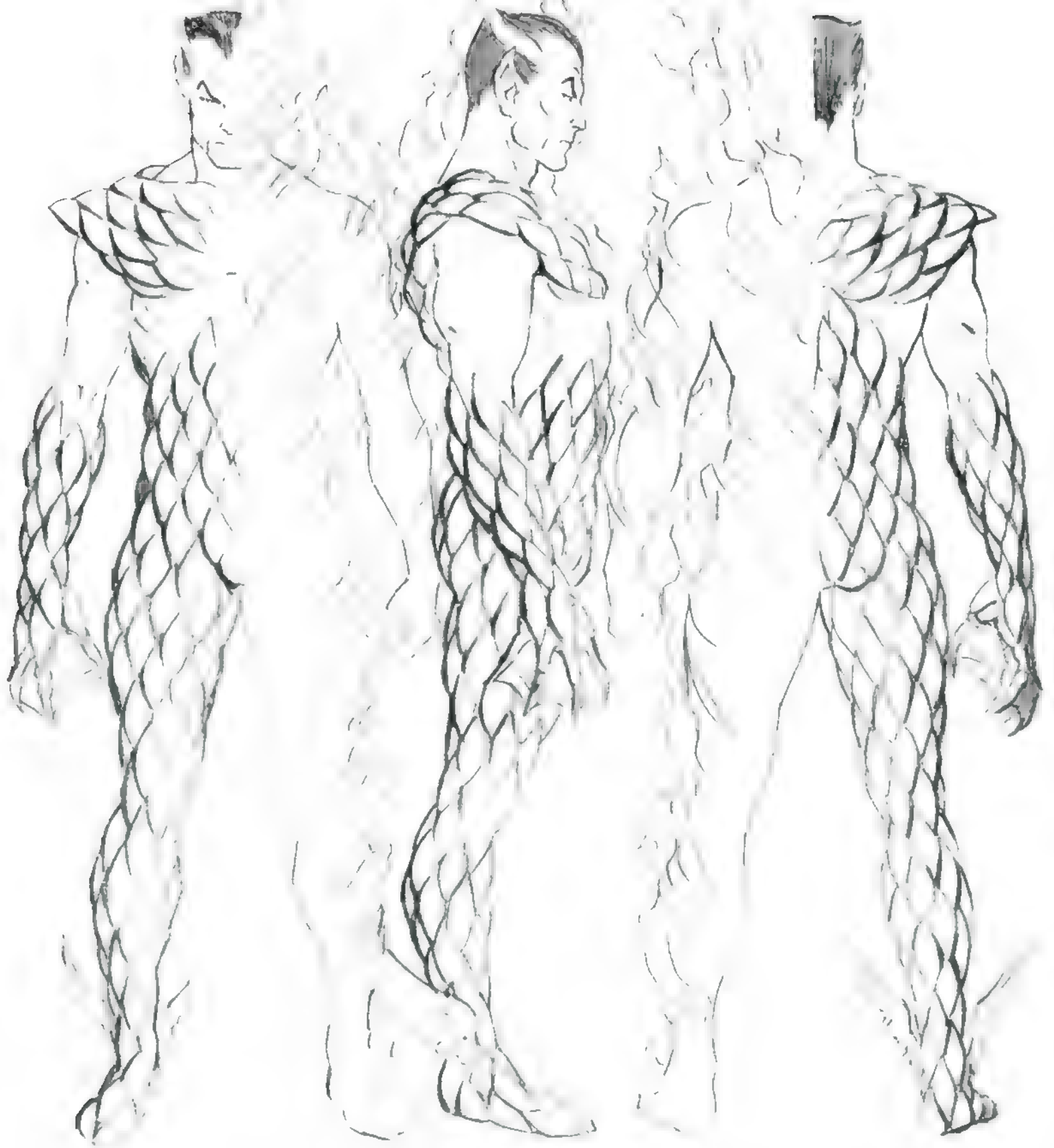
Pencil sketch JPL

Bruce Banner is a blind boy who has seen all too clearly the monster that man is capable of becoming.

He is extremely intelligent. His age does not even hint at his intellectual abilities. Nor does he age anymore. He's been 11 years old for the past ten years.



Due to an astonishing mental link between the two, Bruce is only capable of sight through the Hulk's eyes.



In what would be the final pairing of the Sub-Mariner and Dr. Doom, this Super-Villain Team-Up sought to force the United Nations to bow before their countries' demands. While Doom's actions, as always, were governed by pride and self-determination, it was humanity's wholesale slaughter and consumption of the ocean's fishes that led to Namor's renewed partnership with Doom.

In a fit of rage, during what would be the final battle of the original Fantastic Four, Namor killed Johnny Storm. Afterwards, Franklin condemned Namor to burn for what he'd done whenever he left the water.

Beneath the oceans, Namor carries the scars of his sin. But who better to steward the scarred and polluted waters, Namor believes, than a king who has also been scarred and polluted by the surface dwellers.

Namor knows that because of his unique half-human, half-Atlantean physical nature, he cannot remain underwater long without going mad. So Namor has once again become the enemy of mankind. No one dares go near the water as a result. No fish is hunted... no water is polluted... for to do so, would be to elicit the fiery wrath of Namor the Cursed.

NAMOR
THE CURSED





QUEEN HYDRA

Jennifer Walters, the She-Hulk, was the first to be converted into a member of the Hydra by Osborn Industries. Walters was a lawyer, and therefore, an enemy the future presidency of Norman Osborn.

A. A. W. UNDER-LIGHTING

PLACEMENT OF TENTACLES AROUND HEAD

EVERYBODY'S HAIR IS WHITE (OR STREAKS OF WHITE)

D. KAN

FALCON

EYES ARE GLOWING WHITE AND VEINS ARE GREEN, CREATING AN ASHEN TONE TO BLACK SKIN (FALCON) OR PALE FLESH TONE. THE ONLY PERSON NOT AFFECTED BY THE EXPOSED GREEN VEINS IS SPE-HULK (QUEEN HYDRA), WHO IS ALREADY GREEN.

HYDRA HAS EXACTLY 8 ARMS WITH SUCTION CUPS ON CONTACT SIDE.

EXACT LAYOUT OF SPOT PATTERN (NOT REAL EYES OR MOUTH, JUST MARKINGS)

BACK

ALL HAIL HYDRA

SHARON
CARTER



VALENTINA
ALLEGRO
de FONTAINE

SAM JONES



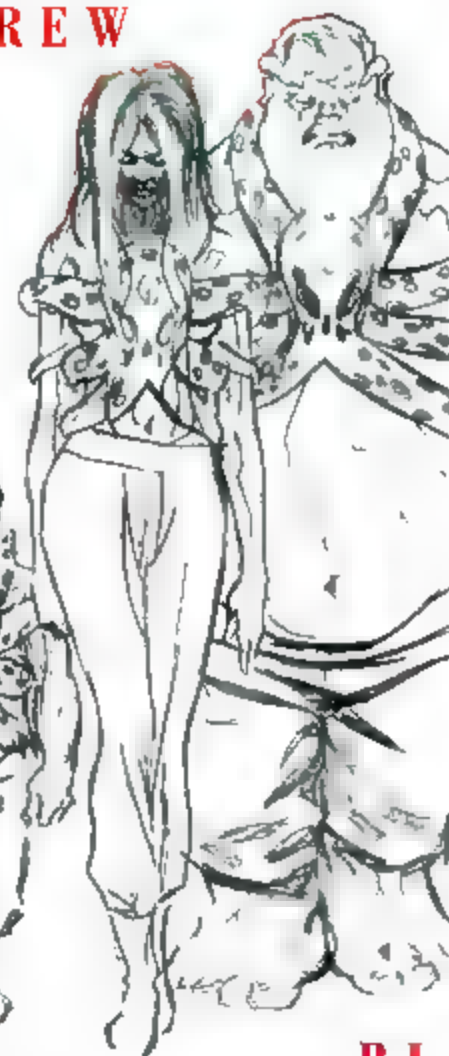
DUM DUM DUGAN



JESSICA
DREW



PUCK



BLOB

Many of these agents who were killed in the crash of the S.H.I.E.L.D. Helicarrier were re-assigned to the HYDRA, including certain prisoners of S.H.I.E.L.D. like the former member of the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants, the Blob.



As humanity died, the greatest and most terrible of the new powers... the ability to make anyone do anything you wished... was placed in the hands of a boy — a child who might not have become embittered, insolent and insecure were he not given this ultimate ability to be an overman. At the moment of this child's mutant awakening, his telepathic "birth" snuffed out the lives of the world's foremost psychics—including Charles Xavier and Emma Frost.

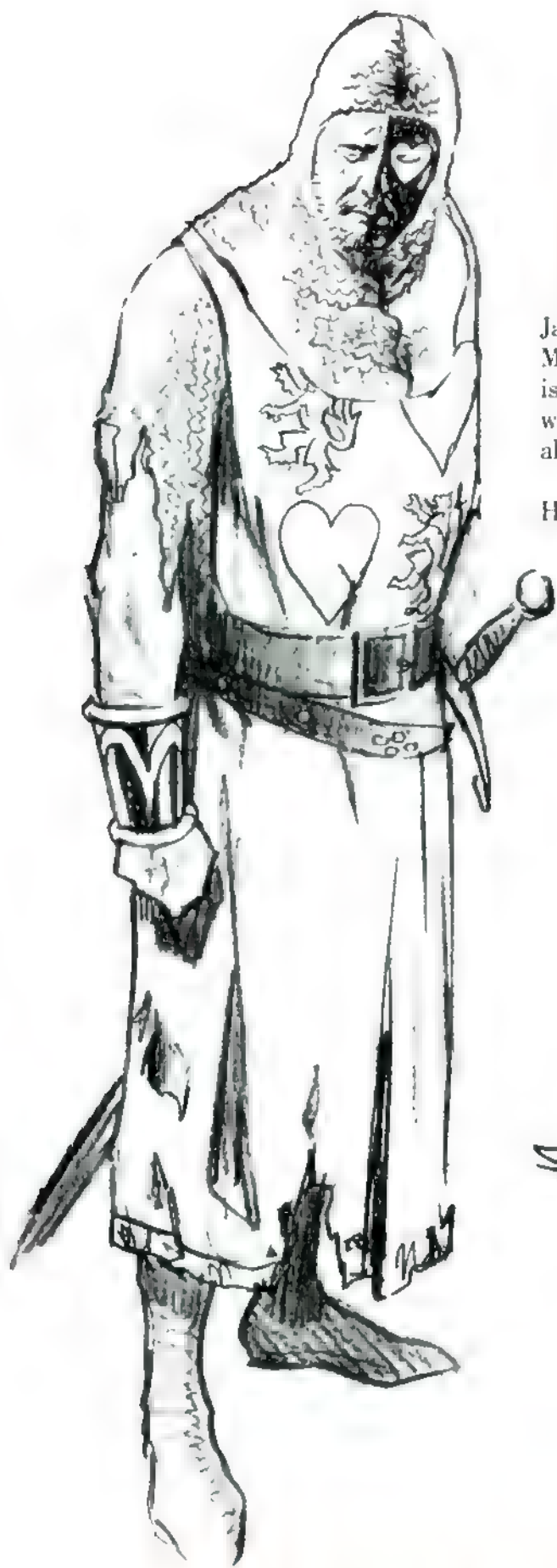
THE SKULL



Devouring the individuality of the new Superhuman America, he moves across the nation, drawing everyone he encounters into the uniformity of his Reich. His empire is built upon their plundered minds— a new master race with one Master. One nation under a prepubescent god.

He wears a red version of the Punisher's skull symbol representing his control over all skulls and grants seemingly eternal life to the original Red Skull's Nazi presence.

In a world where each man should be able to break the chains that society and his once human body held, the new Skull tramples that freedom under the jackboot of an even greater bondage.



JACK OF HEARTS

Jack Heart is another member of the Skull's army. Like Muldoon, he has come from money. But unlike Muldoon, he is a being of almost unlimited power. He hopes secretly that with each new being the Skull adds to his army, that the Skull's ability to control them all is lessened.

He waits and watches.



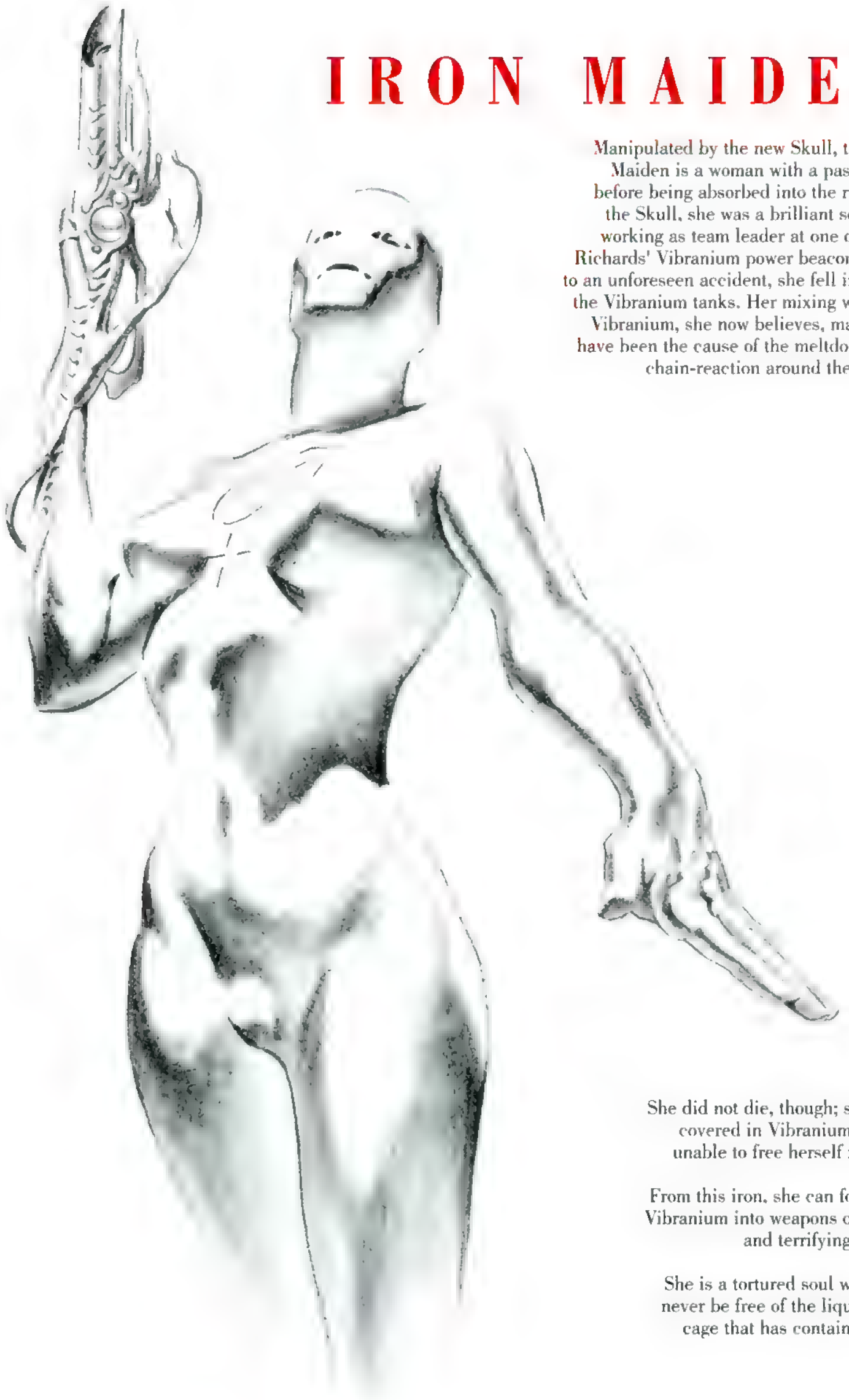
TEXAS JACK

Jack Muldoon was once a rich oil-tycoon, given to whiskey and women. The original Marlboro Man. He allied himself with Captain America years before Rogers courted a possible candidacy for the Presidency. His business was ruined with the advent of a world fueled with vibranium. His mutation effected the thickness of his skin. Movements like walking are more difficult as a reasult, and his skin has begun to split and peel like leather as a result of its forced movement.

Now one of the Skull's possessed army, Muldoon has prepared a trap for the Skull. By making the Skull aware of Cap's presence in their midst, Muldoon hopes the Skull will make the same mistake so many enemies of Captain America have in the past.

IRON MAIDEN

Manipulated by the new Skull, the Iron Maiden is a woman with a past. Long before being absorbed into the ranks of the Skull, she was a brilliant scientist working as team leader at one of Reed Richards' Vibranium power beacons. Due to an unforeseen accident, she fell into one the Vibranium tanks. Her mixing with the Vibranium, she now believes, may even have been the cause of the meltdown and chain-reaction around the world.



She did not die, though; she was covered in Vibranium and is unable to free herself from it.

From this iron, she can form the Vibranium into weapons of awful and terrifying effect.

She is a tortured soul who will never be free of the liquid iron cage that has contained her.

SKULL'S ARMY



SANDMAN

THE WIZARD

WOODGOD

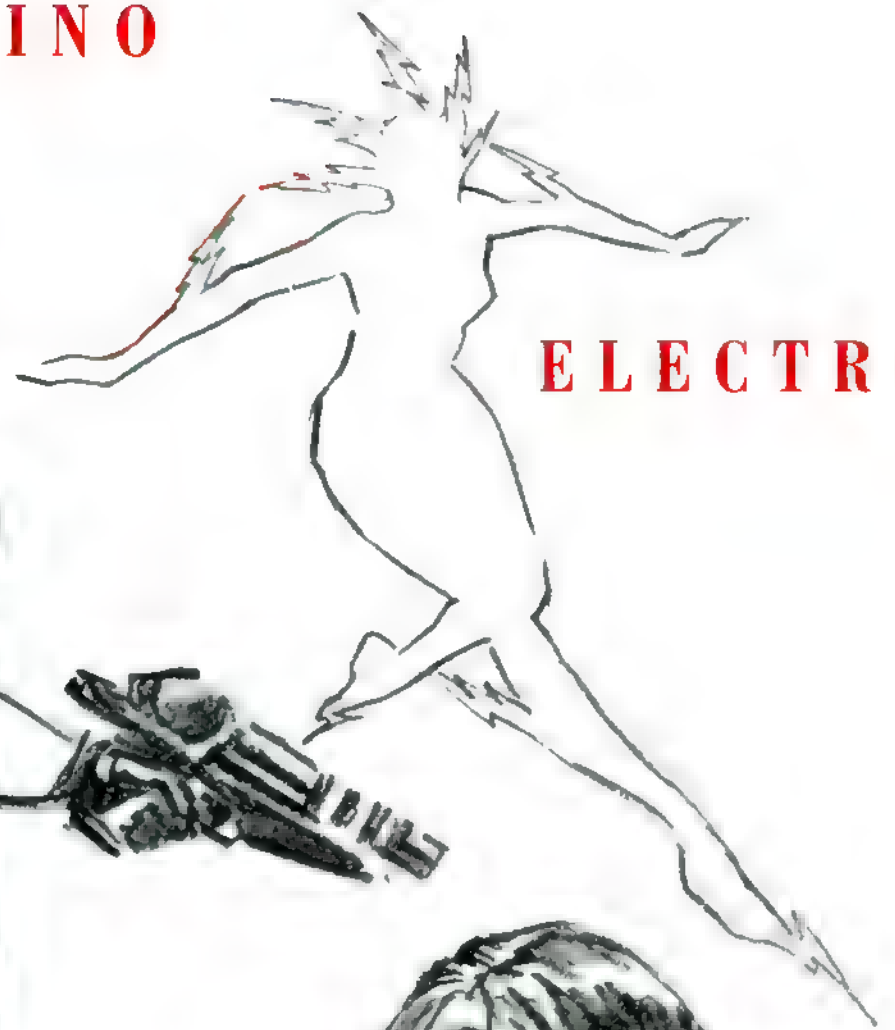
FERAL

Enemies become allies instantly when called to join the Skull's army. It is comprised of heroes and villains. Reformed criminals and mercenaries. Peace was bought between them at a far greater cost. It does not matter what they were before the Skull took hold of them. And therefore, it matters not what they are now.

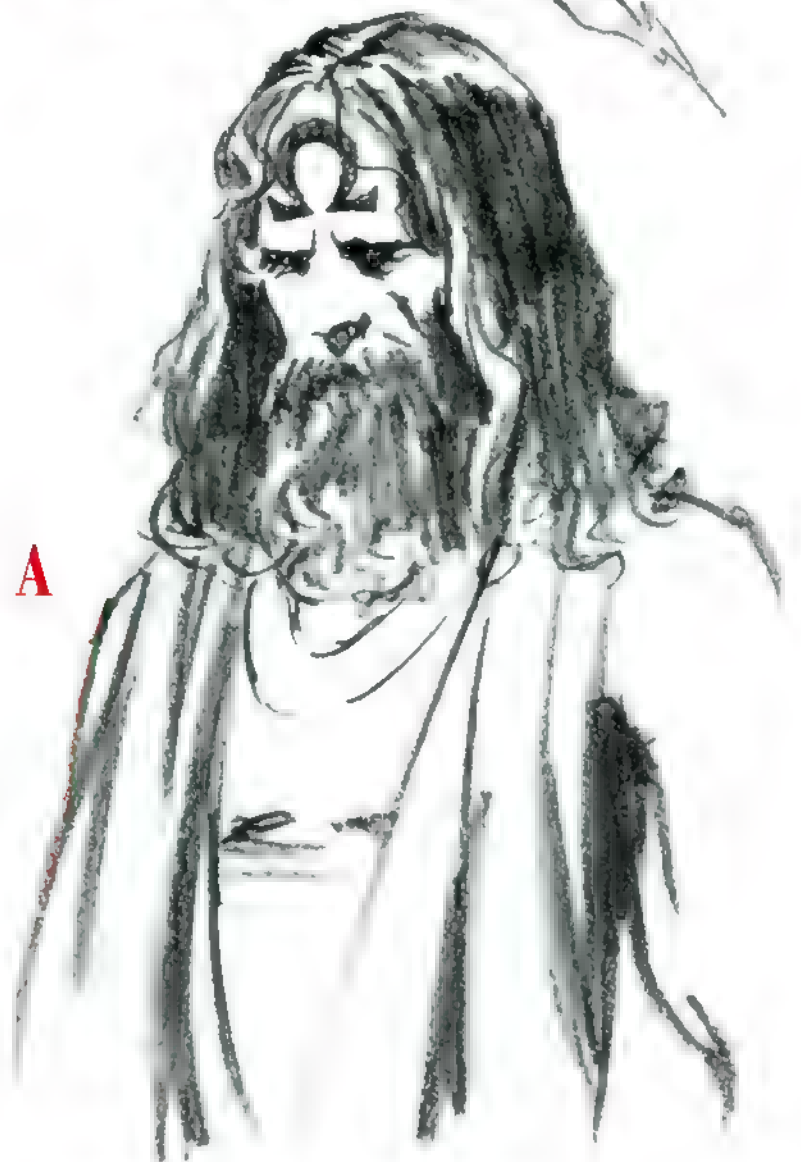
DOMINO



ELECTRA



OMEGA



Each member of the Skull's army has a story to tell, as they often do while the Skull releases his hold on their jaws and allows them to speak with each other. The man known as Omega talks about the alien he met when he was only a child and of his first experience with death. The Mercenary, Domino, tells about a man named Cable and about the treasures he left that she hoped to one day lay claim to. The energy being, Elektra tells of her conversion from a simple housewife in Greece to a being of energy.

These stories become old after a while, and those within the Skull's Army slowly lose interest in speaking with each other whether they are being controlled by the Skull or not.



SGT. CAGE THE SHERIFF OF NEW YORK

Luke Cage has been many things to many people.

Criminal. Convict. Hero for Hire.

But in a mutated world, his own abilities and experience with the super-powered populace put him on the other side of the law. Now he is the chief of the N.Y.P.D. Now, it is Cage who decides who is guilty and who is innocent.

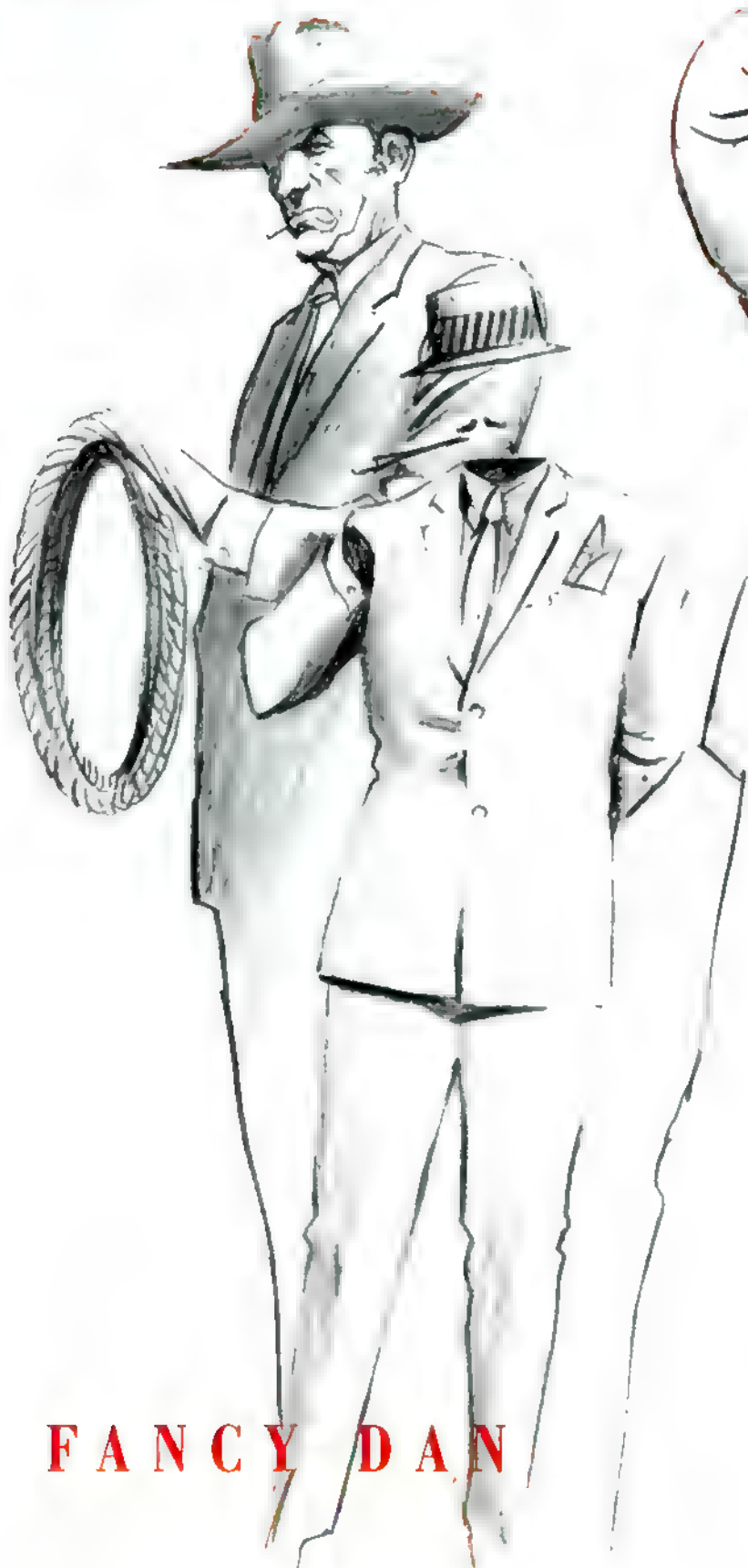
And, more than ever before, he must live up to the power that has made him the man he is.
He is the lone sheriff of New York.

THE JADE DRAGON



THE ENFORCERS

MONTANA



FANCY DAN



THE OX

VULTURE



Norman Osborn made many enemies before he took the office of President of the United States. He knew that these enemies, if not dealt with, would constantly distract him from the power he now had in his control. So Enforcers were needed to systematically hunt down and exterminate all those whose potential might threaten the office he fought so hard to steal.

The Kingpin was the first to fall.



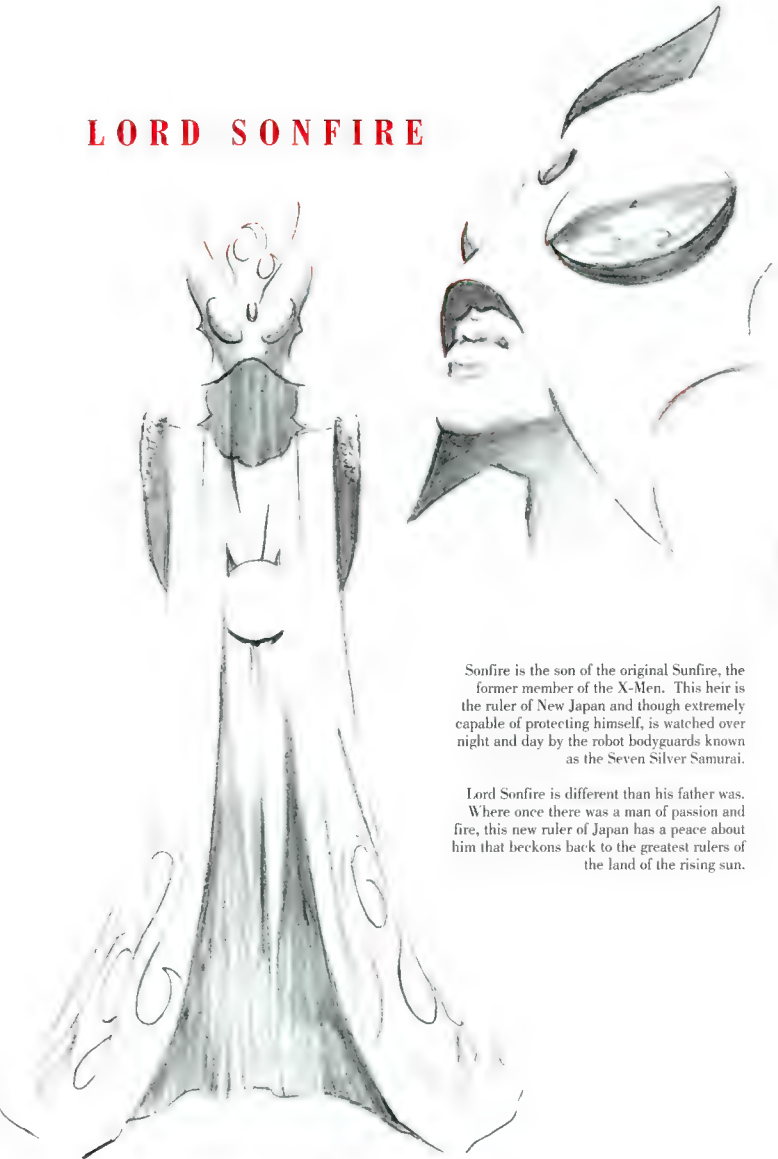
GOBLIN

He is the **Goblin King of America**. The plague has changed him by making him the very thing he always masked himself to be. America, not that it exists anymore in any recognizable capacity, is run by big business. And while sightings of the Goblin are rare, everyone knows deep down that he is in control. He is the grand manipulator. A spider in his own right whose web stretches from coast to coast. Even industrialist Tony Stark is caught up in the dealings of Norman Osborne.

Long before the world changed... many believed the true colors of America were not red, white and blue, but the color of money. And perhaps, as this is certainly the case with the Green Goblin, Plague X merely brought out what was there all the time.

AMERICA

LORD SONFIRE

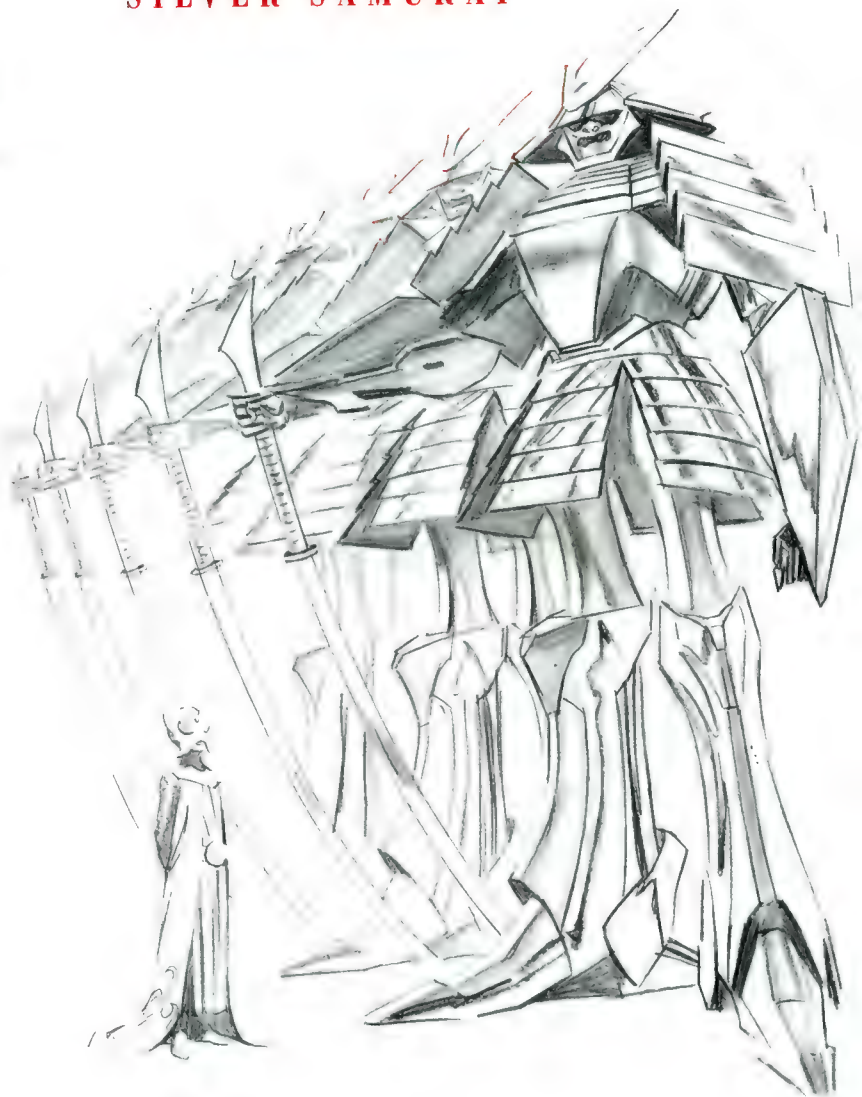


Sonfire is the son of the original Sunfire, the former member of the X-Men. This heir is the ruler of New Japan and though extremely capable of protecting himself, is watched over night and day by the robot bodyguards known as the Seven Silver Samurai.

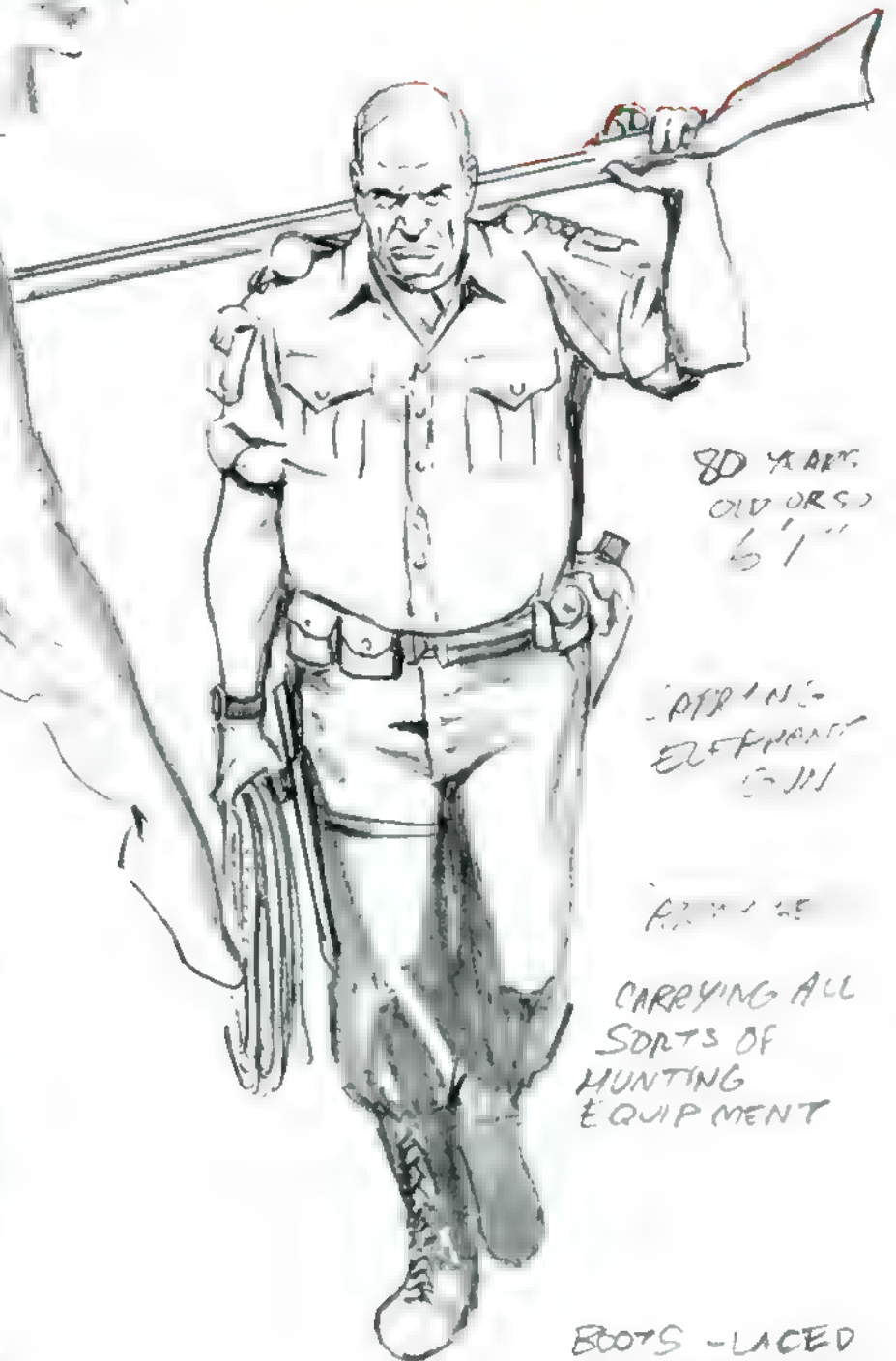
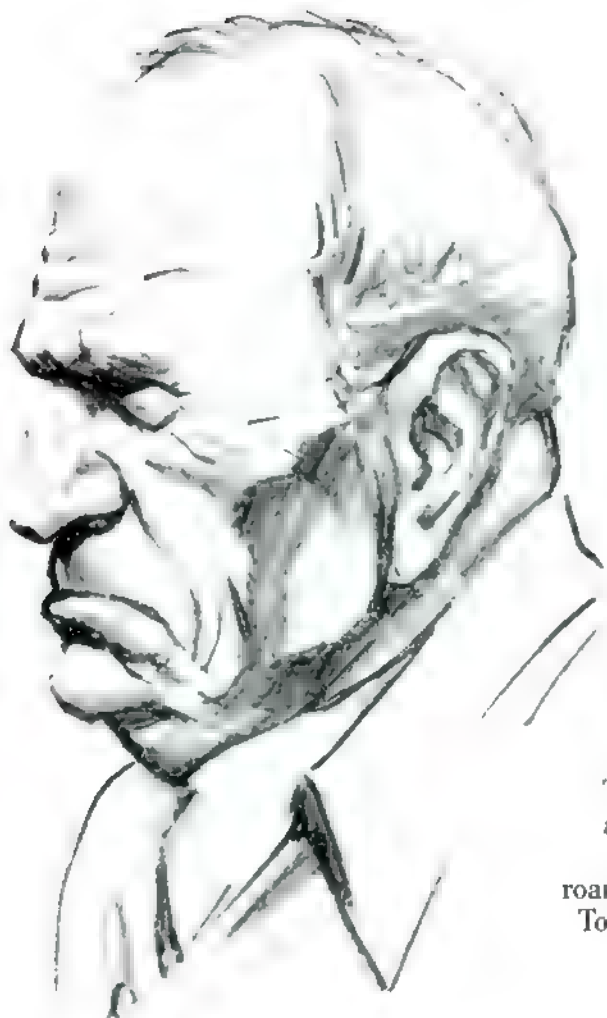
Lord Sonfire is different than his father was. Where once there was a man of passion and fire, this new ruler of Japan has a peace about him that beckons back to the greatest rulers of the land of the rising sun.

JAPAN

THE SEVEN SILVER SAMURAI



THE COSSACK & TORA



80 YEARS
OLD OR SO
6'1"

SPRING-
ELECTRIC
GUN

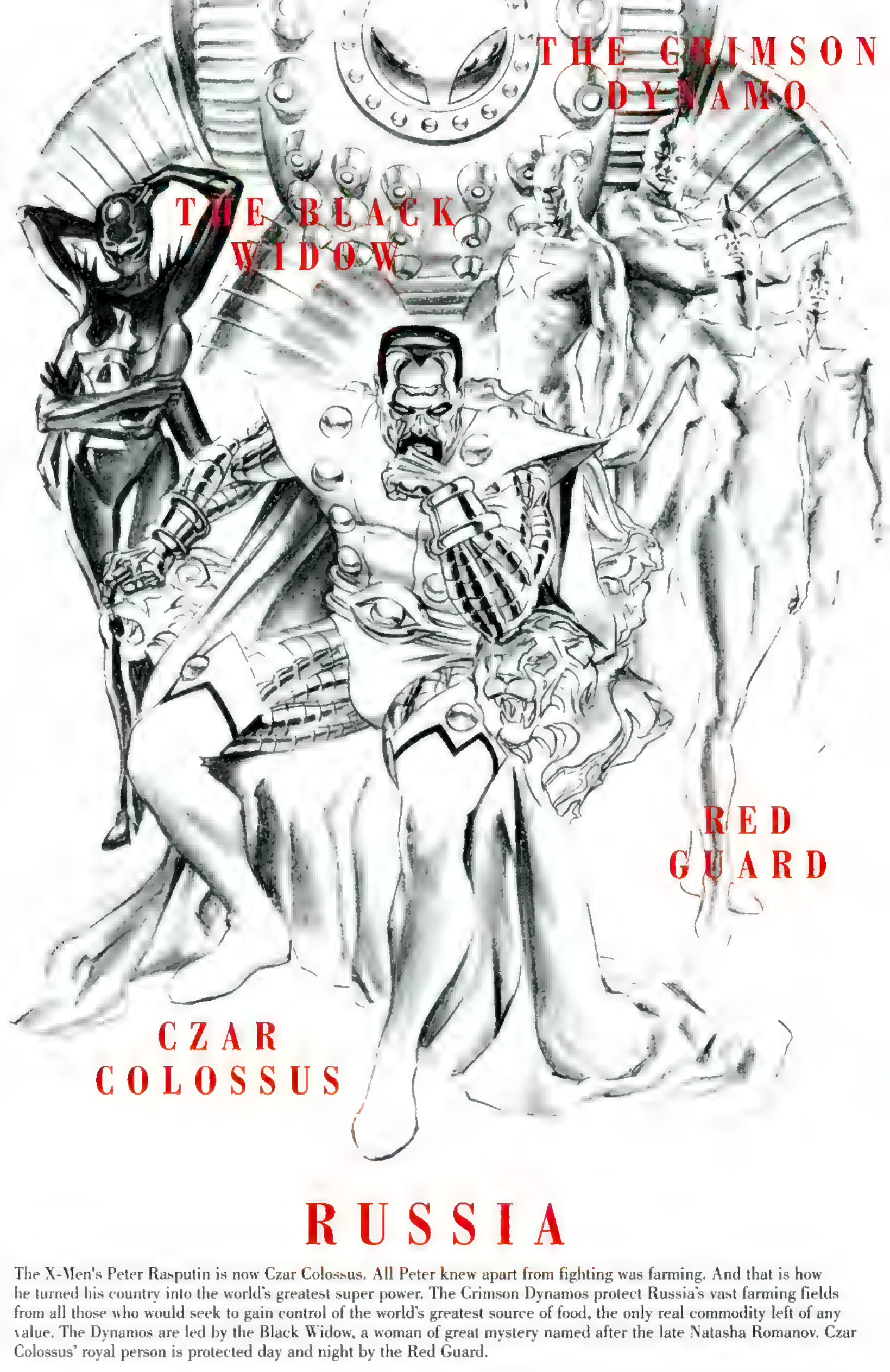
ARMY

CARRYING ALL
SORTS OF
HUNTING
EQUIPMENT

BOOTS - LACED
UP ARMY BOOTS

The Cossack, though not Russian in his formal nationality, is a monster hunter who made him home in Siberia. Famed for hunting down and stuffing the creatures and monsters that roamed the Earth in the 50s, he became a fast friend and ally of Tora, whose own flaming power was triggered the first time she came in contact with the original Human Torch.

Tora was once considered a monster herself.



THE CRIMSON
DYNAMO

THE BLACK
WIDOW

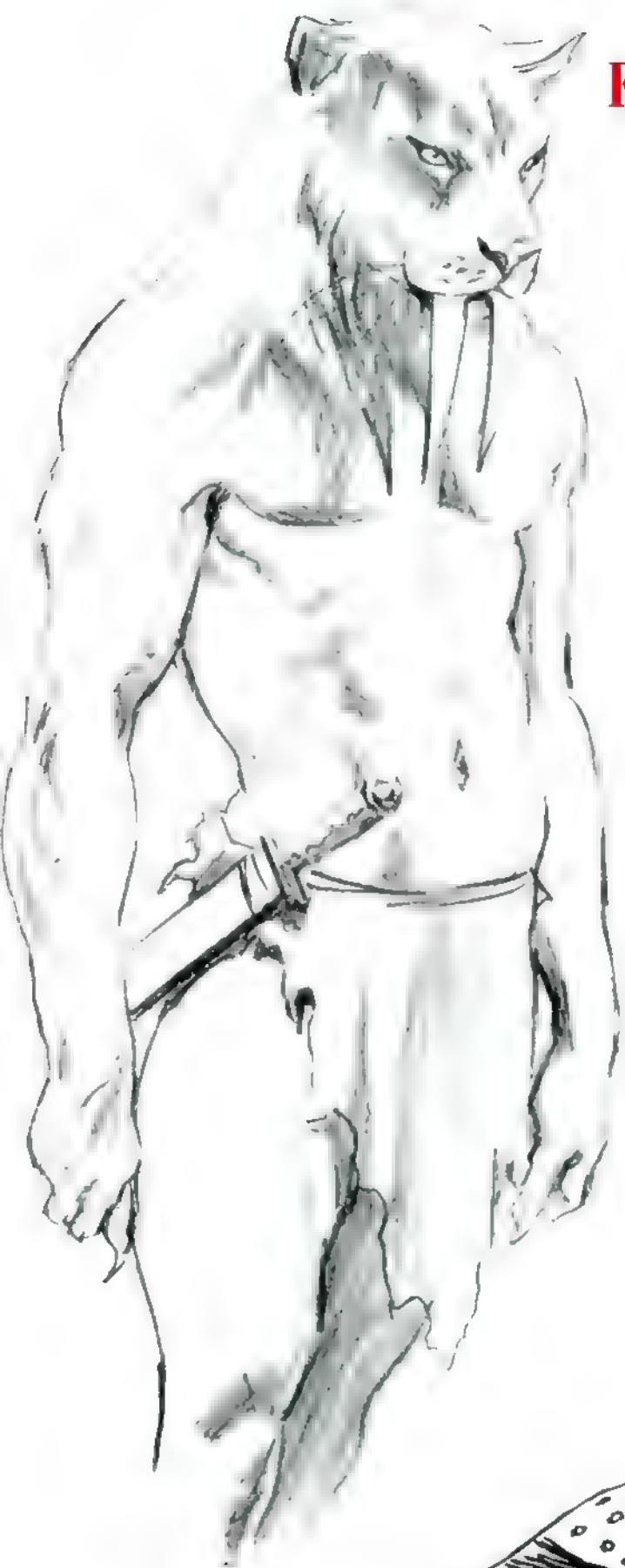
RED
GUARD

CZAR
COLOSSUS

RUSSIA

The X-Men's Peter Rasputin is now Czar Colossus. All Peter knew apart from fighting was farming. And that is how he turned his country into the world's greatest super power. The Crimson Dynamos protect Russia's vast farming fields from all those who would seek to gain control of the world's greatest source of food, the only real commodity left of any value. The Dynamos are led by the Black Widow, a woman of great mystery named after the late Natasha Romanov. Czar Colossus' royal person is protected day and night by the Red Guard.

K A - Z A R



**S H A N N A
T H E S H E - D E V I L**

T H E S A V A G E L A N D

Lord Kevin Plunder and his wife Shanna O'Hara were not untouched by the effects of Plague X. Perhaps their transformation has only made right that which should have been remedied long ago. For who but savages could dare rule in the land where dinosaurs still walk the Earth?

THE ANI-MEN

THE BEAST



KING PANTHER

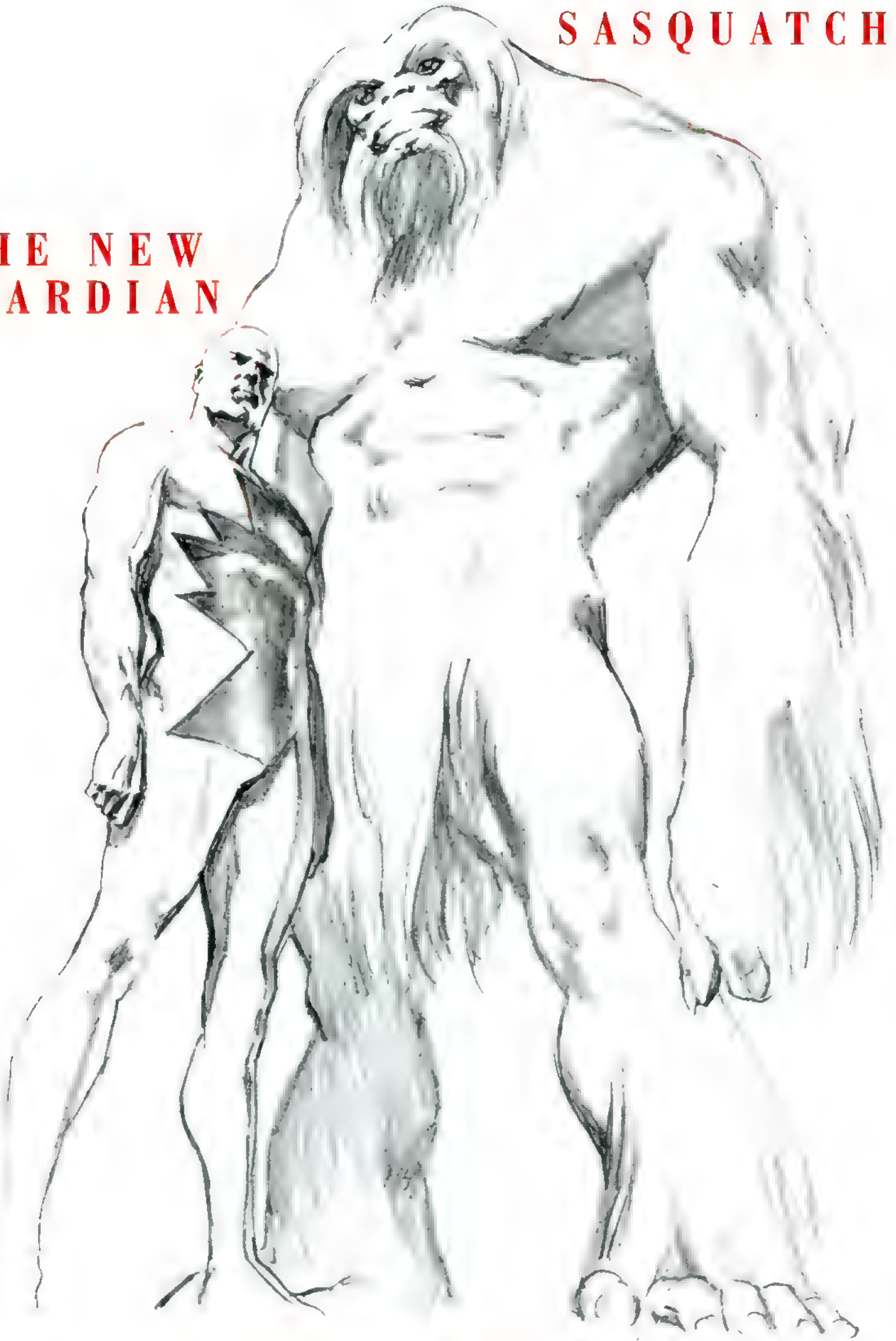
QUEEN STORM

AFRICA

In a world where meat and animal life has become scarce, Wakanda has become the sole sanctuary of the world's wildlife, under the monarchy of King Panther and Queen Storm. Reed Richards' friend and ally Hank McCoy, the Beast, now resides in Wakanda, seeking a cure for the world's mutations by studying her richest known deposit of vibranium. But his work has met with great interference. For plague affected all life on Earth. And now, the spirits T'Challa always believed to have lived within the great beasts of the plains have finally been given voice in the form of the Ani-Men.

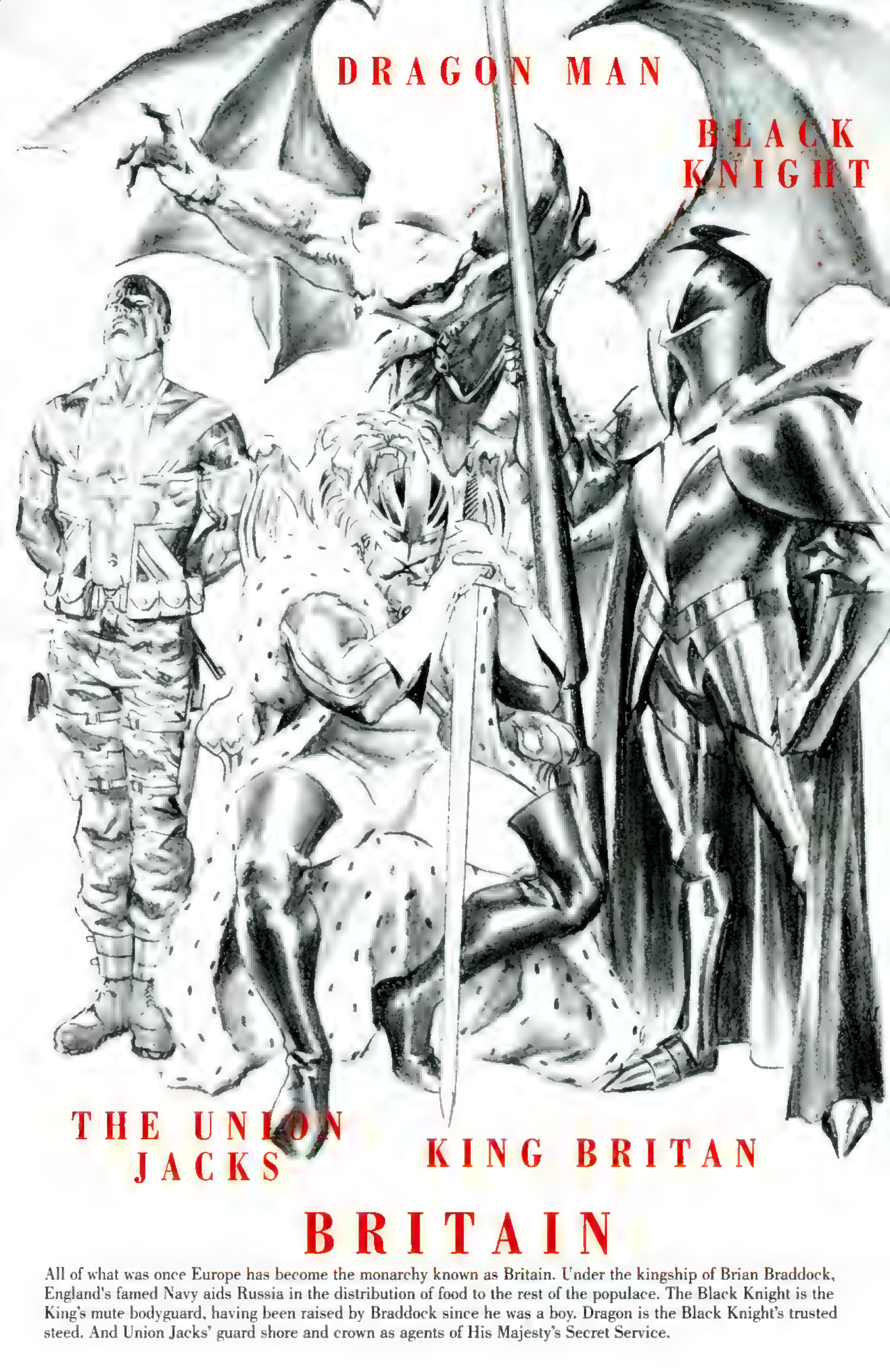
SASQUATCH

THE NEW GUARDIAN



CANADA

The Northern parts of North America have become a savage land in their own right. The once proud cities of Canada have all but been swallowed by the encroaching wilderness and forests. Beasts prowl these lands now. And a magic that has not been practiced for years except in the most primitive of areas of Canada has resurfaced. Only former members of Alpha Flight dare attempt to try to hold onto the civilization that is dying here.



DRAGON MAN

**BLACK
KNIGHT**

**THE UNION
JACKS**

KING BRITAN

BRITAIN

All of what was once Europe has become the monarchy known as Britain. Under the kingship of Brian Braddock, England's famed Navy aids Russia in the distribution of food to the rest of the populace. The Black Knight is the King's mute bodyguard, having been raised by Braddock since he was a boy. Dragon is the Black Knight's trusted steed. And Union Jacks' guard shore and crown as agents of His Majesty's Secret Service.

THE INHUMANS



Throughout the history of the Inhuman Nation, the desire to live amongst humanity, to be free of the Hidden Land and the stringent old ruling council's oppression, had been a constant. So at last, there came a day when the Inhuman nation's desire grew too strong to contain... and they dispersed and spread throughout the world. The royal family then left for the stars... convinced that the Inhuman society could no longer exist as a people. For there could be no royalty without subjects to rule.

But now, after almost 20 years amongst the stars, the royal family has returned. Though each has become more and more mutated in their own ways, nothing could have prepared them for the mutations that await them on Earth.

KARNAK

Karnak's ability to find the flaw in everything makes him the single most unlikable member of the Royal Family. He suspects wrong in all with the exception of Black Bolt, who is becoming more and more logical and mechanical in his decisions. Of course, it is this trust in logic that is Karnak's flaw. For the heart cannot be confined by the intellect. Nor can the mind operate without a heart.

THE SHORTEST IN HUMAN,
KARNAK COMES IN AT 5'5"

PULSATING VEINS
SEEN IN SIDE OF HEAD

VERY SKELETAL
BUT SERENE,
KARNAK IS ALL
ABOUT
ENHANCEMENT
OF THE MIND.

RIBBON AROUND HEAD
WITH FRAYS AT ENDS
ENDS ON LEFT SIDE

HIS METAL NECK
RECEIVES
SPECIFICALLY
DESIGNED TO HOLD UP
HIS HEAD.

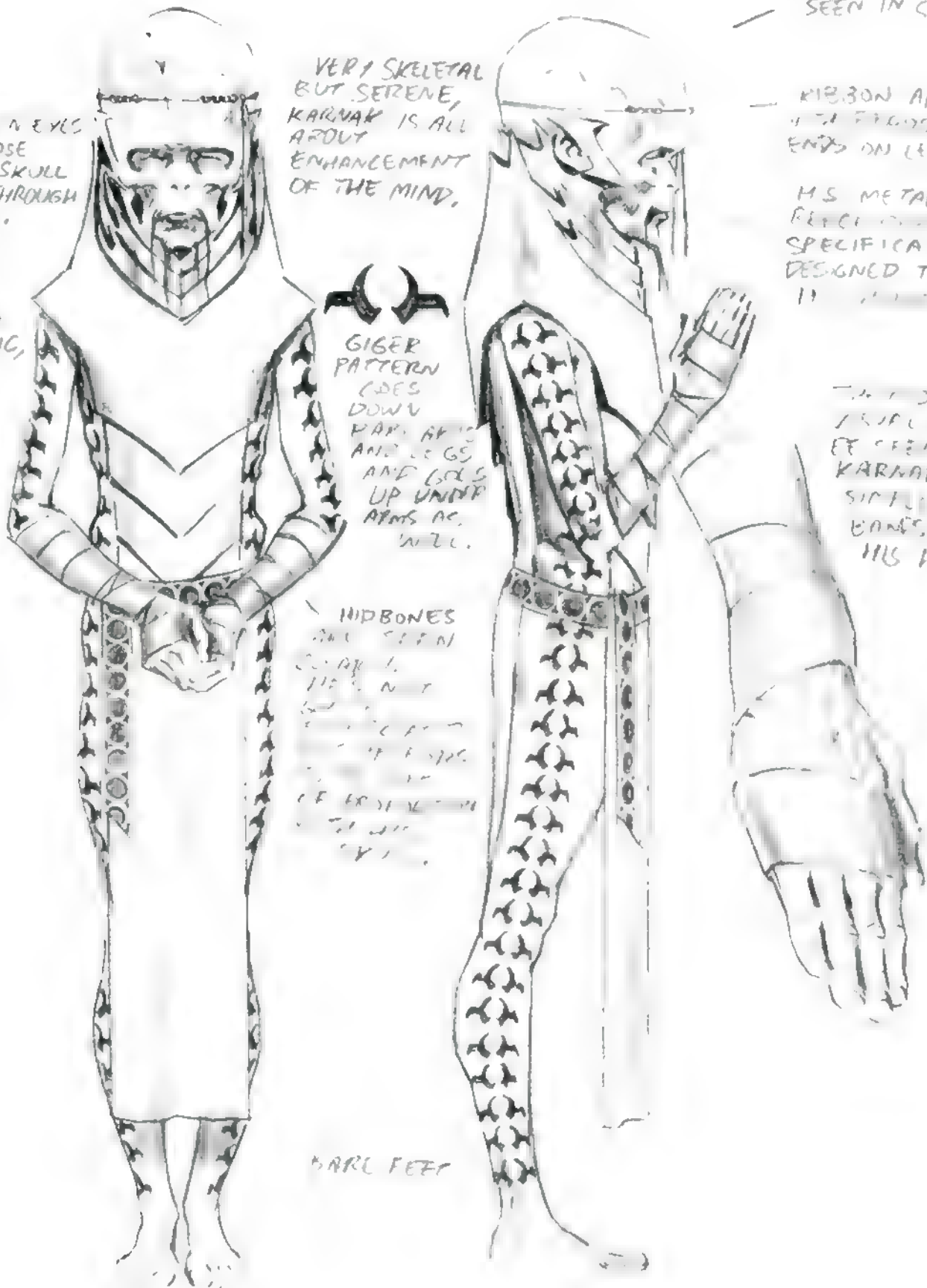
KN EYES
AND NOSE
DEFINE SKULL
COMING THROUGH
MORE.

THE MOST NOTABLE
FEATURE TO A KARNAK
IS THE WAY
KARNAK'S HANDS
SIMILAR KUNG FU
BANDS AROUND
HIS HANDS.

GIGER
PATTERN
GOES
DOWN
KARNAK'S
AND LEGS
AND GOES
UP UNDER
ARMS AC.
WALL.

HIDBONES
ARE SEEN
THROUGH
HIS TUNIC
BUT NOT
HIS ARMS
BUT HIS
HIS HANDS
HIS HANDS
HIS HANDS

BARE FEET





ABOUT 5'8" IN HUNCH 2 OVER POSTURE, PROBABLY CLOSE TO 10' IF STRETCHED OUT WITH TAIL.

FEARSOME AS HIS LOOK IS, TRITON HAS A LOT OF HUMANITY ABOUT HIM. HIS EYES RELATE A GOOD DEAL OF PATHOS, A REAL SYMPATHETIC AND IMAFINE CHARACTR AT HEART.

CALM EXPRESSION MOSTLY, NO OUTRAGEOUS FANGS BUT SHARP TEETH ALL OVER.

FOREARMS ARE LONGER THAN NORM, BODY HAS A FINE LAYER OF SCALES AND WOULD ALWAYS LOOK SHINY WET FROM WATER PIPING.

TAIL EXTENDS OUT AT LEAST 6 FEET BEHIND HIM. FIN ON TAIL LOOKS LIKE A 5-PRONGED TRIDENT.

METAL PIPING GOING UP AND DOWN BODY IS SHAPED LIKE A CENTIPEDE, SPREADING WATER ACROSS HIS WHOLE SYSTEM SO HE CAN SURVIVE OUT OF IT.

SLIDES ACROSS GROUND LIKE A SNAKE BUT IS REALLY A BIG FISH.

TRITON

Triton's further mutation has disabled his mobility on land. So his return to Earth has meant a return to the oceans which were once his home. He is about to discover how unforgiving the sea has become.

GORGON

More at home on all fours than in the presence of men, the party animal of the Royal Family is now more animal than anything else. Comparisons to the deceased Lockjaw by Karnak send Gorgon into stomping fits of rage that often end in utter destruction. Only Medusa's compassion is capable of reaching the rational man trapped within a beast.

THE LARGEST INHUMAN (WITH THE EXCEPTION OF TRITON'S LONG TAIL), GORGON IS ABOUT 7'5" AT FULL EXTENDED HEIGHT BUT IS HUNCHED OVER OR CROUCHED DOWN MOST OF THE TIME TO PUT HIM AROUND BLACK BOLT'S LEVEL - 6'2"



BRILE FEET AND ARMS

SPAC 21
1/1/1988
1/1/1988



LIGHT GRAY

GLASS ONLY IN
FRONT

LUNA

BEFORE TRANSFORMATION

ABOUT 5'3"
REDDISH-BLOND
HAIR AND
GREEN EYES

HAVE A
VIRGINAL
PRESENCE IN
WHITE SHE
CARRIES A
SILVER
SWORD TO
THE DARK
FIGURE OF
BLACK BOLT
AND THE
COMPLICATED
GIGER-STYLE
OF DESIGN
THE OTHER
INHUMANS
WEAR.

WEARING
A SKIN-CONFORMING
DRESS OF SILVER
(NOT CHROME) WITH
SKIN EXPOSED IN
SCANTY FASHION,
THE BODY SHOWS
LITTLE SEPARATION
FROM THE MATERIAL
MUCH LIKE AS IF IT
WAS BODY PAINT.

... AN EGYPTIAN ...
... THE MAKEUP SHE
HAS A VERY PIXIE-ISH,
LAERIE BERTINELLI KIND
OF FACE.

LUNA LOOKS ABOUT
14-17 YEARS
AGE BUT IS ACTUALLY
MORE INTO HER 30'S.
THIS IS DUE TO THE
SILVER AGING
THAT ACCOMPANIES
LONG TERM
SPACE TRAVEL.

SILVER SYMBOL
ON CHEST
(VAGUELY SEXUAL)

LUNA'S FUTURE
EXPERIENCE OF
BEING SLOWLY
CHANGED BY THE
TERRIGEN MISTS
ON EARTH WILL
BE A SLOW
PROCESS BY
WHICH SHE WILL
MUTATE IN THE
MOST UNPLEASANT
WAY POSSIBLE. AS A
STONY EXTERIOR BUILDS
UP ALL OVER HER IT
PAVES THE WAY FOR HER
TRUE TRANSFORMATION
TO HATCH LIKE A
BUTTERFLY FROM A
COCON SHELL.

The daughter of Crystal and Quicksilver has now returned to Earth with the rest of the royal family. alone among the royal family is human, and was never affected by the traditions of the Inhuman nation. Luna, after having been prepared for this moment all her life, is looking forward to her wedding with the son of Black Bolt and Medusa.

This expected union, it is hoped, will be the event that reunifies the Inhuman people and reestablishes their kingdom.

MEDUSA

Black Bolt's wife has not felt loved for a very long time, yet she loves her husband and would never betray the memory of their earlier years together. But he is a stranger now and sometimes, she is afraid to be near him.

Her attentions have turned to Luna, who would marry her son. This marriage between the two holds a promise of renewal for Medusa and an escape from a past that haunts her to this day.

HAIR ALMOST ALWAYS
GOES OUT OF THE COMPOSITION.

HAIRLINE STARTS
AT BROW LEVEL!
REMEMBER HAIR IS COMING
OFF EYELASHES, EYEBROWS
AND UNDER CHEEKBONES
EQUALLY INTO THE HUGE MASS.

HIGH CHEEKBONES
LIGHT COLORED EYES

LARGE HOODED EYES
WITH SOMEWHAT A LOOK OF
'DISDAIN BUT ALSO SAD.

HIGH ANGLED NOSTRILS
BUT NOT AN OVERSIZED
NOSE.

HUGE FULL LIPS AND A
STRONG JAWLINE.
CHIN ALWAYS HELD HIGH
BUT SHE IS A SOMBER
FIGURE.

LOOSE STRANDS
OF HAIR
FLAIL ABOUT
FROM TEMPLES.

DIAMOND
BARE CLEAVAGE
AND STOMACH

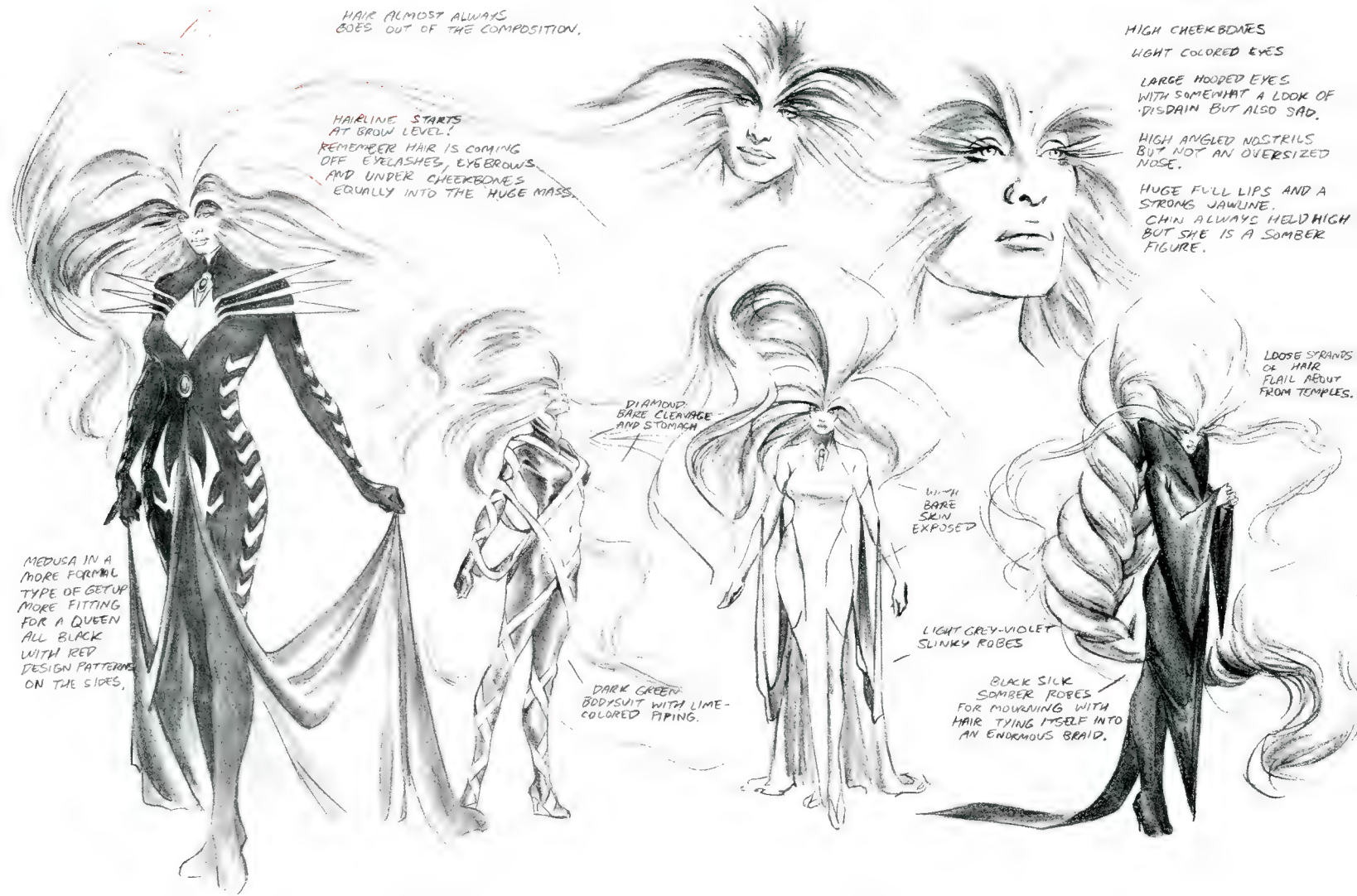
WITH
BARE
SKIN
EXPOSED

LIGHT GREY-VIOLET
SLINKY ROBES

DARK GREEN
BODYSUIT WITH LIME-
COLORED PIPING.

BLACK SILK
SOMBER ROBES
FOR MOURNING WITH
HAIR TYING ITSELF INTO
AN ENORMOUS BRAID.

MEDUSA IN A
MORE FORMAL
TYPE OF GETUP
MORE FITTING
FOR A QUEEN
ALL BLACK
WITH RED
DESIGN PATTERNS
ON THE SIDES.



BLACK BOLT

THE SILENT KING

LIKE A COMBINATION OF THE FILM BATMAN'S GLOSSY BLACK COSTUME AND H.R. GIGER'S ALIEN, THIS BLACK BOLT IS A HIGH GLOSS BLACK ALL OVER WITH SILVER PIPING ON HIS MOUTHPLATE, TUNING FORK HEADPIECE, LIGHTNING BOLT PIPING ON THE CHEST AND TRUNKS, GLOVE CUFFS AND WINGS.

BLACK BOLTS FACEPLATE W/NO FEATURES VISIBLE

THE MOUTHPLATE IMITATES A ZIPPER TO CLOSE THE MOST DANGEROUS MOUTH ON EARTH.

BLACK TUBING VISIBLE ON NECK AND TEMPLES.

← WHILE THIS IS MORE CLASSIC AND CALM FOR THE CHARACTER WE MIGHT WANT A MORE CHAOTIC FEEL FOR HIS UNDERARM WINGS.

NORMALLY HE ONLY BEARS THE SMALL UNDERARM WINGS AND THE LARGER WINGBLADES CAN GROW OUT OF HIS BACK IN MORE DRAMATIC MOMENTS.

UNLIKE MY CONTEMPT FOR MOST UNREALISTICALLY SKIN-TIGHT COSTUMES BLACK BOLTS CLOTHES ARE FROM A MORE ALIEN CULTURE AND IS INTENDED TO REFLECT A GREATER SYNTHESIS OF MAN AND METAL WITH FULL MUSCULATURE BECOME VISIBLE IN SPOTS. THE GLOVES REMAIN A MORE LEATHER-LIKE, HUMAN BEING-WEARIN ELEMENT.

FOREHEAD TUNING FORK

SLOPED NECK MUCH LIKE BATMAN

HIS WINGS ARE METAL EXCURSIONS OF HIS EVOLVED BIOMECHANICAL NATURE. ABLE TO PROTRUDE LIKE SHARDS IN A VENECIAN BLIND-LIKE MANNER, THEY CAN EXPAND TO ENORMOUS PROPORTIONS MUCH LIKE SPANNS CAPE BUT SIMILAR IN FORMATION TO GLOSSAMER WINGS.

THESE CAN ACT LIKE SOLAR SAILS WHEN THEY ARE SHOWN AT THEIR FULL EXTENSION AT THE TIME AND PLACE OF OUR MOON BATTLE.

THE EXACT SHAPE CAN REACT IN AN EMOTIONAL MANNER ACCORDING TO THE ARTISTIC WHIM OF THE MOMENT.



Black Bolt's appearance is not all that has changed. There is now something cold and dark within him. Now, to those who know him best, he seems a stranger. Even Medusa, his wife and queen, is startled by his blatant inhumanity.



FRANKLIN RICHARDS GALACTUS



The son of Reed and Susan Richards is no more. Franklin does not exist. Nor, for the good of the entire universe, can he. There must be a balance to Celestial procreation. Should Reed ever speak to Galactus, should he ever remind him of who he is or call him "son", Franklin would cease to be Galactus. And mankind's every achievement and hope would be lost forever before the power of the Celestials.

THE SILVER SURFERS



Earth X is not the only place of startling transformation. Some incomprehensible change in the role of Galactus has altered the lives of those once subjugated to the will of the world-devourer.

For Galactus, feared the worlds over, has brought Norrin a gift far greater than the energy of the cosmos. Galactus, whose name has become synonymous with genocide, has brought love to Norrin Radd. He has reunited the lone Silver Surfer with Shalla-Bal, who had been denied him when he sacrificed his life to save his world.

Now and forevermore, Norrin and Shalla-Bal are the Silver Surfers, devoted to soaring the endless spaceways together in search of planets for their master to consume.

THE MARVEL UNIVERSE



Not even death could stop Mar-vell. He certainly wasn't the first hero to fall. But he was the first to escape its finality. The first to find that from the inside, death's door splintered at his touch.

He now finds himself coming back into focus in the dreams and nightmares of those he once called allies. He has visited Richards and Stark and even the child Banner in their strange unconscious imaginations. He has told them of his return.

But how could this be happening? Why should he be allowed to come back? He wasn't anything special, anything pure or noble. He was just a man who died before the world changed. Is it possible that Plague X is now affecting the dead as well as the living?





EARTH X WIZARD SKETCHBOOK



EARTH X SKETCHBOOK



MURAL LEGEND

The art for this mural was produced by combining the fourteen covers painted by Alex Ross. Though conceived by Ross prior to painting, each cover image was painted individually with only a color copy of the prior month's art to work from. High-resolution, drum scans were created from each cover which were then digitally composed by Kevin Horn who preformed all of the necessary alignment and color corrections on this extremely large, unmanageable file.

The following is a breakdown of the characters pictured on each of the cover segments. The overall image shows the Celestial embryo encased in the Earth.

- #0..... The face of Uatu: The Watcher and the hand of the original Human Torch.
- #1..... Cap, Daredevil, Redwing and Hydra.
- #2..... Dr. Richards, Ben Grimm and The Brothers Grimm.
- #3..... The Skull, the Skull Symbol, and Namor the Cursed.
- #4..... Spiders Man, Iron Maiden, King Panther and Queen Storm.
- #5..... Thor: the Goddess of Thunder and Hank, Pietro, Jan, Wanda, Vision and Clint from the Iron Avengers.
- #6..... Tower, Mr. S (Scott Summers), Dogface, Charmer, Double Header and Mermaid from the X-Men.
- #7..... Hulk & Banner, Sorceress Supreme and Loki.
- #8..... Venom, Spidey and the Goblin King.
- #9..... Black Bolt, Medusa, Gorgon, Luna, Triton and Karnak of the Inhumans.
- #10.... X-51: Machine Man, Man-Wolf: John Jameson, Nezarr the Calculator, Ziran the Tester, Oneg the Prober and Eson the Searcher of the Celestials.
- #11.... The Marvels, the eyes of Alicia Masters Grimm and Gammenon the Gatherer and Arishem the Judge of the Celestials.
- #12.... Stark, The Silver Surfers, The Eye of Galactus and Jemiah the Analyzer and One Above All of the Celestials.
- #X..... The Marvel Universe.





EARTH X: X VARIANT





E A R T H

Just prior to *Earth X #0*, I was asked to do a prelude to Earth X with the purpose of not only retelling Machine Man's origin, but covering his life up until the moment the zero issue begins. The art was done by Casey Jones for the first three chapters and Doug Gregory for the last. At the time, these prelude stories were intended for promotional purposes.

The first time Alex and I met, at a time when I was just promoting Marvels, we talked about how much we both loved Machine Man. I think our first thought for a narrator for Earth X was Medusa. But when we decided to focus on Machine Man and the idea of the Earth as a Celestial egg became the central mystery, a lot began to come together on the series.

These pages served as a bridge to move people from the current Marvel Universe to the door into Earth X, the last panel of this story, and first panel of Earth X #0.

--Jim Krueger

Editor's Note: The lettering proofs that follow were the only materials available for presenting this story.

~~EX~~ - THIS IS FOR YOUR INFO... IT'S THE

X-51 ORIGIN

(PART 1)
PLOT

EARTH X

THE ORIGIN OF X-51

PART ONE:

SCREEN ONE:

1/1 Zoom in on the skeleton of X-51. This skeleton is being suspended vertically. NOTE: This is the same skeleton that we see within X-51 after he's been transformed on Earth X. But this is far from the future described in Earth X. This is the moment of origin. The point in which X-51 was first being built. The place is a laboratory of sorts. Very cool. Very seventies Sterenko!

ANIMATE: Skeleton turning completely around.

1/2 We see a bearded Doctor (Abel Stack), his creator, holding what would be the eyes. They are strange red-binocular-based contraptions. STACK is not happy with them. They don't look like human eyes at all. STACK refers to this skeleton as "son"

1/3 A military aid mentions something about the eyes not being necessary for the illusion—that the ultraviolet and infrared lenses were more important.

1/4 Stack turns away, frustrated, he lifts a mask off a table. This will be X-51's face as we see on the next page.

SCREEN TWO:

2/1 STACK holds this face before his own. We see Stack's eyes peer out from behind this soulless mask. Stack muses that the eyes don't matter as much as the face. It's all about the face

SCREEN THREE:

3/1 Later... somewhere in the military complex that houses the X-series of robots, Dr. Stack walks down a hallway with Dr. Broadhurst. Dr. Broadhurst is a bald man with glasses and a mustache. They are speaking of the X-series robots.

3/2 Stack is upset by what Broadhurst's revelation that the entire operation was funded by the military.

3/3 "But why would the military be interested in funding the creation of artificial life?" asks Stack. Stack never agreed to a military operation. What do "they" care of life. They are the purveyors of death.

3/4 Broadhurst punches a code on the wall... and the entire wall slides up. The sight that greets Stack is shocking.

ANIMATE: DOOR SLIDING OPEN

SCREEN FOUR:

4/1 There before Stack in a training room are dozens of X-series robots fighting and lunging with guns and knives against dummies and the like. There are robot appendages all over the place. Guns blazing all over the place. Total action spread.

SCREEN FIVE:

5/1 With all of this action behind him, Stack turns to Broadhurst in rage. "Weapons? We're making weapons?"

5/2 One of the X-series robots behind them (X-43) screams against the window.

5/3 Broadhurst tries to explain. His voice is drowned by Stack saying "These are live beings...capable of thought... able to feel fear... love..."

5/4 "... betrayal." X-43 is blown to bits behind them.

5/5 Broadhurst: "Not according to inventory. They are nuts and bolts and rivets and sheet metal."

SCREEN SIX

6/1 Broadhurst produces for Stack a device with a series of switches on it. Stack, of course, responds with questions of it's origin.

6/2 Broadhurst exclaims that's it's a trigger for the self destruct mechanisms inside each of the X-series robots within the training room.

6/3 Stack watches in horror as all the robots within the room are blown to bits.

SCREEN SEVEN:

7/1 Broadhurst puts his hand on Stacks shoulder as the two of them enter the training room. All is quiet and smokey with pieces of robots all over the place. Broadhurst says something cold and unfeeling. "We're scientists here, Stack. So a couple of X-series robots are destroyed. It will mean more funding. More experimentation. More. ."

7/2 Stack holds up one of the name plates from the four-heads of the robots. X-15
Broadhurst exclaims "They're just numbers"

7/3 Stack looks at him. "You even sound like military, Dr. Broadhurst."

7/4-5 Broadhurst explains that he hopes Stack will not cause any trouble. Stack. . totally frustrated... storms off. . saying that X-51 as of this point is under his own supervision. Broadhurst agrees and says he'll work it out.

SCREEN EIGHT

8/1 Cut to Stack in his lab as the gray body pieces of X-51 are formed around the skeleton from PAGE 1. It should be similar to a mold.

ANIMATE: The two pieces fitting around the Skeleton formed of X-51

8/2 Stack looks down at the face. His guilt is getting to him. "What are you looking at?"

8/3 Stack works at his computer as the mold comes apart revealing the gray robotic body suit of X-51. We see the X-51 number tag on its forehead. It is a being. It is his son. And no one here seems to understand that.'

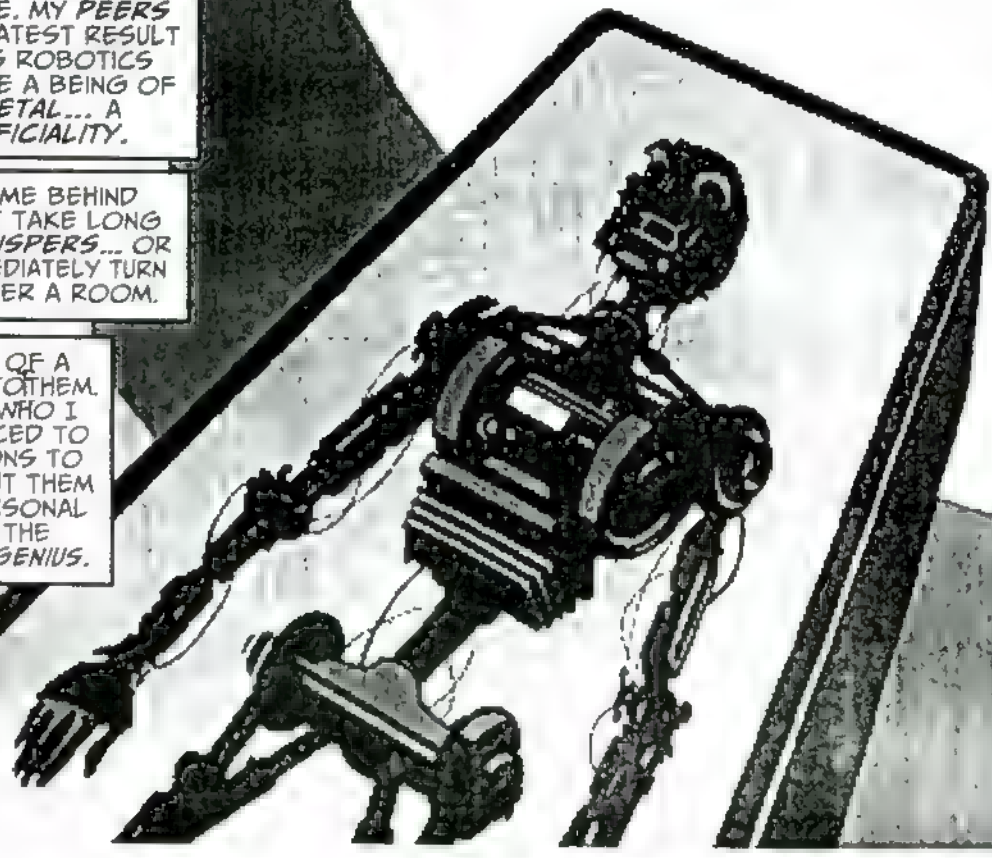
8/4 Stack holds up one of the self destruct devices and wonders what affect it would have on a human being

"I LOOK UPON THE TABLE THAT RISES BEFORE ME. MY PEERS SEE UPON IT THE LATEST RESULT OF THE X-SERIES ROBOTICS DIVISION. THEY SEE A BEING OF RIVETS AND METAL... A THING OF ARTIFICIALITY.

"THEY LAUGH AT ME BEHIND MY BACK. IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG TO NOTICE THE WHISPERS... OR THE EYES THAT IMMEDIATELY TURN AWAY WHEN I ENTER A ROOM.

"I AM SOMEWHAT OF A DISAPPOINTMENT TO THEM. BUT BECAUSE OF WHO I AM, THEY ARE FORCED TO KEEP THEIR OPINIONS TO THEMSELVES AND PUT THEM DOWN IN THEIR PERSONAL ACCOUNTING AS THE ECCENTRICITY OF GENIUS.

"I HOPE TO USE THAT TO MY ADVANTAGE."



"THEY LOOK UPON THE TABLE AND SEE A NUMBER.

"I SEE..."

...MY SON.



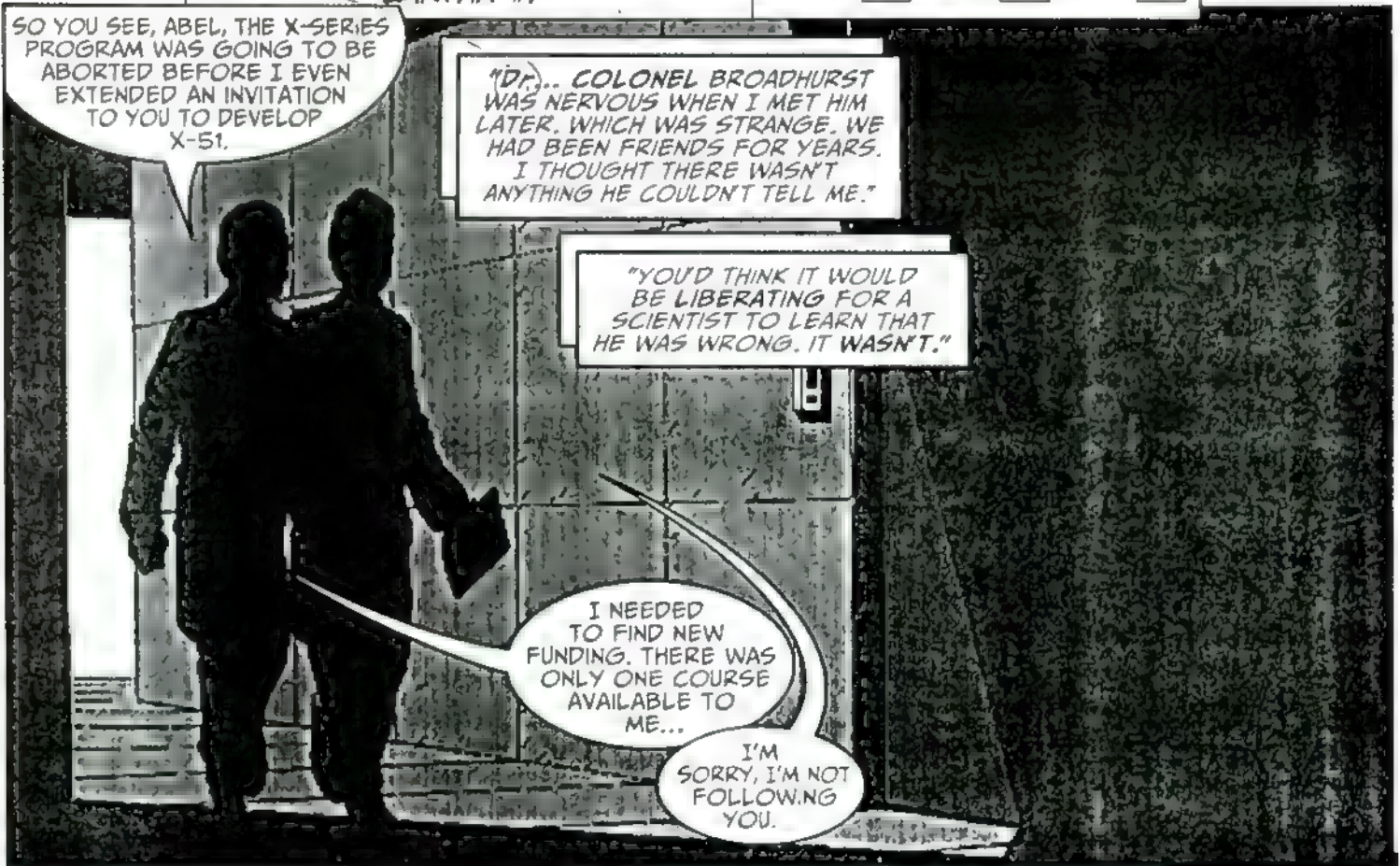
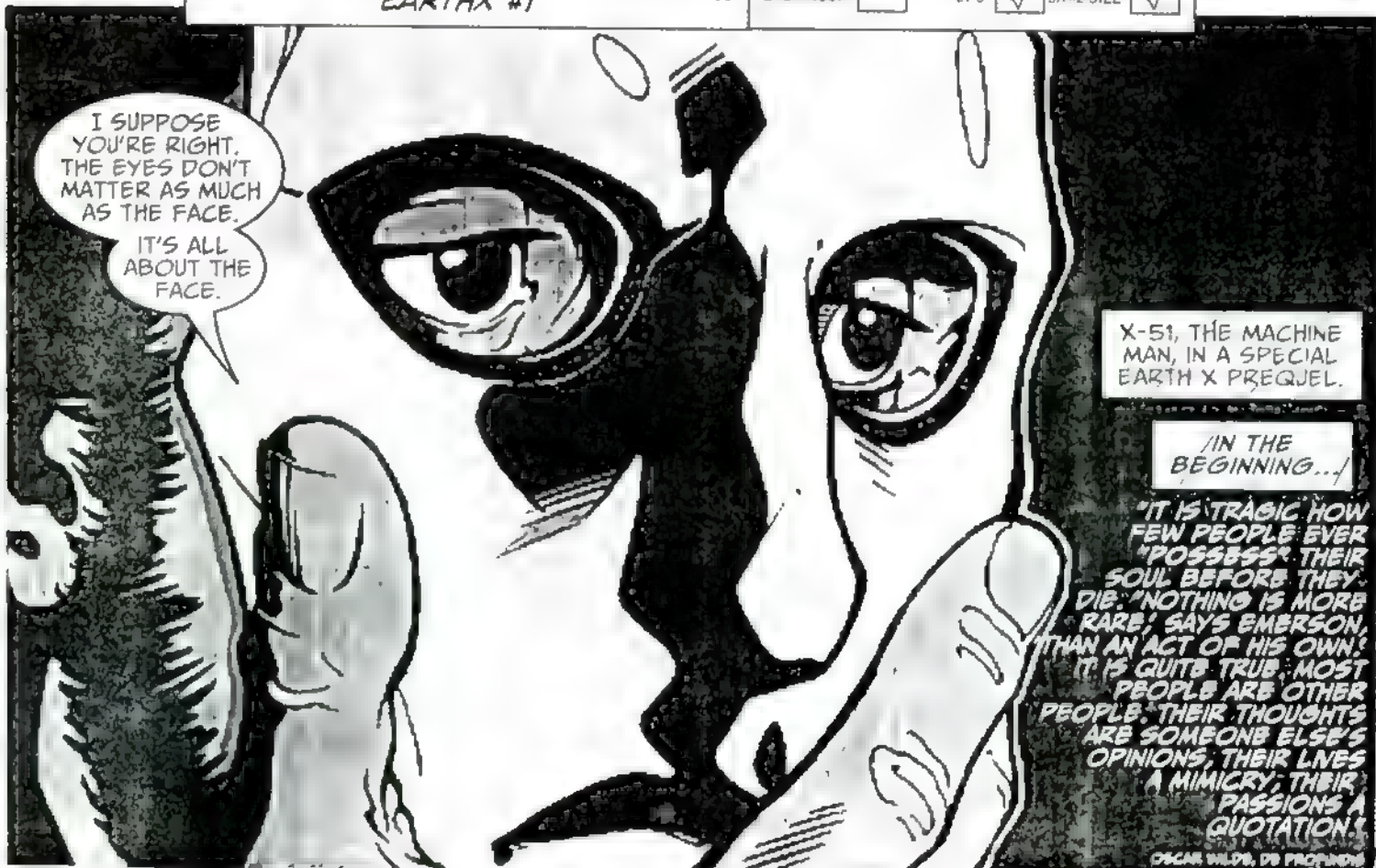
EXCUSE
ME, DR. STACK?
COLONEL BROADHURST
WISHES TO SPEAK
WITH YOU.



IS IT COLONEL,
NOW? WHEN DID THAT
HAPPEN? I REMEMBER
WHEN HE WAS A
DOCTOR... LIKE
MYSELF

IT DOESN'T
MATTER, I SUPPOSE.
THE EYES AREN'T RIGHT.
I'M NOT SURE IF
THEY'LL WORK
AT ALL.





1ST PROOF:	LA	PASTE UP:	-	BLEED	✓
2ND PROOF:		VELLUM:		REGULAR	
3RD PROOF:		EPS:	✓	SAME SIZE:	✓

∞

EARTHX #1

∞

I'M AFRAID
THIS IS GOING TO
BECOME RATHER
DIFFICULT FOR YOU
TO UNDERSTAND. THE
X-SERIES IS NOW... A
MILITARY OPERATION.
VERY HUSH-HUSH.
SPLINTER GROUP,
IN FACT.

WHAT?
BUT WHY
WOULD THE MILITARY
BE INTERESTED IN
FUNDING THE CREATION
OF ARTIFICIAL
LIFE?

I NEVER
AGREED TO
A MILITARY
OPERATION.

1ST PROOF:	LA	PASTE UP:	-	BLEED	✓
2ND PROOF:		VELLUM:		REGULAR	
3RD PROOF:		EPS:	✓	SAME SIZE:	✓

∞

EARTHX #1

∞

WHAT
DO "THEY"
CARE ABOUT
LIFE?

WEAPONS?
WE'RE MAKING
WEAPONS?
BUT THESE
ARE LIVE BEINGS
WE'VE CREATED —
CAPABLE OF THOUGHT —
ABLE TO FEEL
FEAR... LOVE...



1ST PROOF

LA

PASTE UP

-

BLEED

✓

2ND PROOF

VELLUM

REGULAR

3RD PROOF

EPS

✓

SAME SIZE

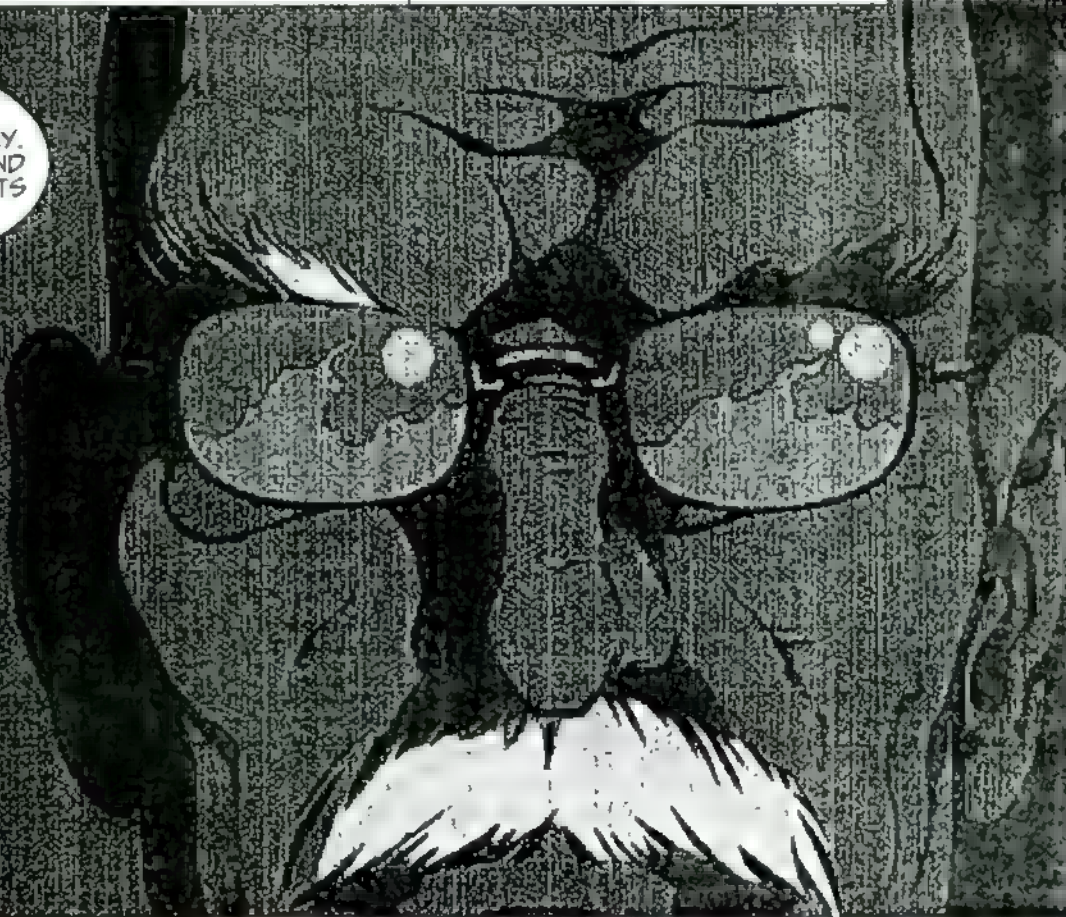
✓

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EARTH #1

00

NOT
ACCORDING
TO THE INVENTORY.
THEY ARE NUTS AND
BOLTS AND RIVETS
AND SHEET
METAL.



1ST PROOF

LA

PASTE UP

-

BLEED

✓

2ND PROOF

VELLUM

REGULAR

3RD PROOF

EPS

✓

SAME SIZE

✓

00

EARTH #1

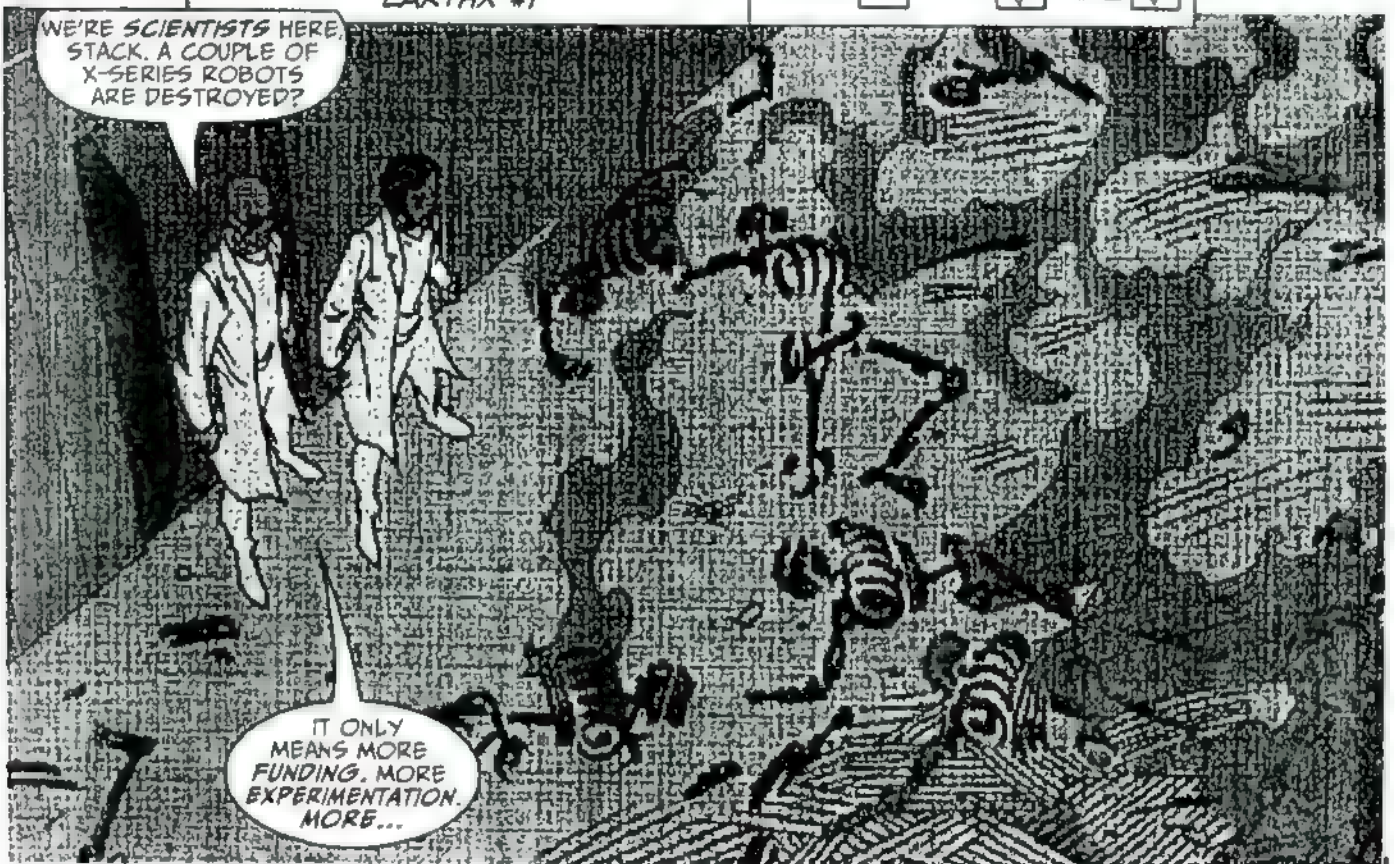
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WHAT'S
THAT?

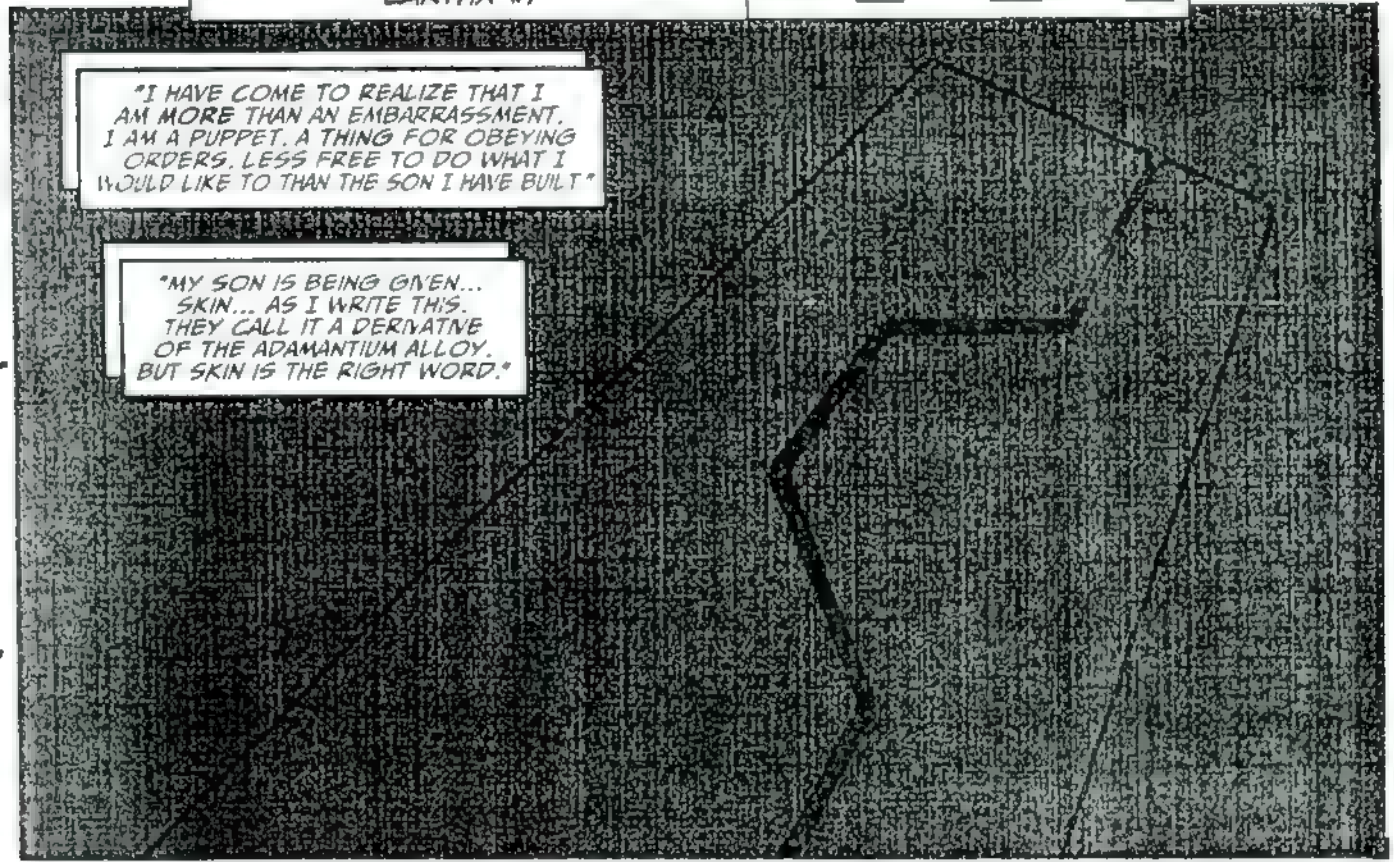
YOU ONLY THINK
THEY'RE ALIVE BECAUSE
SCIENTISTS LIKE YOU AND
I HAVE PUT SO MUCH
TIME AND ENERGY INTO
THEIR ASSEMBLY
THEY'RE NOT,
ABEL

THEY ARE
THE REASON YOU
GET PAID, ABEL, AND
ARE ALLOWED TO
CONTINUE YOUR
EXPERIMENTS.









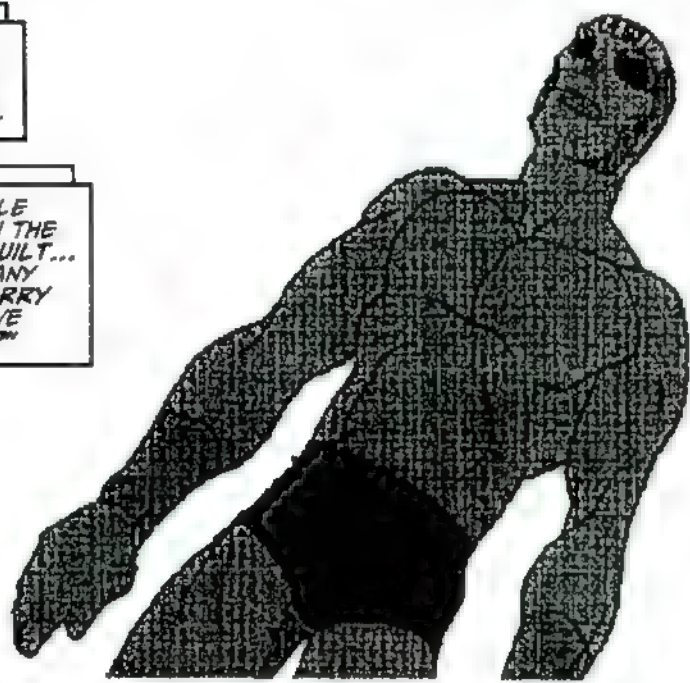
9352 626661

"MY SON'S FACE STARES UP AT ME FROM MY LAB TABLE."

"AND I WONDER WHAT I'LL TELL HIM... WHEN BROADHURST AND THE OTHERS COME FOR HIM."

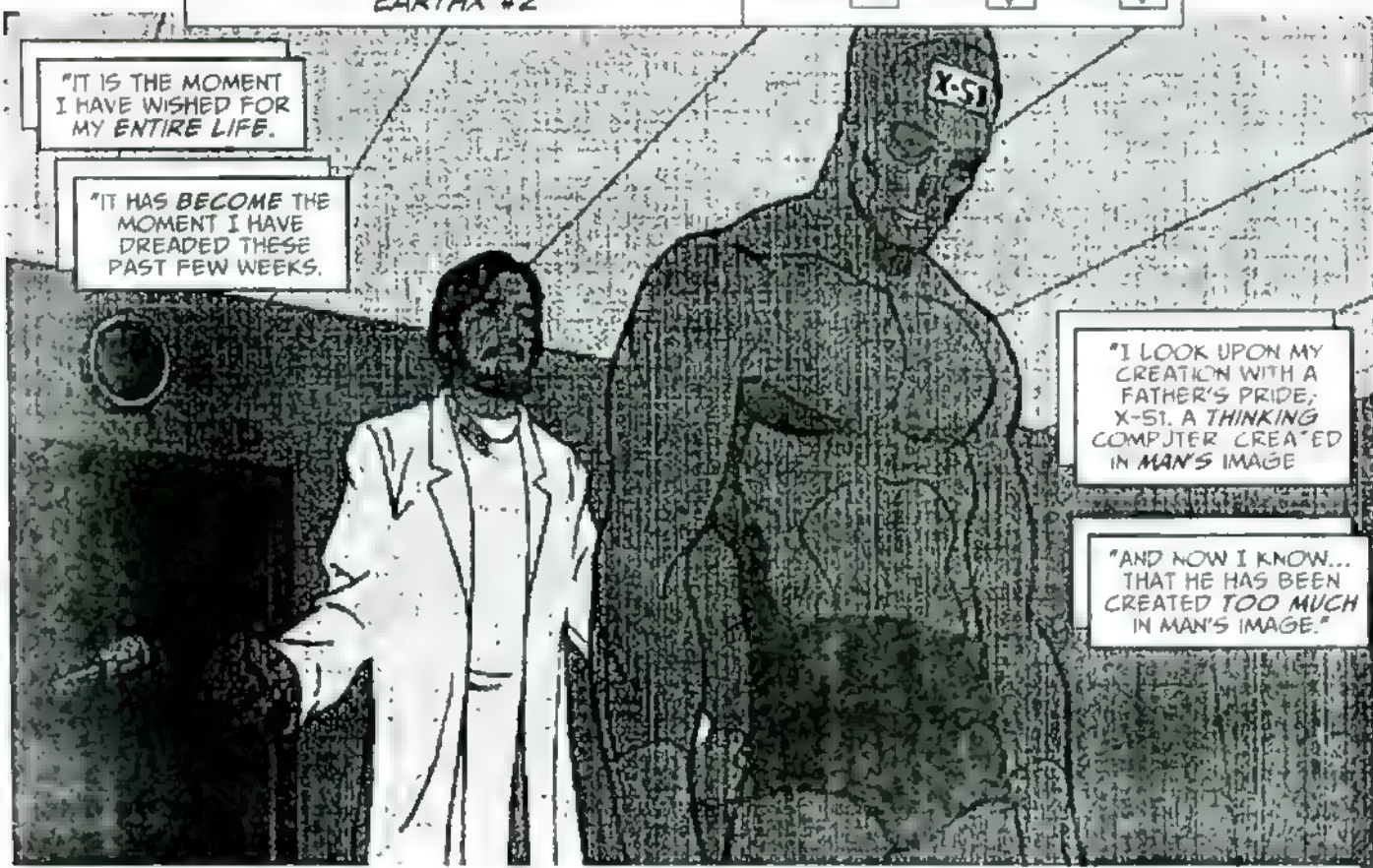
"WILL I BE ABLE TO LOOK HIM IN THE EYES... EYES I BUILT... AND SAY WITH ANY CONVICTION "SORRY SON, BUT I HAVE MY ORDERS?"

"HOW ON EARTH WILL I LIVE WITH MYSELF THEN?"

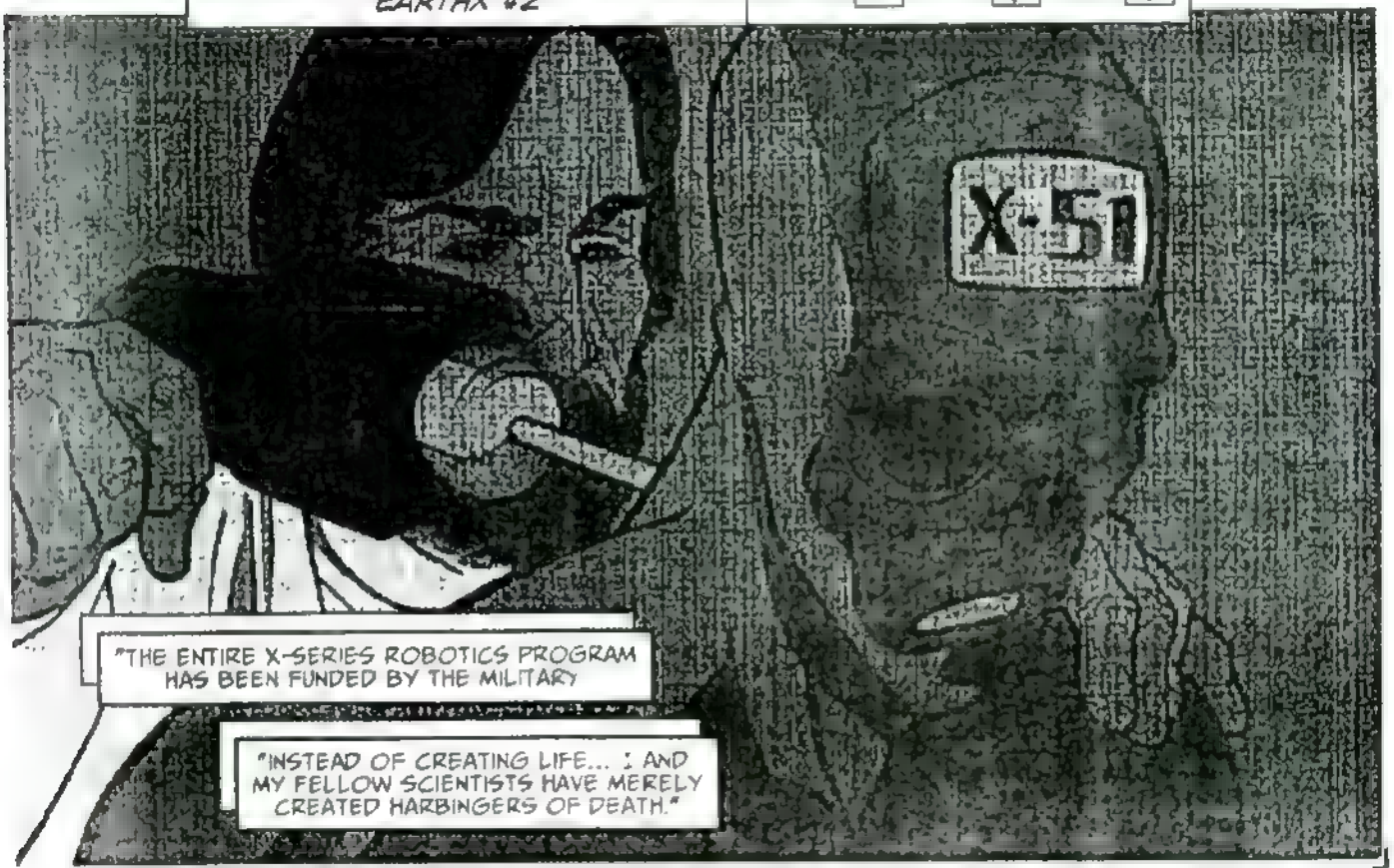


I WONDER IF THE "ALMIGHTY" MILITARY KNOWS WHAT THIS SELF-DESTRUCT MECHANISM WOULD DO TO A HUMAN BEING --?





Attention—Grege Sanderson!



"I BUILD HIM... I ASSEMBLE HIM... FOR
THE D.SASSEMBLY OF OTHERS. TO DESTROY
OTHERS AND SERVE A GENERAL'S WHIM.

"IF HE DOES NOT, THE RESULT WILL BE HIS
DEMISE BY THE SELF-DESTRUCT MECHANISM
PLACED WITHIN ALL OF THE X-SERIES ROBOTS

"I...NO... I WON'T LET THEM... I WON'T LET
X-51 BE A PART OF THIS... HE'S MORE THAN A
MACHINE... I'VE WORKED TOO HARD... TOO LONG...

"...TO LET THIS BLOW
UP IN MY FACE."

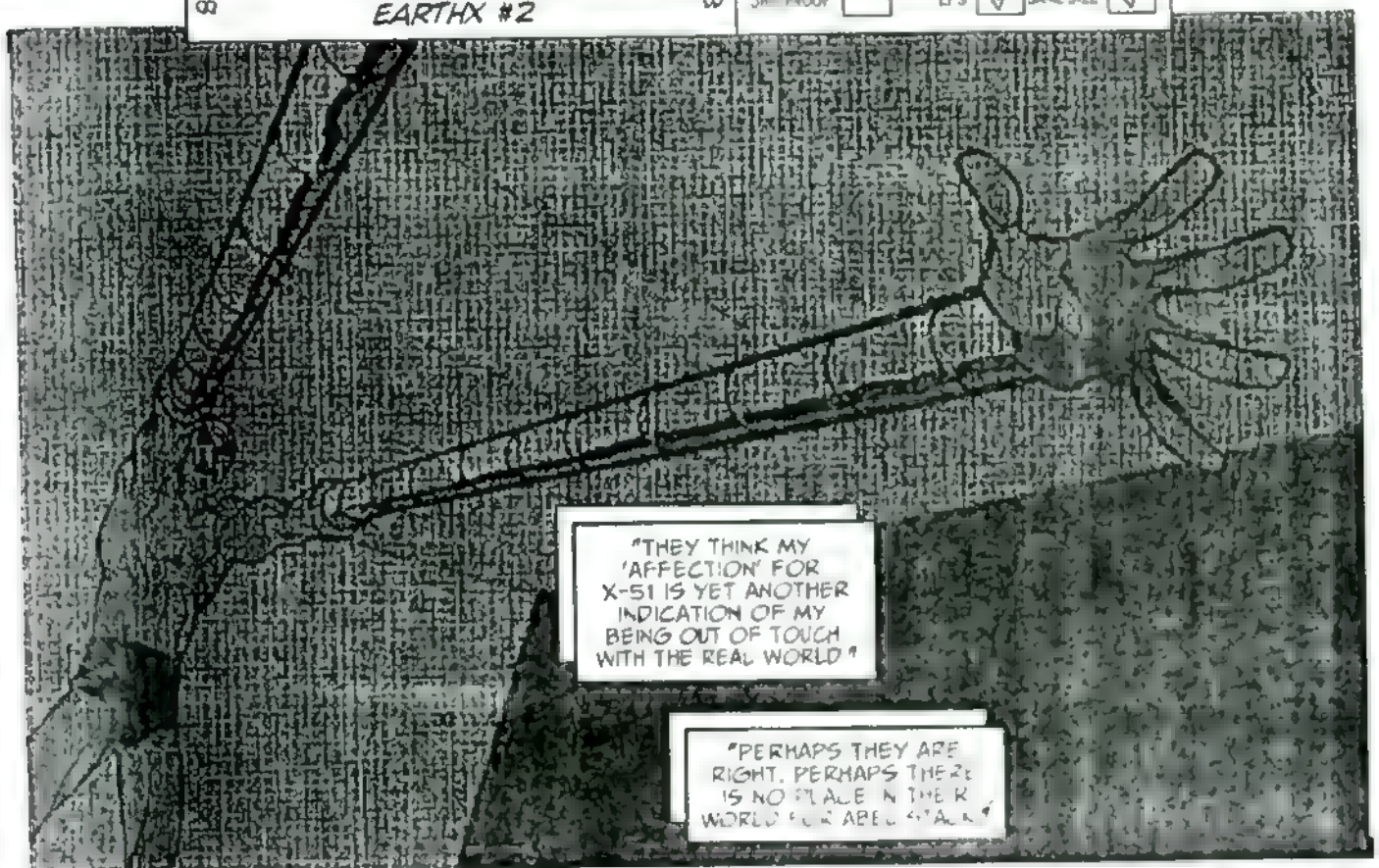
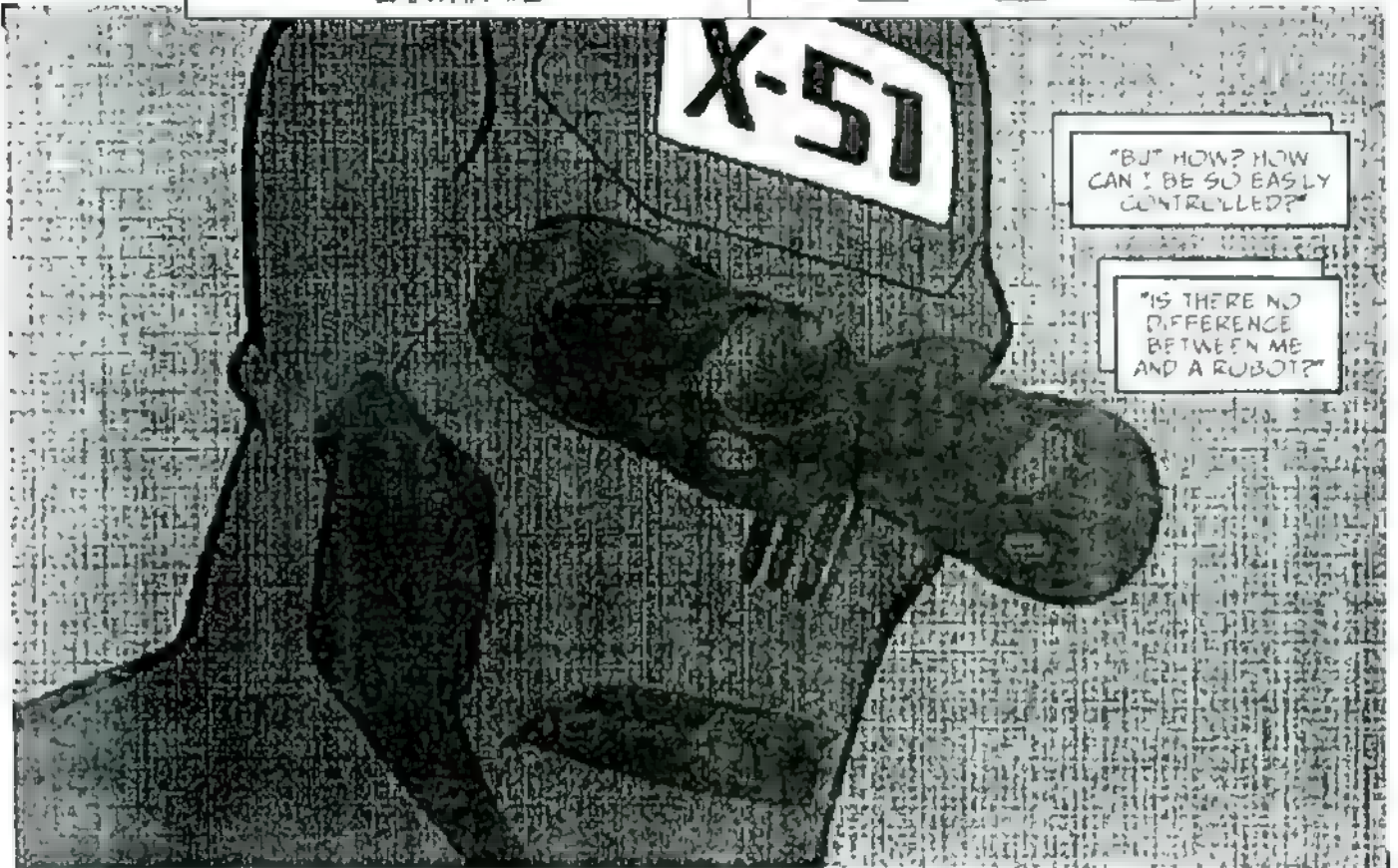
"IF A CREATED BEING
HAS NO RIGHTS WHICH
HIS CREATOR IS BOUND
TO RESPECT, THERE IS
AN END TO ALL MORAL
RELATIONS BETWEEN THEM."
OLIVER WENDALL HOLMES.

"MY... BETTERS... TELL
ME THAT THIS IS MERELY
PART OF THE SCIENTIFIC
PROCESS. THAT IF I DESIRE
TO DO MORE RESEARCH...
I MUST LET GO OF MY
PAST ACCOMPLISHMENTS."

"THAT IF I TRAIN X-51... TEST HIS
ENDURANCE... TEACH HIM HOW TO
SURVIVE WHILE KILLING OTHERS...
IT WILL MEAN MORE FUNDING
FOR MY CONTINUED RESEARCH."

"THE MILITARY KNOWS
MY ASSOCIATES AND
MYSELF TOO WELL.

"THEY KNOW WE ARE
DRIVEN BY THE PURSUIT
OF KNOWLEDGE MORE
THAN KNOWLEDGE ITSELF
IT IS WHAT FUELS US"

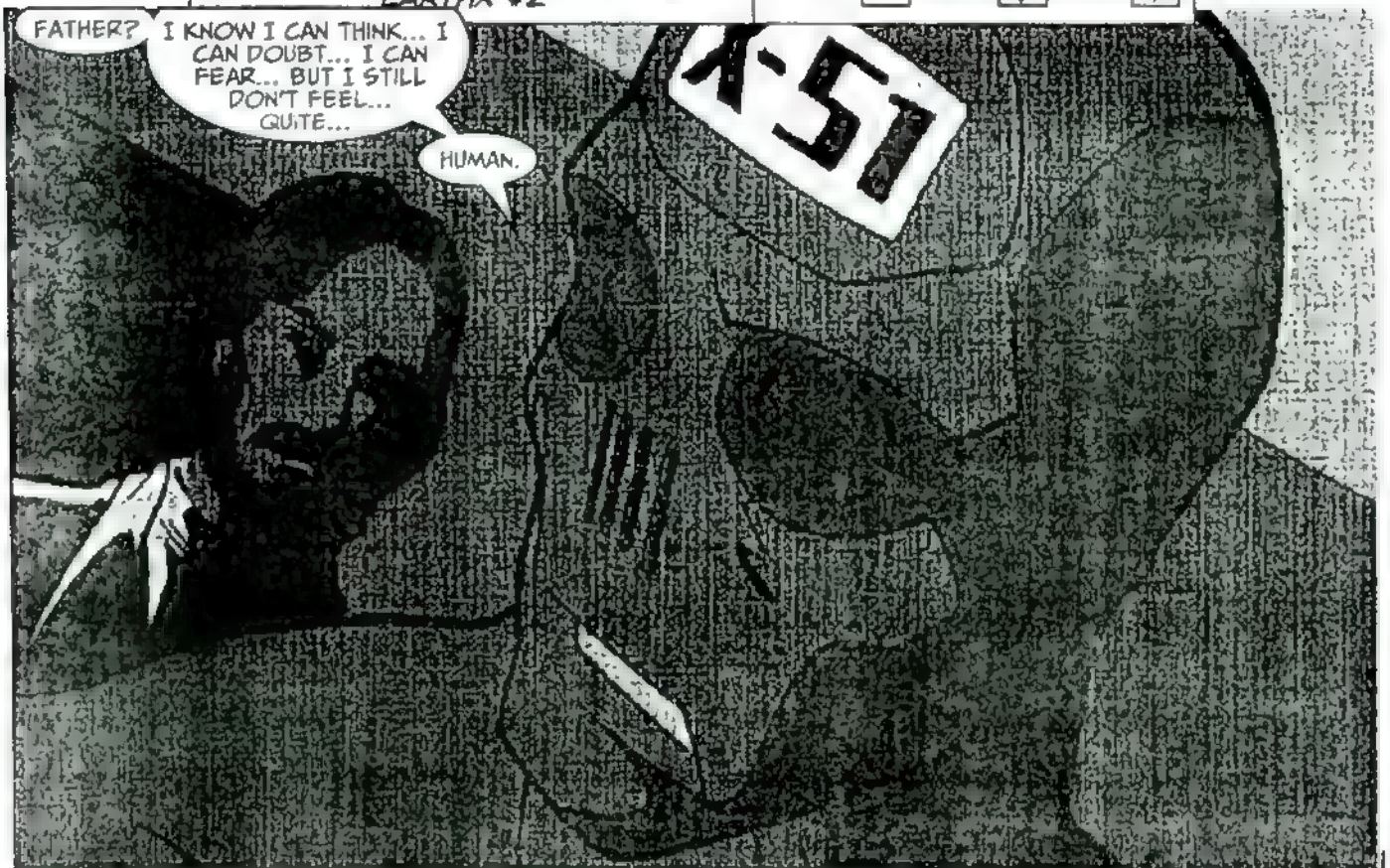


1ST PROOF	☒	PASTE UP	☐	BLEED	☒
2ND PROOF	☐	VELLUM	☐	REGULAR	☐
3RD PROOF	☐	EPS	☒	SAME SIZE	☒

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EARTH X #2

00



1ST PROOF	☒	PASTE UP	☐	BLEED	☒
2ND PROOF	☐	VELLUM	☐	REGULAR	☐
3RD PROOF	☐	EPS	☒	SAME SIZE	☒

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EARTH X #2

00



YOU WILL
NEED TO LOOK
HUMAN, AARON, NEED
TO KNOW HOW TO
LIVE AMONGST
HUMANITY

I
WANT YOU
TO LEAVE
HERE...
NOW.

WHAT DO
YOU MEAN...
FATHER?



THE ONLY EXPLANATION I CAN
GIVE YOU, AARON... IS THAT
I CAN'T EXPLAIN. YOU
NEED TO RUN AWAY...
NEVER COME
BACK.

BUT I
DON'T WANT TO
LEAVE. I WANT TO
STAY HERE WITH
MY FATHER

DO, WHAT
I SAY, AARON!
DO EXACTLY
WHAT I TELL
YOU



1ST PROOF ☒
2ND PROOF ☐
3RD PROOF ☐

☒
☐
☐

PASTE UP
VELLUM
EPS

☐
☐
☒

REGULAR
SAME SIZE

☒
☐
☒

00

EARTHX #2

00



WHY,
FATHER... WHY
MAKE ME CAPABLE OF
INDEPENDENT THOUGHT
IF ALL YOU WANT IS
FOR ME TO OBEY
YOU?

YES,
DR STACK.
WHAT DO YOU
MEAN?

1ST PROOF ☒
2ND PROOF ☐
3RD PROOF ☐

☒
☐
☐

PASTE UP
VELLUM
EPS

☐
☐
☒

REGULAR
SAME SIZE

☒
☐
☒

00

EARTHX #2

00



I MEAN THAT IF AARON
STAYS HERE...

X-51.

IF HE
STAYS HERE.
THE BEST HE CAN
HOPE FOR IN THIS
LIFE WE GAVE HIM IS
TO SPEND IT KILLING
OTHERS FOR THE
MILITARY.



STACK, GET A HOLD OF
YOURSELF... WE'RE
TALKING ABOUT THE
ADVANCEMENT OF
SCIENCE.

YOU'RE
TALKING ABOUT
SELLING OUT LIKE
YOU DID! AND I WON'T
DO IT. I DON'T
WANT TO BE A
GENERAL

RUN,
AARON,
RUN!

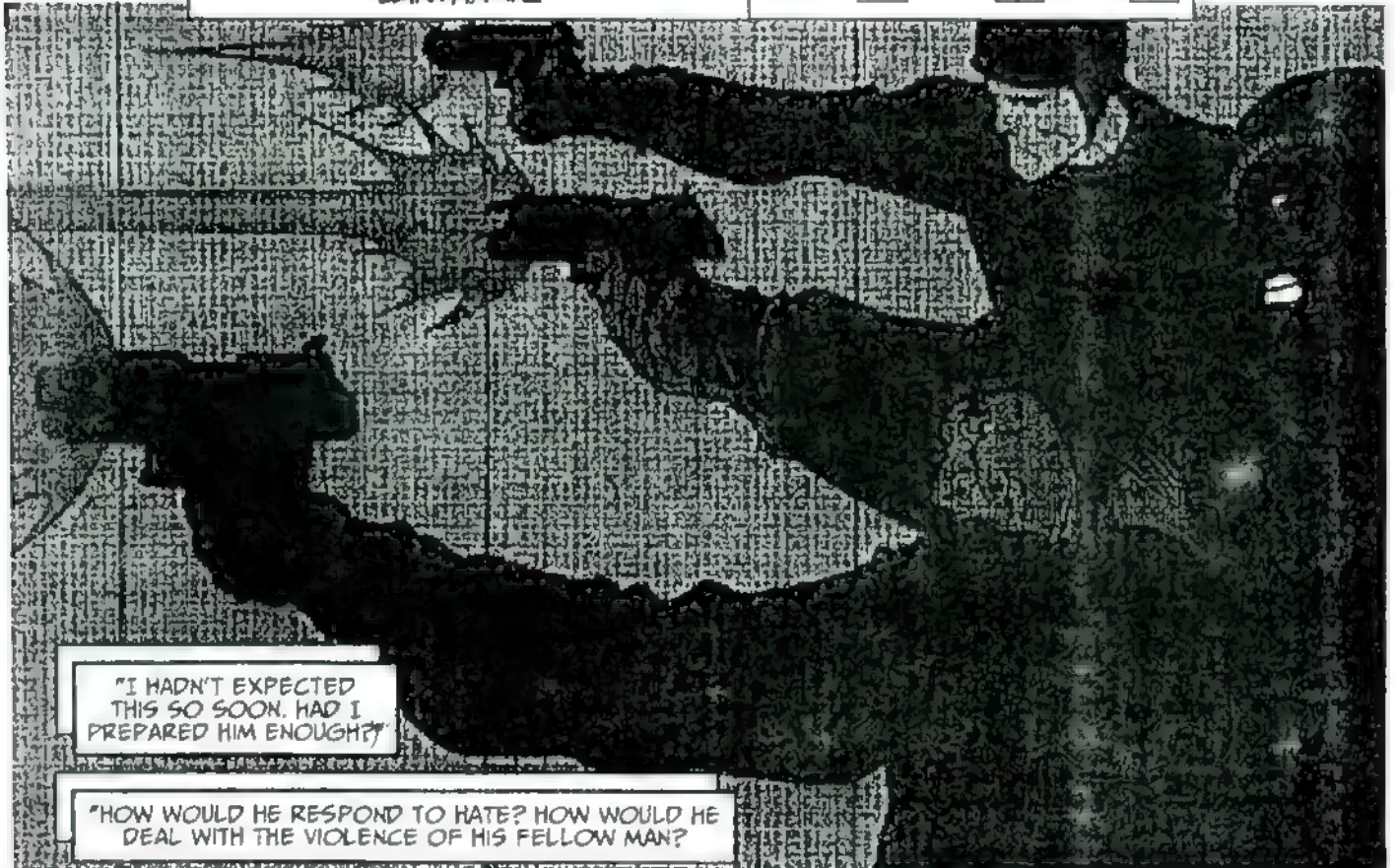
"MOMENTS LATER, THE
ALARM SOUNDED, AARON
WAS ON HIS OWN."

1ST PROOF	☒	PASTE UP	☐	BLEED	☒
2ND PROOF	☐	VELLUM	☐	REGULAR	☐
3RD PROOF	☐	EPS	☒	SAME SIZE	☒

∞

EARTH #2

∞



"I HADN'T EXPECTED
THIS SO SOON. HAD I
PREPARED HIM ENOUGH?"

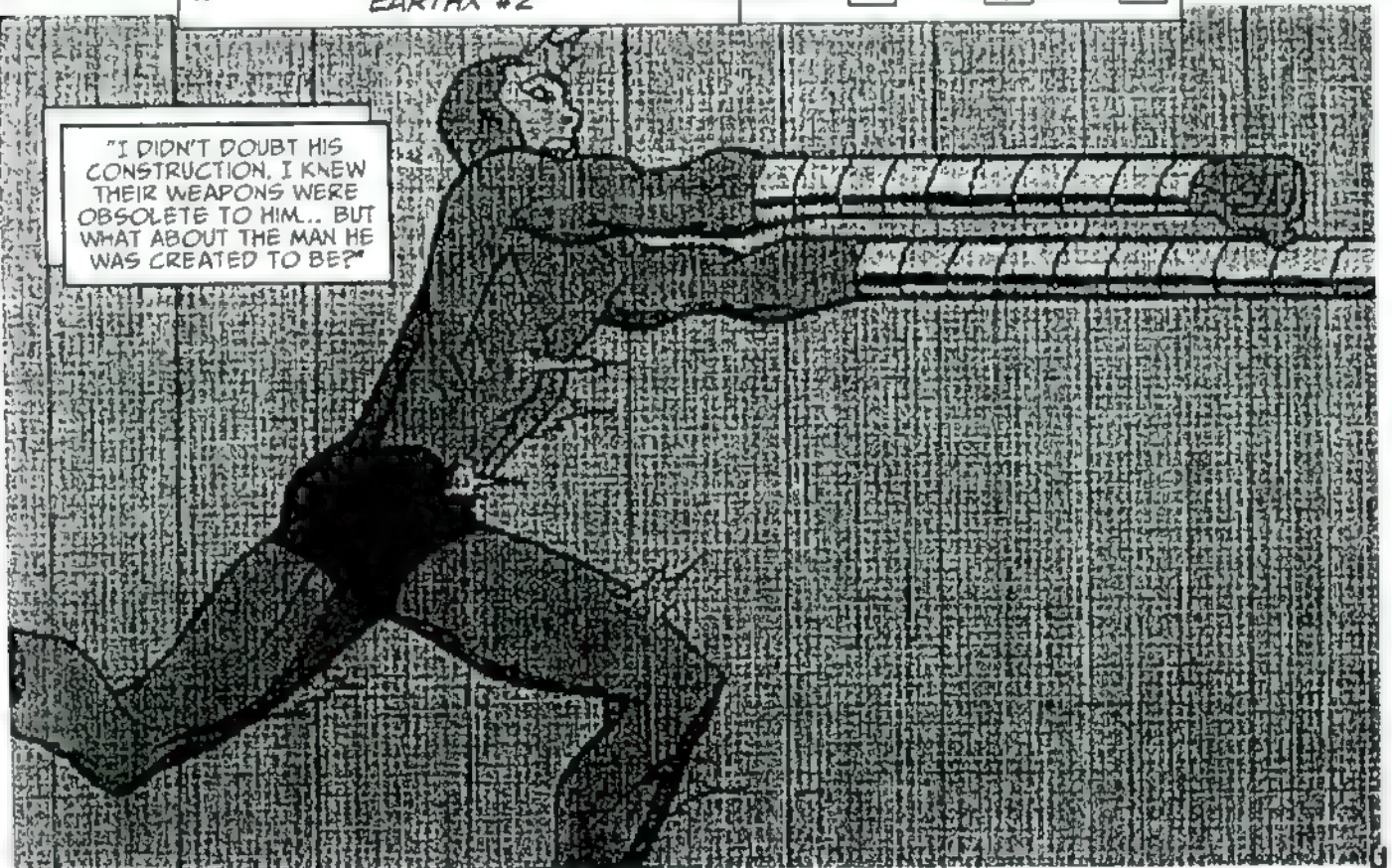
"HOW WOULD HE RESPOND TO HATE? HOW WOULD HE
DEAL WITH THE VIOLENCE OF HIS FELLOW MAN?"

1ST PROOF	☒	PASTE UP	☐	BLEED	☒
2ND PROOF	☐	VELLUM	☐	REGULAR	☐
3RD PROOF	☐	EPS	☒	SAME SIZE	☒

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EARTH #2

∞

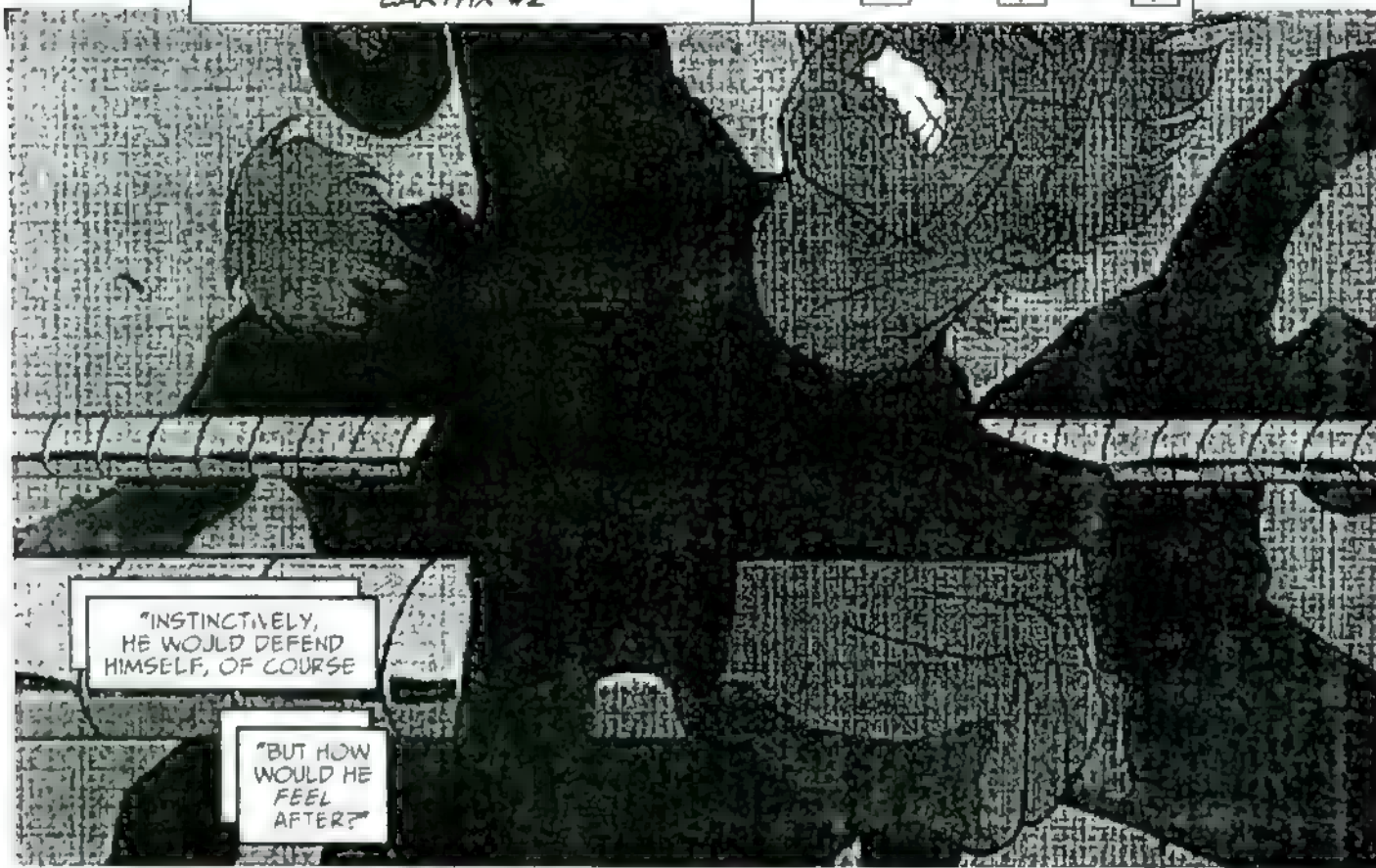


"I DIDN'T DOUBT HIS
CONSTRUCTION. I KNEW
THEIR WEAPONS WERE
OBSOLETE TO HIM... BUT
WHAT ABOUT THE MAN HE
WAS CREATED TO BE?"

Gregs!

9352

EARTHX #2



"INSTINCTIVELY,
HE WOULD DEFEND
HIMSELF, OF COURSE

"BUT HOW
WOULD HE
FEEL
AFTER?"

! GREGG SANDERSON!

∞

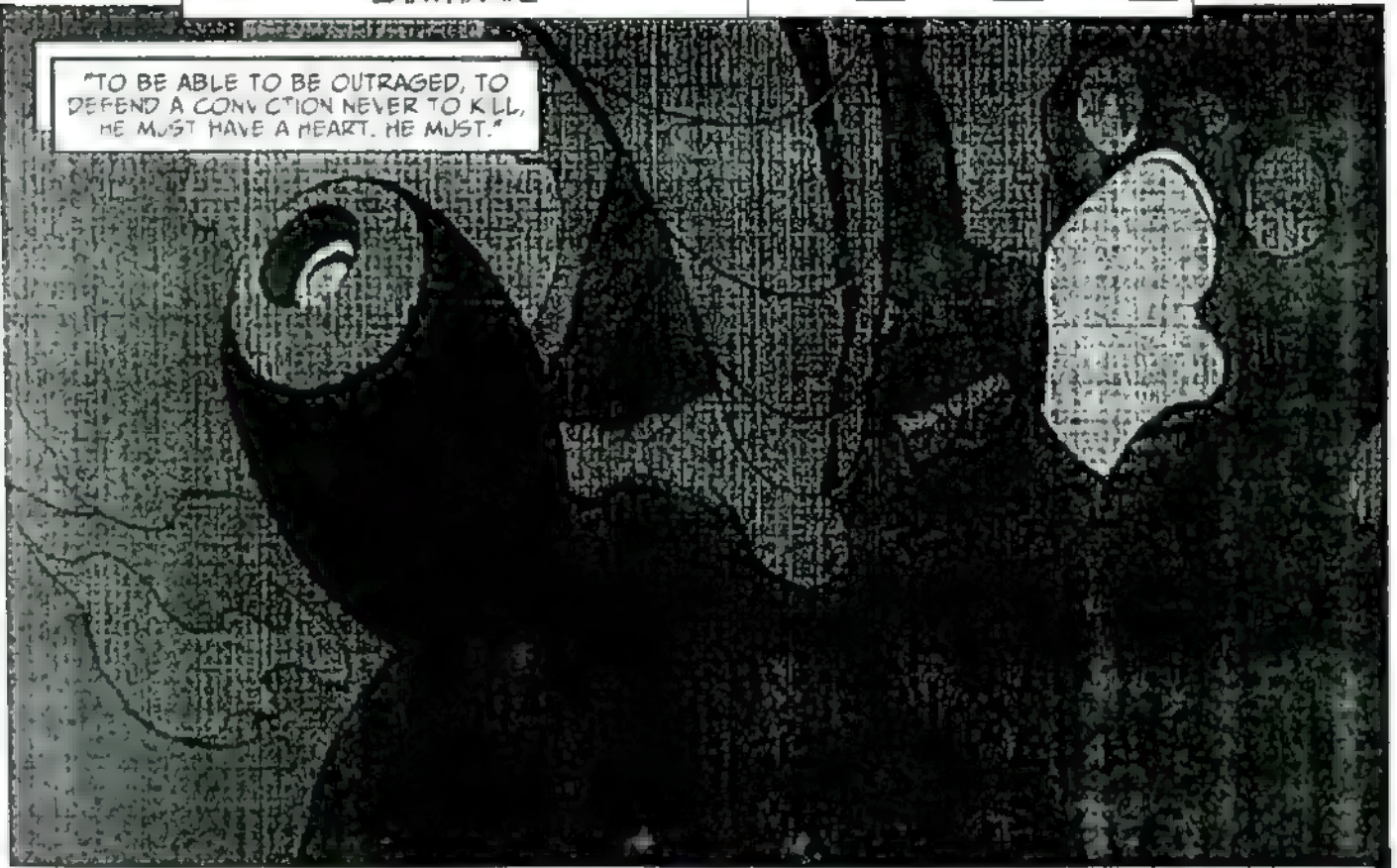
EARTHX #2

∞

"THEY WANTED ME TO
TEST HIS STRENGTH... HIS
ENDURANCE... HIS AGILITY.

"BUT WHAT OF GUILT?
WHAT OF COMPASSION?
WHAT OF THE BURDENS
THAT WEIGH UPON A HEART?"

"TO BE ABLE TO BE OUTRAGED, TO
DEFEND A CONVICTION NEVER TO KILL,
HE MUST HAVE A HEART. HE MUST."



"OR IS BROADMURST CORRECT?
IS THIS MERELY A HELL OF MY
MAKING? ARE THE DOUBTS AND FEARS
I PUT TO X-SI MINE ALONE?"



F-FATHER?
WHY DIDN'T YOU
TELL ME?

"STILL... THE TRUE TEST
WILL OCCUR WHEN X-51
FACES THE TRUTH, LIKE
ALL OF US MUST, OF
HIS OWN MORTALITY."

SO
MANY... LIKE
ME... ALL
DEAD.





00

EARTH X #2

00



I CAN D SMANTLE IT, AARON... BUT ONLY IF YOU'RE OUTSIDE THE IMMEDIATE AREA.

LISTEN TO ME, AARON... I NEVER CREATED A MACHINE. I DON'T BUILD NUMBERS. I MADE A MAN... A MAN TO LIVE WITH MEN. A MAN TO HELP OTHER MEN BUILD AS I HAVE BUILT

GO AND BE ONE OF THEM. GO LIVE AS THEY DO. AND REMEMBER ME.

HOW COULD I FORGET? I'LL SEE YOU SOON, DAD. I'LL MAKE YOU PROUD. JUST WAIT AND SEE!

00

EARTH X #2

00



I WISH I COULD, SON. BUT I'M PROUD, ALREADY.

I SUPPOSE I'M NOT THE FIRST CREATOR TO DIE SO HIS CREATION COULD LIVE.

TIK TIK TIK TIK

NEXT WEEK
EARTH X
PART 3



1ST PROOF	LA	PASTE UP	-	BLEED	✓
2ND PROOF		VELLUM		REGULAR	
3RD PROOF		EPS	✓	SAME SIZE	✓

EARTH# #3

"NO, SIR.
YES, SIR... BUT SIR..
THE OKAY... LIEUTENANT
THERE'S BEEN A CHANGE IN
PLANS, COMMAND WANTS US TO
WAT /THEY'RE SENDING OUT A
CONTAINMENT DEVICE THAT WILL
RENDER THE ROBOT INOPERATIVE.
SEEMS SOME SCIENTIST
NAMED BROADHURST
DOESN'T WANT X-51
DAMAGED."

"SOME
SCIENTIST... NO
WAY IS THE MILITARY
TAKING ORDERS FROM
THE LAB -- HEH -- IF ONLY
YOU HAD TOLD ME A SECOND
SOONER, PRIVATE. I MIGHT
NOT HAVE PULLED
THE TRIGGER."

1ST PROOF	LA	PASTE UP	-	BLEED	✓
2ND PROOF		VELLUM		REGULAR	
3RD PROOF		EPS	✓	SAME SIZE	✓

EARTH# #3

"PULL
THE TRIGGER?
SR? WHAT ARE YOU
DOING? COMMAND
SAD NOT
TO..."

CLICK

ANOTHER FINE
PAGE FROM

COMICRAFT 2b of 8

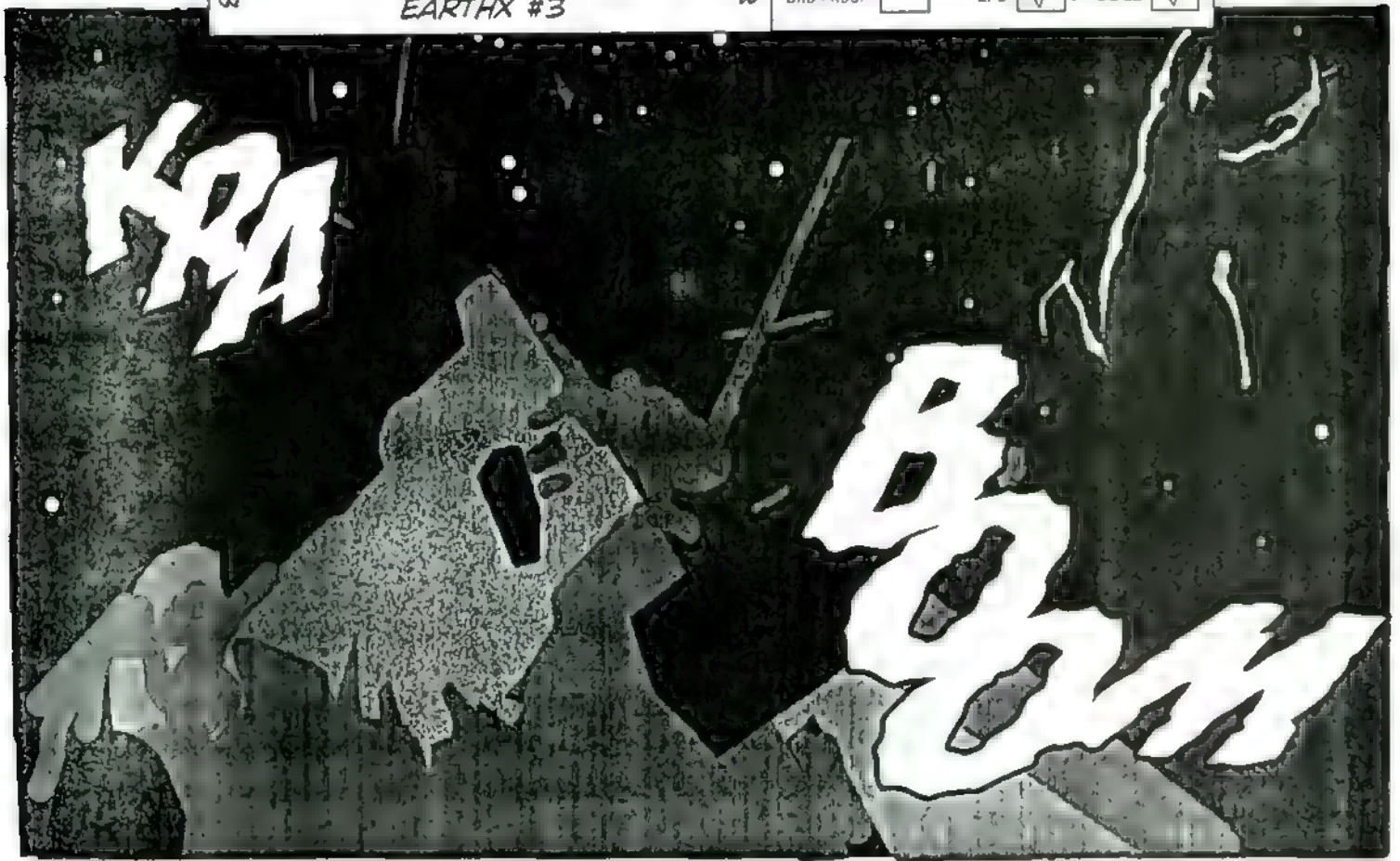
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2ND PROOF		VELLUM		REGULAR	
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EARTH X #3

∞



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COMICRAFT 3a of 8

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2ND PROOF		VELLUM		REGULAR	
3RD PROOF		EPS	✓	SAME SIZE	✓

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EARTH X #3

∞



IN ALL THE
CONFUSION, I CAN
MAKE MY *ESCAPE*. IS
THAT NOT HUMAN?
TO LIVE AND THINK
FOR MYSELF...

BUT HOW
CAN I JUST
LEAVE?

SO MANY
PEOPLE HERE...
MAYBE I COULD
HELP THEM.

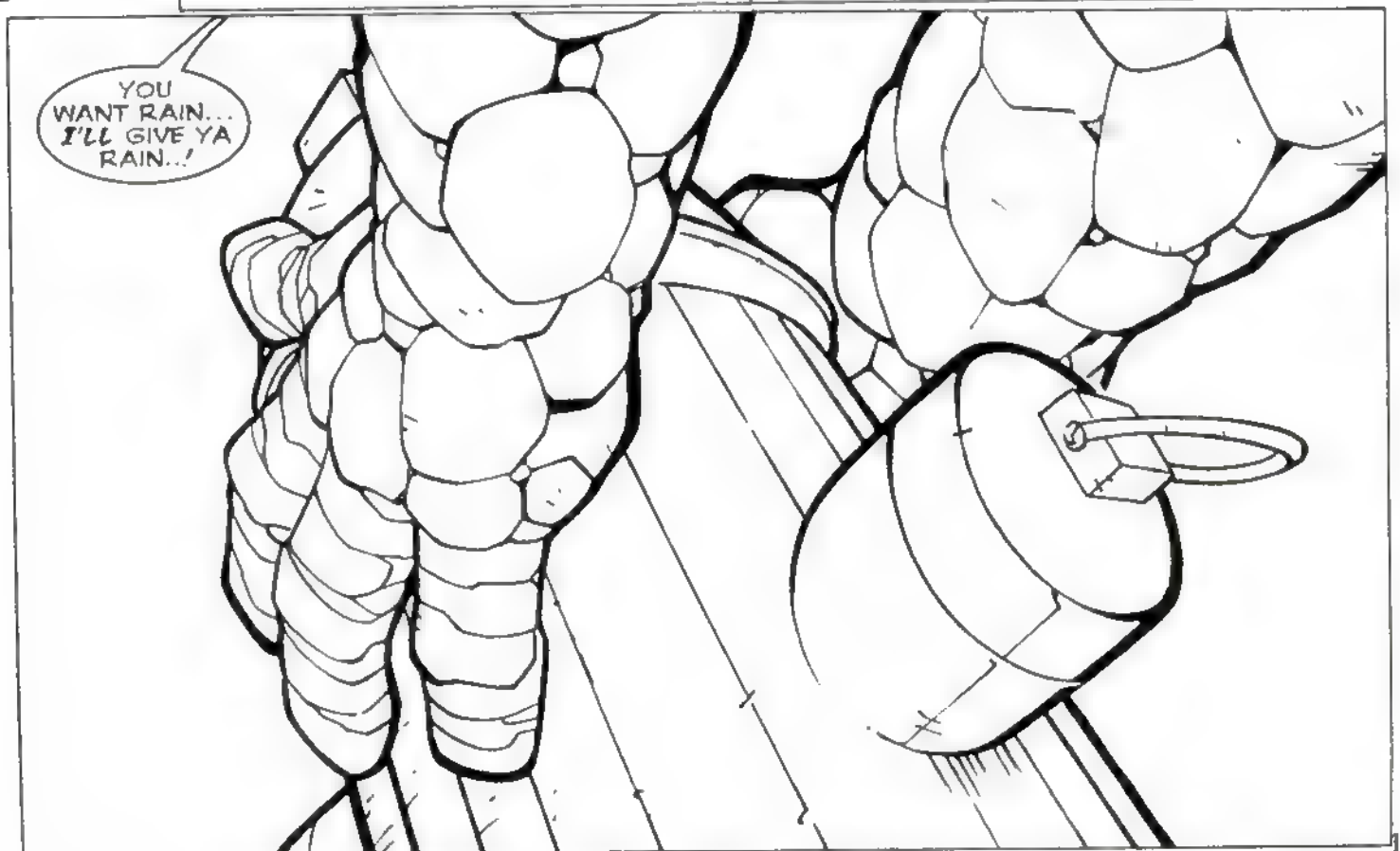


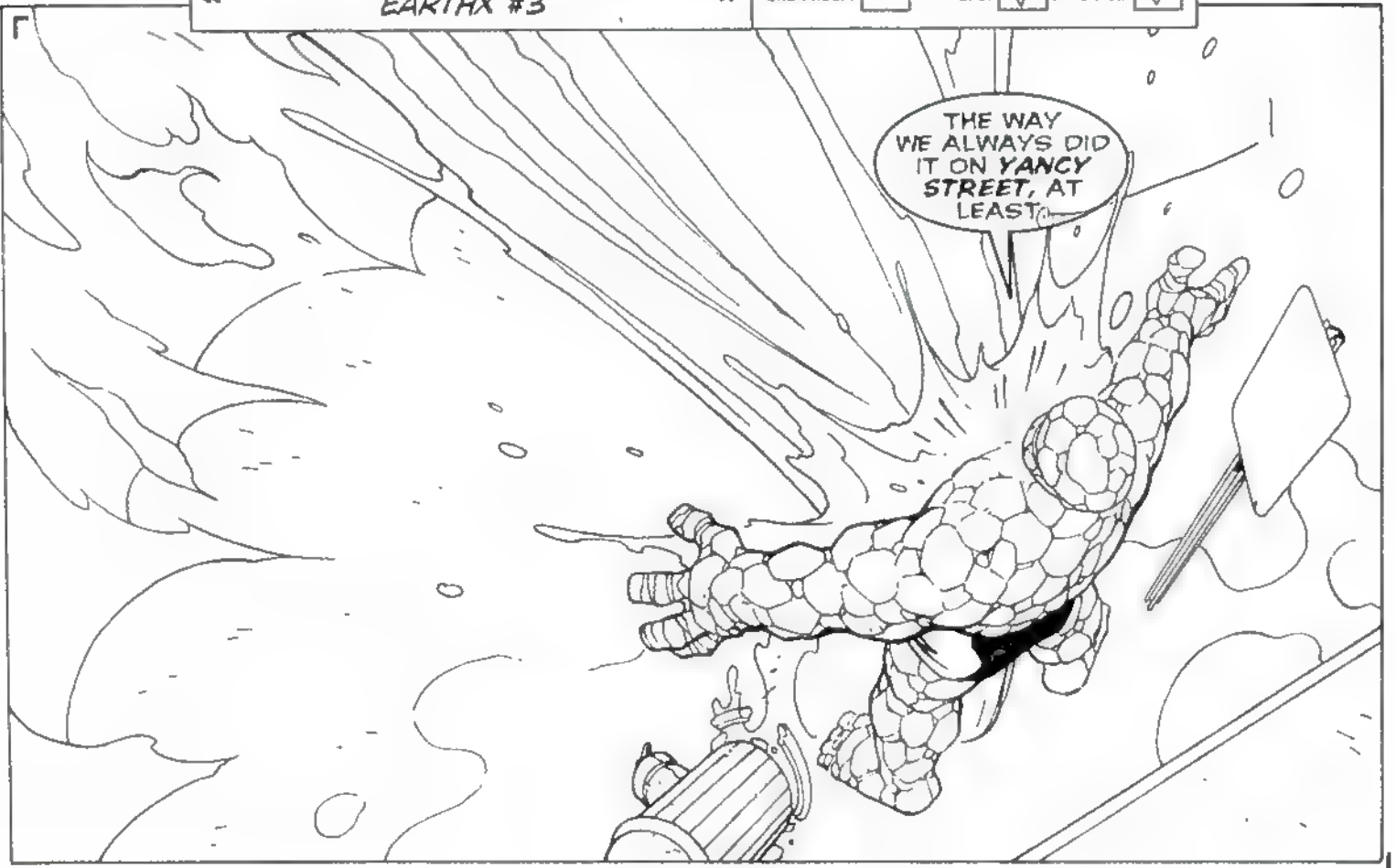
"SOME OF THEM...
BUT HOW COULD I
SAVE THEM ALL?"

LOOK
ALIVE,
PEOPLE!

THOR,
I NEED A
RAINSTORM
RIGHT NOW!

AS THY
WISHEST,
CAPTAIN.







1ST PROOF: LA

PASTE UP: -

BLEED: ☒

2ND PROOF:

VELLUM:

REGULAR

3RD PROOF:

EPS: ☒

SAME SIZE: ☒

EARTH #3



"BUT FATHER DIED SO
THAT I COULD LIVE...
HE DIDN'T THINK ABOUT
HIMSELF... I HAVE
TO CHOOSE..."

1ST PROOF: LA

PASTE UP: -

BLEED: ☒

2ND PROOF:

VELLUM:

REGULAR

3RD PROOF:

EPS: ☒

SAME SIZE: ☒

EARTH #3



"I HOPE YOU WILL BE
PROUD, FATHER. I BELIEVE
THAT TO LIVE WITH THEM...
I MUST LIVE FOR THEM."

I'M
COMING.
DON'T WORRY.
I'LL SAVE
YOU.







make
ame
ive
s
rest



9

FOOL!
YOU ARE NOT
ALIVE... NOT CAPABLE
OF THOUGHT... AND
THEREFORE, NOT
CAPABLE OF FREE
DECISION.

"AND
BECAUSE YOU
ARE NO MAN,
YOU SHALL NOT
WEAR HIS
FACE."

NO, YOU
CAN'T... I AM
A MAN. MY
FATHER
SAID...







3





1ST PROOF: ☒

PASTE UP: ☐

BLEED ☒

2ND PROOF: ☐

VELLUM: ☐

REGULAR ☐

3RD PROOF: ☐

EPS: ☒

SAME SIZE ☒

EARTH# #4



1ST PROOF: ☒

PASTE UP: ☐

BLEED ☒

2ND PROOF: ☐

VELLUM: ☐

REGULAR ☐

3RD PROOF: ☐

EPS: ☒

SAME SIZE ☒

EARTH# #4

YOU CAN TAKE MY
ARM, YOU CAN TAKE
MY FATHER, YOU CAN
TAKE MY FACE, BUT
YOU CAN'T CHANGE
WHO I AM.





IF X-51 WAS
PROGRAMMED WITH
HUMANITY, HE WAS
PROGRAMMED FOR
DECEIT, DOCTOR. IF
THE PUBLIC DOESN'T
HAVE A SCAPEGOAT
FOR THE FIRE, IT
WILL BE ALL OUR
HANDS.

I DIDN'T
START THE FIRE,
MY SENSORS... RECORDED ...
MILITARY PERSONNEL... PLAY...
BZZZT... THE RECORD... BZZZT.

Tailless electric balloons
Electric caps.

9:55h '40R GREGS!

ANOTHER FINE PAGE FROM **COMICRAFT** 20 of 27
EARTH#4

DATE GENERATED: 03.01.99 REVISED: 00.00.99

1ST PROOF: ☒ OG	PASTE UP: ☐	BLEED: ☒
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EARTH#4

DATE GENERATED: 03.02.99 REVISED: 00.00.95

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3RD PROOF: ☐	EPS: ☒	SAME SIZE: ☒



4/1 caps

no burst,
tone down

ANOTHER FINE
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"COMICRAFT" 22 of 8

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EARTHX #4



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"COMICRAFT" 23 of 8

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EARTHX #4



FLIGHT

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COMICRAFT 24 of 8

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2ND PROOF:		VELLUM:		REGULAR:	☐
3RD PROOF:		EPS:	☒	SAME SIZE:	☒

EARTH X #4

WE CREATED...
NO... MEN LIKE ABEL
STACK CREATED THE
X-SERIES ROBOTS TO BE
SOLDIERS... WE CREATED
THEM TO FLIGHT FOR US,
NOT TO BEAR THE
WEIGHT OF OUR
CRIMES.

DON'T
(BE A FOOL,
BROADHURST)

I AM A
FOOL, GENERAL.
TO BELIEVE SCIENCE
MORE IMPORTANT THAN
HUMANITY. WHEN YOU
MADE ME A COLONEL,
YOU MADE ME A
SOLDIER...

...YOU PUT
THE ABILITY AND
THE RESPONSIBILITY
OF SAVING LIVES IN
MY HANDS... JUST
LIKE WE DID
IN X-SI'S.

YOU
CAN'T GO
PUBLIC... IT'S
EXTORTION

Book EARTH X
ANOTHER FINE
PAGE FROM

COMICRAFT 25a of 8

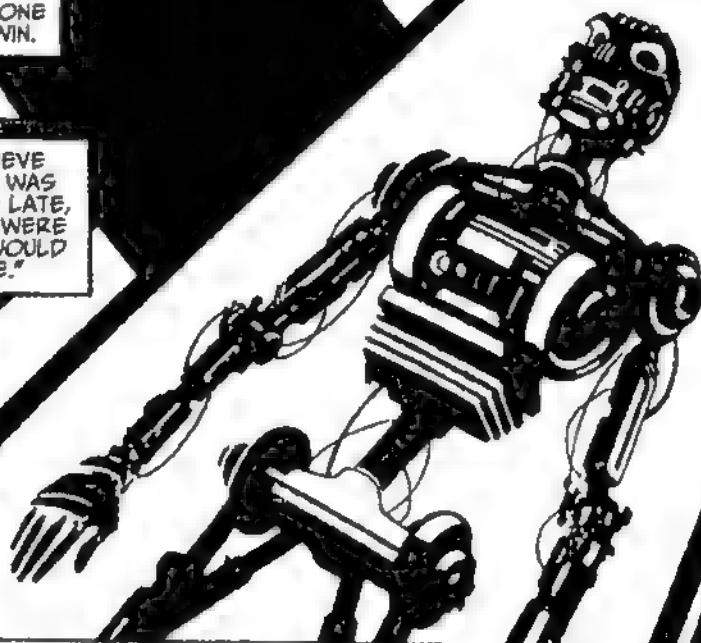
DATE GENERATED: 03.01.99 REVISED: 00.00.95

1ST PROOF:	LA	PASTE UP:	-	BLEED:	☒
2ND PROOF:		VELLUM:		REGULAR:	☐
3RD PROOF:		EPS:	☒	SAME SIZE:	☒

EARTH X #4

"I THINK YOU WOULD
HAVE BEEN PROUD
OF ME, ABEL. IT'S NOT
OFTEN THE MILITARY
IS WILLING TO LET ONE
OF ITS LAB RATS WIN.

"BUT I BELIEVE
NOW, AND IT WAS
ALMOST TOO LATE,
THAT IF X-SI WERE
TO DIE, WE WOULD
ALL LOSE."



"X-51 IS BEING REASSEMBLED ACCORDING TO YOUR SPECIFICATIONS."

"AND THE MILITARY HAS AGREED, BEGRUDGINGLY, TO LET HIM GO... FREE."

> BEGIN WITH 1-1 AND 1-2 (NO MILITARY AID!)
 > CUT TO THE SAME SHOT W/ THIS OVERLAY IN FRONT OF IT.
 > HIS OVERLAY SLIDES DOWN (IN F.I. RESPECTIVE) TO REVEAL 15-2.

EARTH X #4

MY FACE... I DON'T UNDERSTAND. WHY HAVE YOU..?

YOU GAVE ME SOMETHING I NEVER THOUGHT I'D GET WHEN ABEL DIED... A SECOND CHANCE TO DO WHAT'S RIGHT... AND NOT JUST WHAT I WAS TOLD.

BECAUSE OF YOU, X-51, I WAS ABLE TO BE MORE... THAN A COLLECTION OF INSTINCTS AND URGES... YOU SAVED A MAN WHO BELIEVED HE WAS MERELY A ROBOT.



1ST PROOF:	LA	PASTE UP:	-	BLEED	✓
2ND PROOF:		VELLUM:		REGULAR	
3RD PROOF:		EPS:	✓	SAME SIZE	✓

∞ EARTHX #4 ∞

"X-51 WENT TO LIVE IN YOUR OLD FLAT IN THE CITY, ABEL. HE EVEN JOINED THOSE HEROES HE MET THAT DAY, FIGHTING AT THEIR SIDE FOR AS LONG AS HE WAS NEEDED.

"FOR AS LONG AS HUMANITY NEEDED TO BE DEFENDED. I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE FOREVER."



BONUS SKETCHES & DESIGN MATERIALS

WITH COMMENTARY BY ALEX ROSS

SADRA



YELLOW TRIANGLE
IN FOREHEAD

WHITE EYE RIM
RED EYES

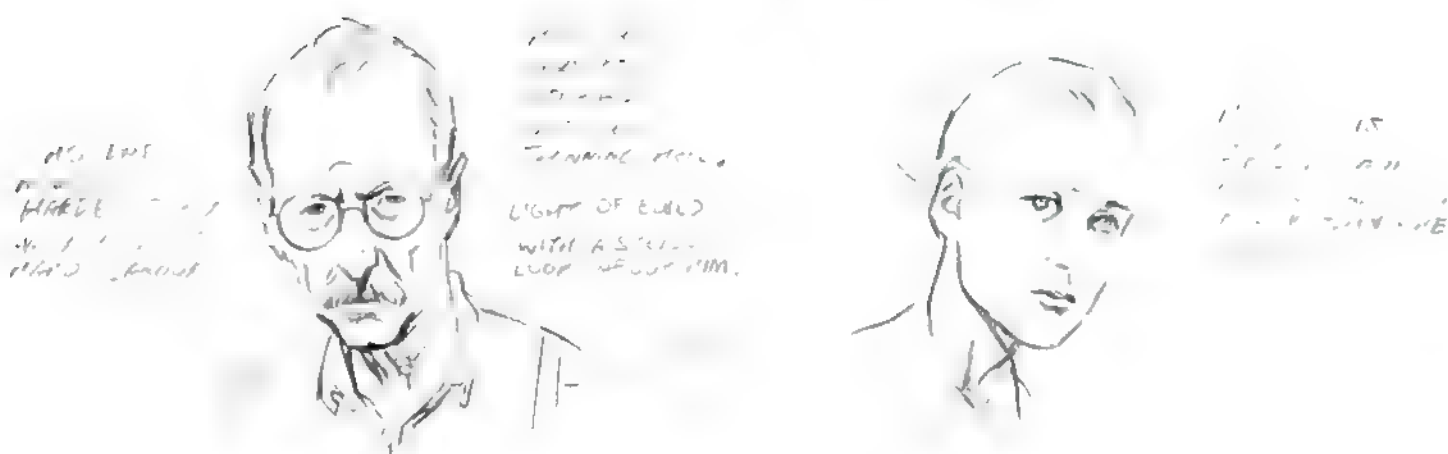
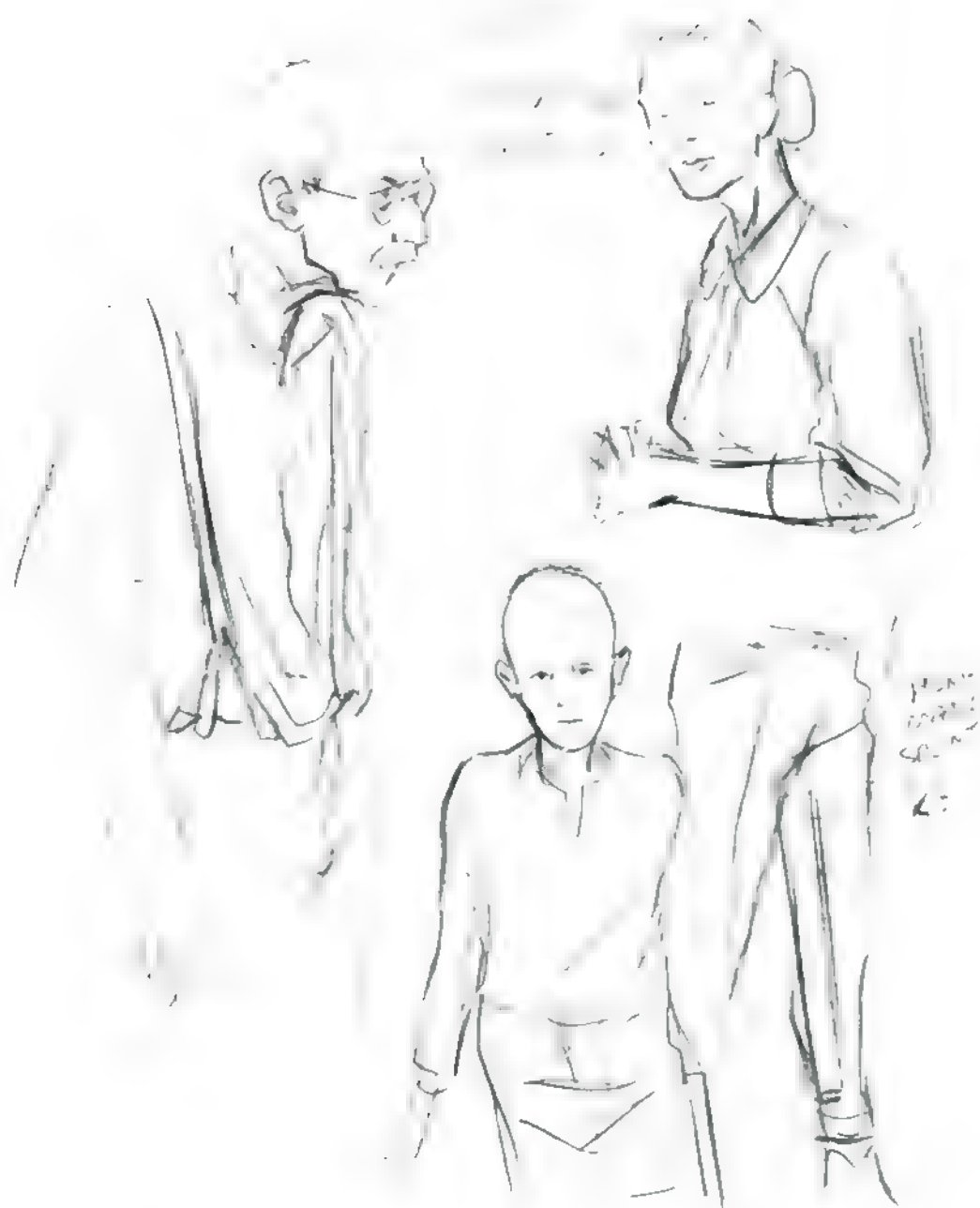
WHITE SKIN
BLACK LIPS

YELLOW & BLACK
COSTUME

WHITE
HANDS
SHOW
THROUGH
W/ RED
FINGERNAILS



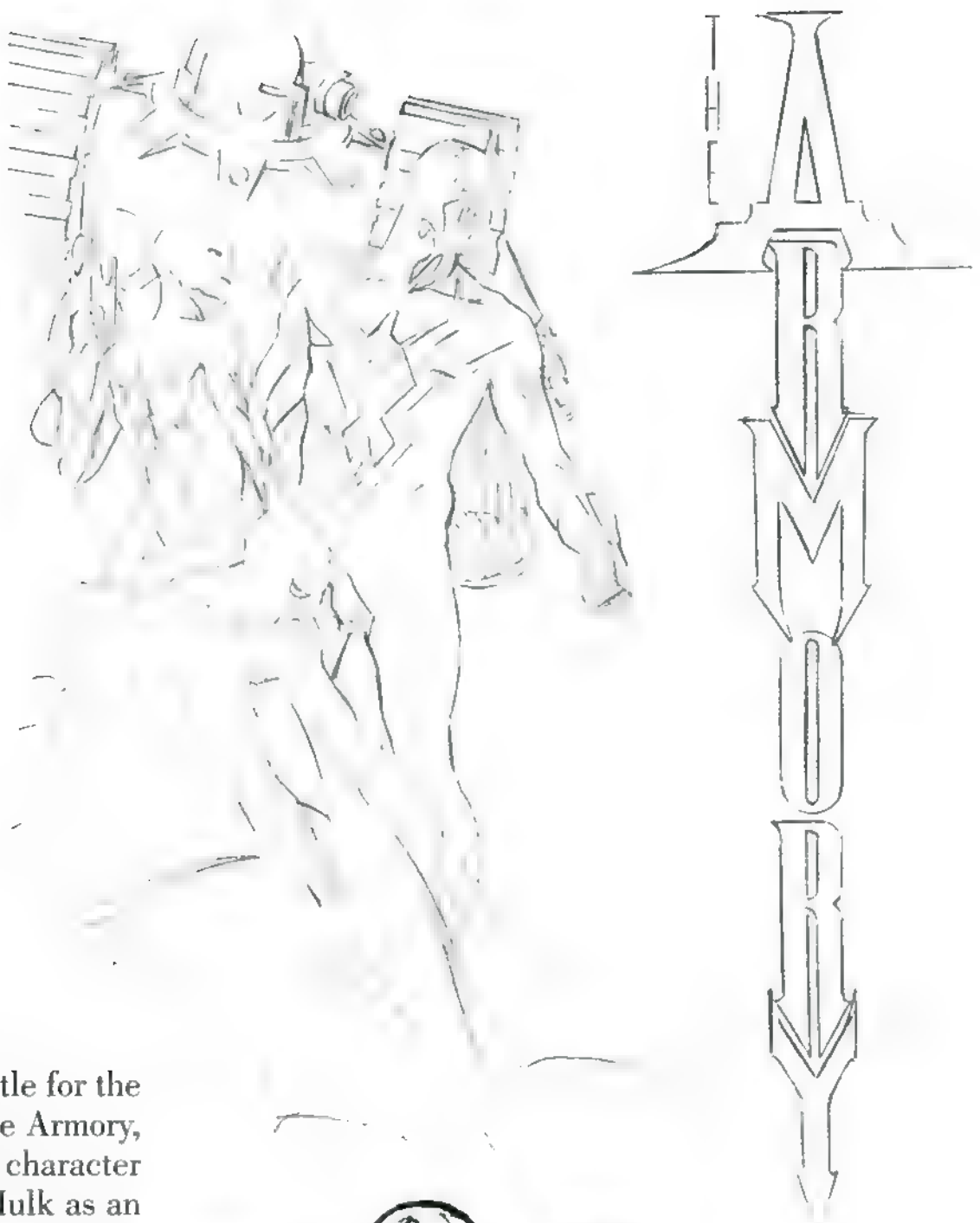
Daredevil
turnarounds for
the basis of 3-D
renderings.



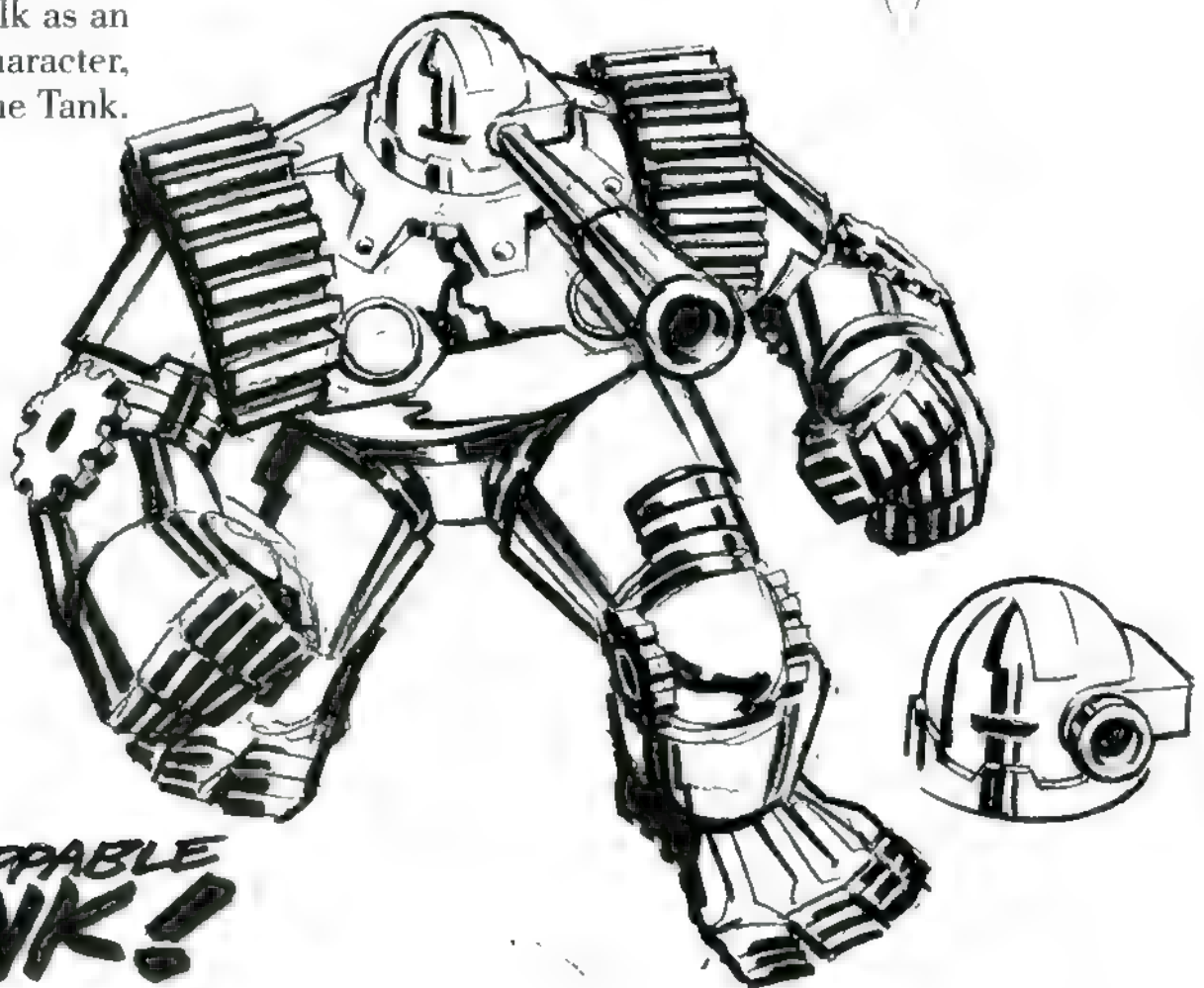
Steve Rogers' family, as seen for the first time in a Marvel comic. To the best of our knowledge in creating the Earth X trilogy, Steve's father Joseph had never been depicted before in the Marvel Universe. Given that he had died when Steve was just a child, the occasion to tell who this man was didn't fit into the greater origin of Captain America when he first takes the Super-Soldier serum. Steve's mother Sarah had been seen before, albeit briefly. We took the great leap of suggesting that there had been another Rogers son, who died during the hardship of the Depression, with Steve never knowing he had an older brother at all. Depicting Steve's family as frail and sickly was a reflection of the man himself before the government experiment transformed him.



Early re-designs for Nighthawk, Black Knight, White Tiger, Luna (of the Inhumans), and the diminutive members of the Ant-Men, our version of the Micronauts.



The original title for the Iron Men was the Armory, featuring a new character concept of the Hulk as an armor-suited character, the Tank.



**THE UNSTOPPABLE
TANK!**

Designs for the members of Xen, our eastern martial arts super-group, featuring Chi, Red Ronin, Mantis, and Sai.



SAMURAI

POSSIBLY CREEL'S POSE & MORE LIKE THIS

RED RONIN IS OLD FACED LIKE WONG, HAS A KNUARLED STAFF, LONG ROBES AND SCARF AROUND NECK



Visual direction for the reconstructed body of Crusher Creel, the Absorbing Man, Red Ronin, and what became the Seven Silver Samurai.

THE YOUNG
KENDU



TETSU
JAPANESE



Xen designs featuring their leader, the maturing son of Sunfire. Tao, Kendo, Banzai, Sumo, and others.



SUNFIRE

KENDO
JAPANESE



SUMO



TAO



WHITE TIGER

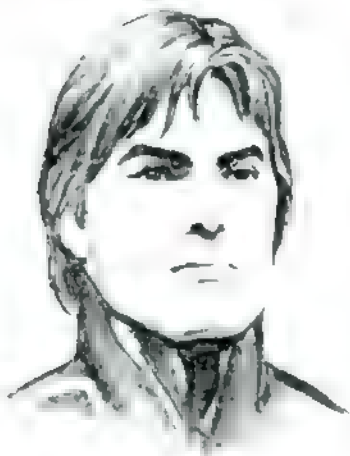
WONG



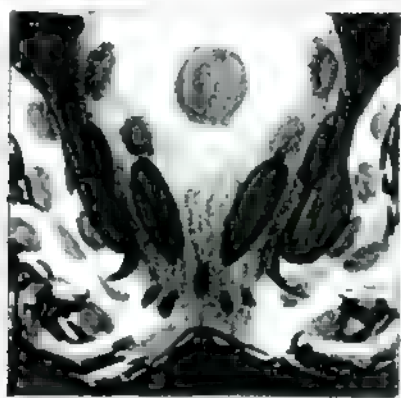
KENDU



The son of Black Bolt and Medusa, the new Black Knight, shown both in and out of costume.



THE NEW BLACK KNIGHT



CLOSE-UP ON HYDRA
HOLD BY TWO HANDS



OR STRAIGHT-ON HEAD SHOT OF
OLDER FALCON WITH GLOWING
EYES AND TENTACLES WRAPPING
AROUND NECK & TEMPLES.
(KEEP IN MIND IF YOU SHOOT A
MODEL, FALCON IS A BLOCK MAN
IN HIS FIFTIES BY NOW.)

THE BALLAD OF NORRIN RADD

REBIRTH



THIS IS JUST
A SHOT OF YOUR
ANIMATION

CLEAR FEET ON BOTTOM
AND CENTER HIM

SPIRITS OF THE
JUNGLE

GAMMA BOMB



SPIDER WEBS

RETURN OF THE SILENT KING



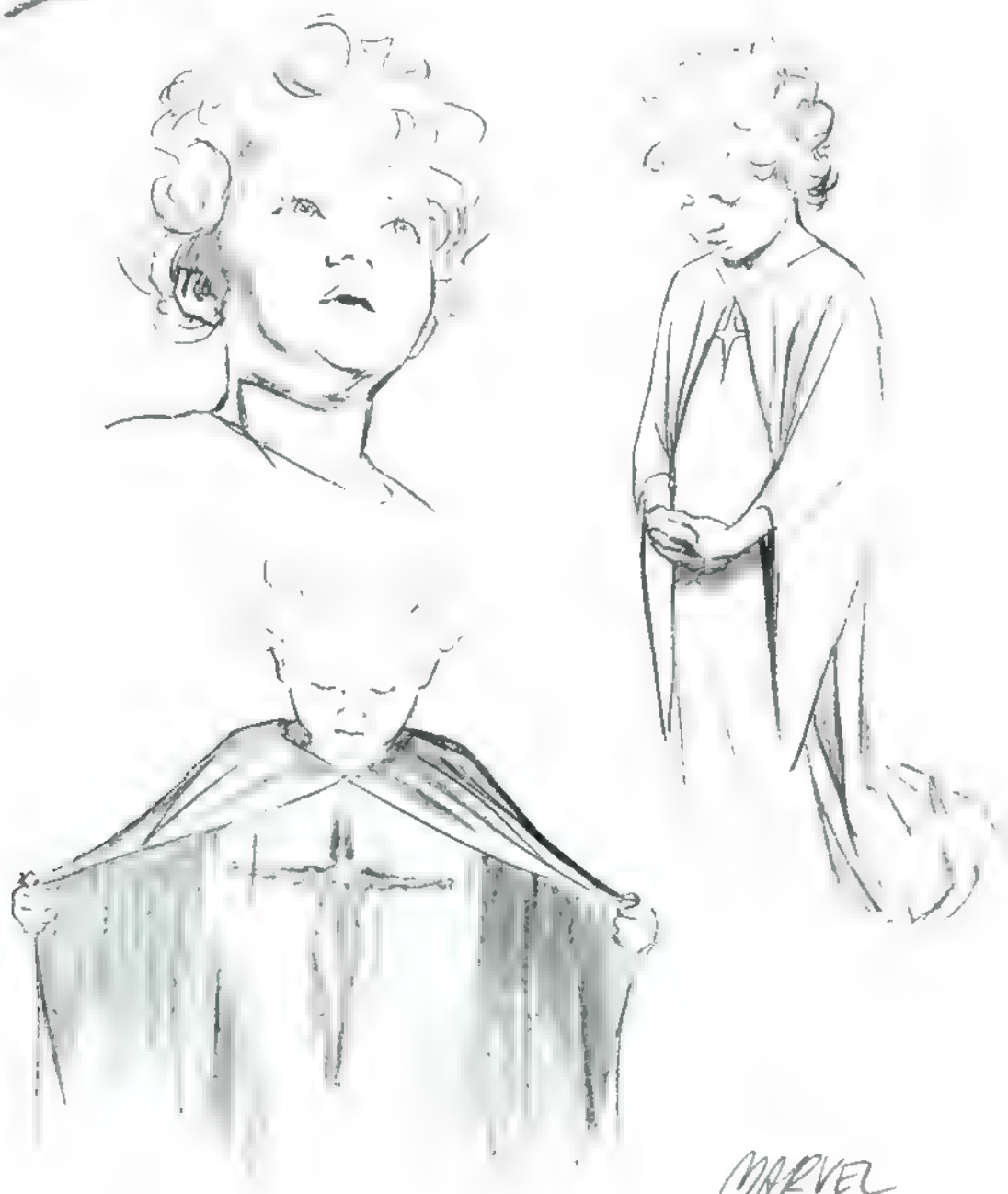
Earth X CD booklet roughs for digital artist
Dave Riske to complete 3-D renderings of.

THE WORLD IS COLD
 WHERE IT WAS ONCE WARM
 RUSSIA IS WARM
 AMERICA IS COLD
 BOBBY TRACE IN HOUSTON

UNIVERSE X BECOMES LIKE
 EMPIRE STRIKES BACK
 TO STAR WARS WITH THE
 SNOWY, COLD ATMOSPHERE
 OF THE WORLD IN SEEMING
 PERPETUAL WINTER.

FURRY
 PARKA?

First designs
 of Cap with the
 reborn Mar-Vell.



MARVEL



Top image: Detailed rough for Earth X hardcover painting.
Sketch of the pre-Earth X time, dispirited Captain America.
Below: Thumbnails for the Earth X ½ cover.





THE REALM MARVEL

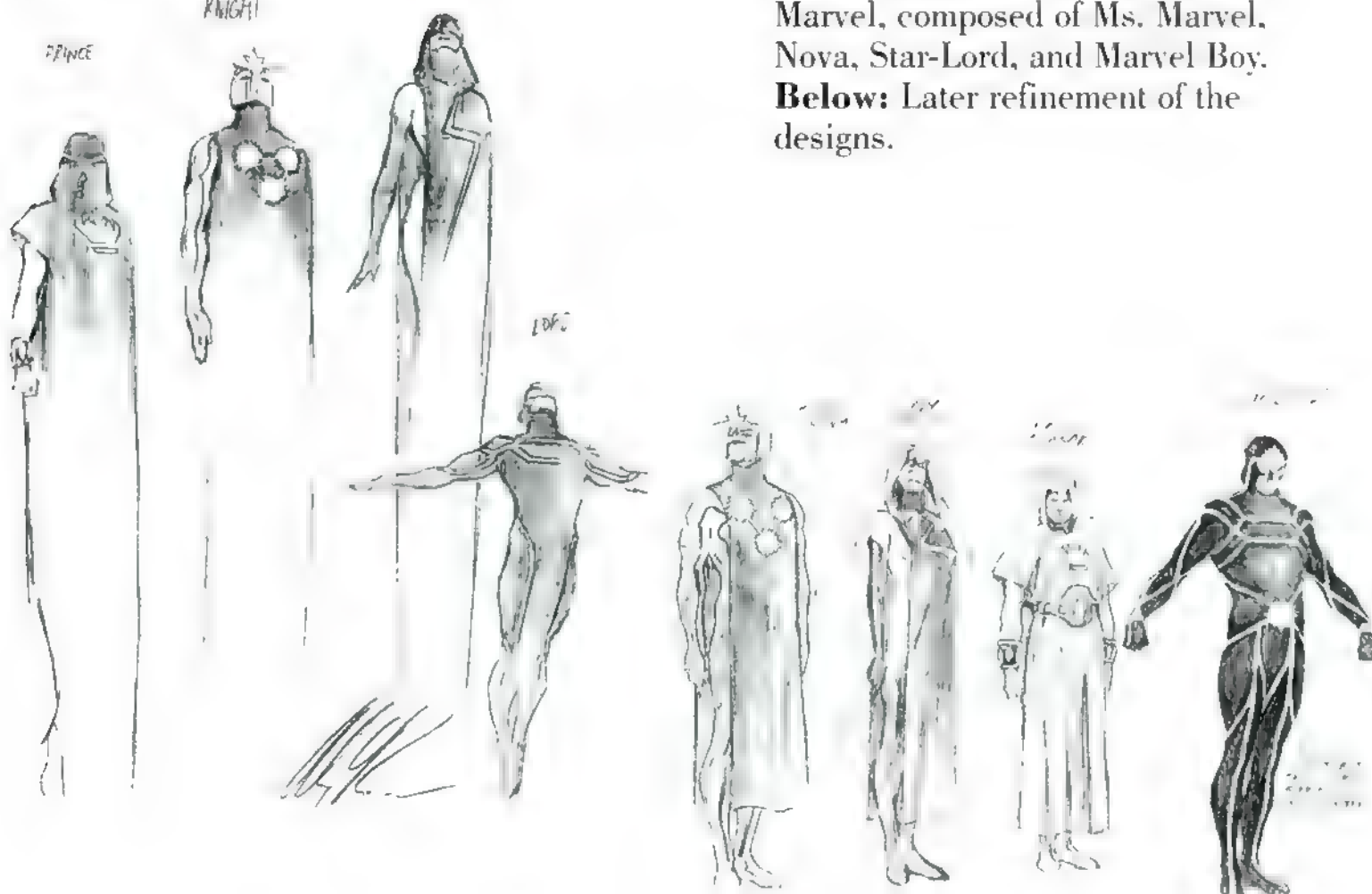
KNIGHT

PRINCE

JOY

JOY

Top image: Early designs for the "Marvel Universe" and the Realm Marvel, composed of Ms. Marvel, Nova, Star-Lord, and Marvel Boy. **Below:** Later refinement of the designs.





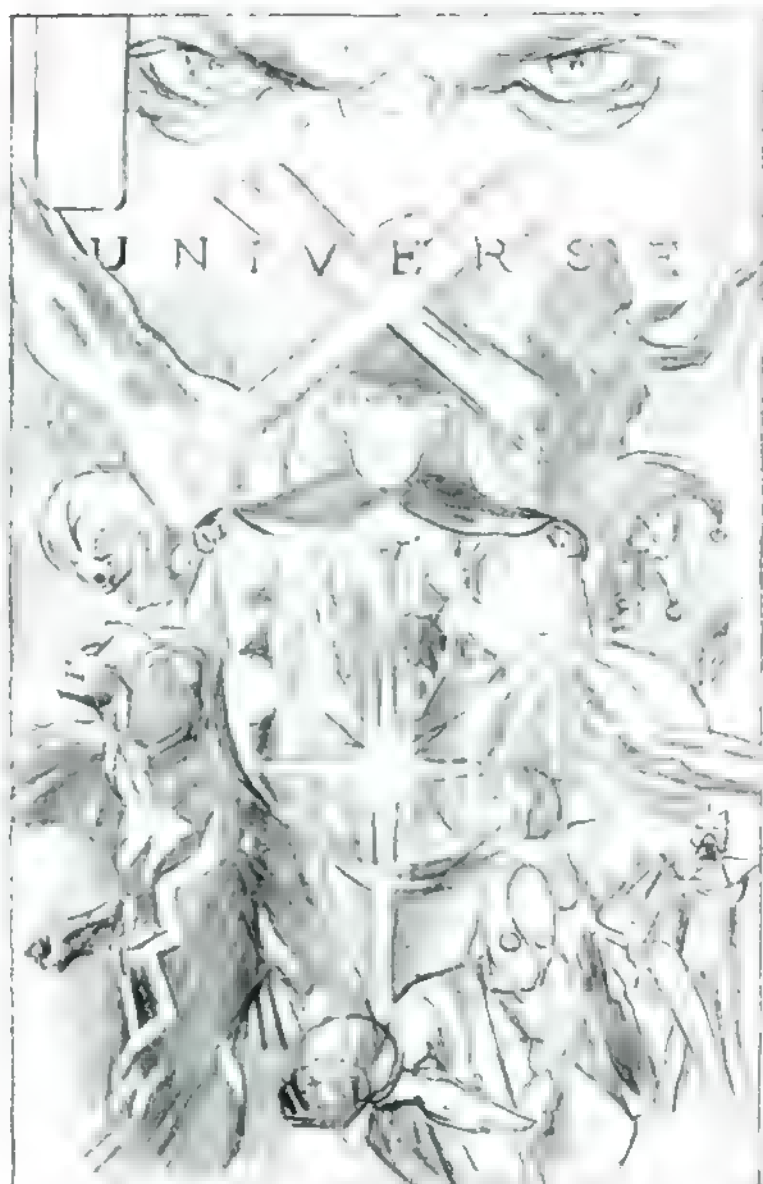
Cover thumbnails for Paradise X
Volume 1 TPB cover.

P A R A D I S E



MARVEL UNIVERSE X
SKETCHBOOK

[Handwritten signature]

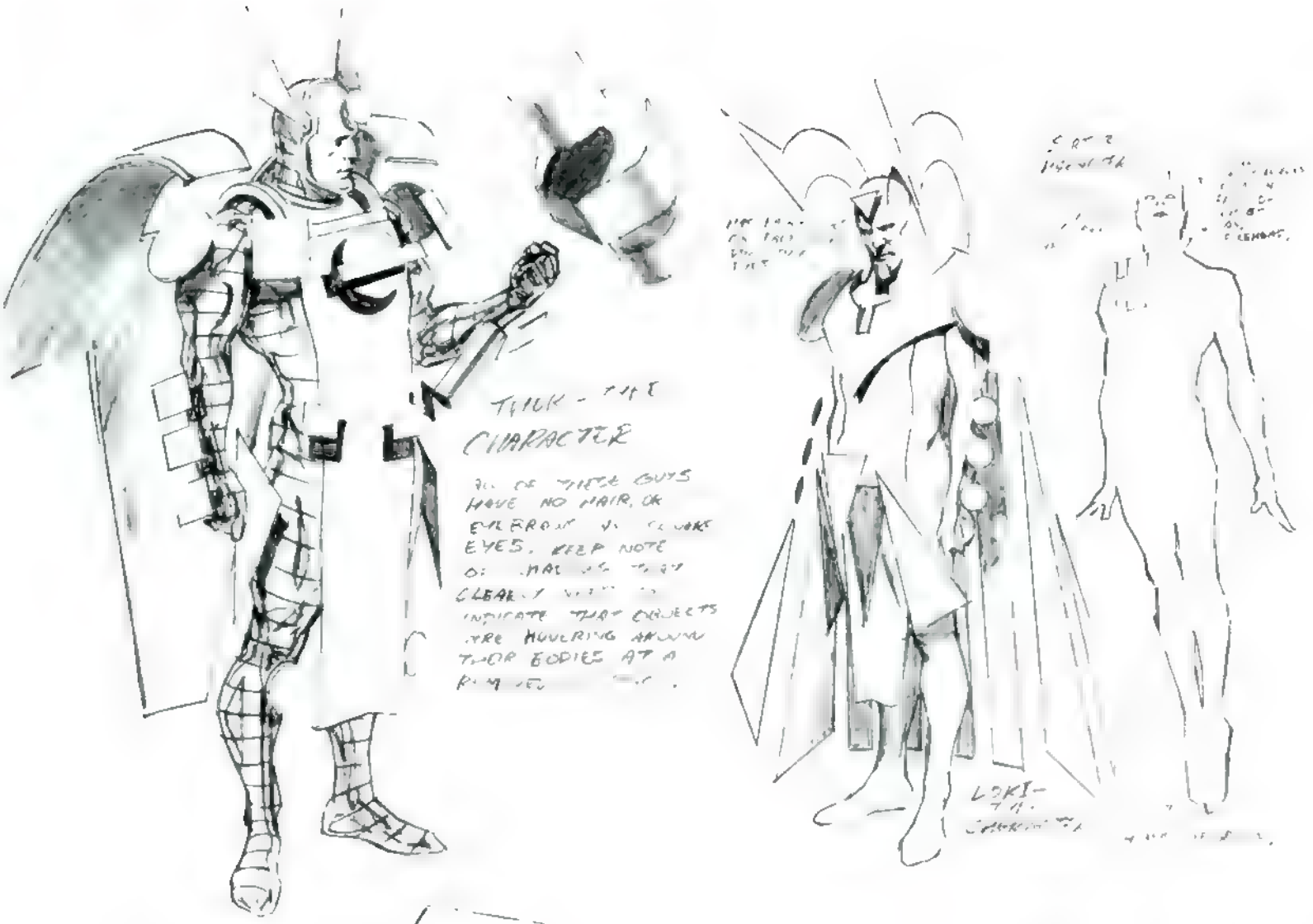


Counter-clockwise from top left: Universe X Omnibus cover sketch, Wizard Universe X cover sketch, and Wizard Universe X Sketchbook cover sketch.



34 0' 75' 45"





THOR - THE CHARACTER

ALL OF THESE GUYS HAVE NO HAIR, OR EYEBROWS, OR EYES. KEEP NOTE OF: MAKE US THAT CLEARLY WITH AN INDICATE THAT OBJECTS ARE HULLING AROUND THOR BODIES AT A PLYING

LOKI - THE CHARACTER

LOKI - THE CHARACTER

From the Paradise X two-issue Ragnarok story featuring Thor, Loki, and Odin reborn as "new gods" in a strikingly futuristic style.



ODIN - THE CHARACTER TYPE

HAS A LARGE STAFF AND IS LIKE A KING OF PLANES.

CITY IN CLOUDS IS LIKE A HULLING PLANE OF CLOUDS BLOCKS

WHEN STEPHEN STRANGE
DOES APPEAR AS 'THE
MAGICAL'...
LOOSER ROSES LIKE
HIS FIRST APPEARANCE.

SEE THE COVER OF
MARVEL COMICS TPE
OR MARVEL MASTERWORKS
(VOL 23) FOR A
REPRINTING. YOU PROBABLY
DON'T HAVE STRANGE
TALES # 110 AND
IF THE REPRINTS AREN'T
AVAILABLE YOU
CAN MAKE A
FAX / ...

YOU...
WHAT I'M GOING FOR.

Instructions for
how to depict
Doctor Strange in
Paradise X once
he's gotten his
Merlin look done
away with.

P. 34-35 PARADISE X #0
STRANGE'S
HOSPITAL
SCENES

MORE
ASIAN
LOOK
TO THE
EYES.

MY MAIN IDEA
IS TO HAVE
STRANGE LOOK
LIKE HIS FIRST
APPEARANCE

DOUG,
HE COULD ALSO
HAVE THE TRADITIONAL
WHITE LABCOAT AND STUFF
BUT I THOUGHT THIS
WOULD LOOK MORE HUMAN,
MORE HARD-WORKING.





GEL-LIKE
REFLECTIONS



Top left image:

Rough design for the overgrown face of Cable speaking to Iron Maiden.

Top right and lower right images: Transformed form of Luna.

Bottom left image:

Transformed form of Psylocke.



Top image: Pope Immortus' projected illusion of super-humankind's future foray into space.

Bottom image: Lord Sunfire's pact, featuring those that helped hide the broken pieces of Absorbing Man around the world.

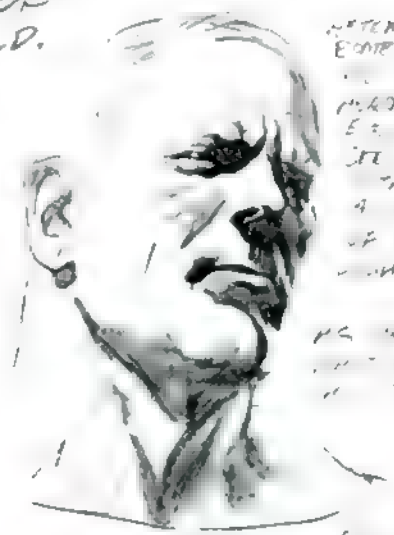


HYPERION

6'2"
60 YEARS
OLD

HYPERION
IS NOW WEARING
BLACK & GOLD
INSTEAD OF
RED & GOLD.

Character
redesign of
Hyperion from
a dystopian
future. Showing
his personal
devastation from
the loss of his
comrades in
the Squadron
Supreme.



HYPERION
THE
EIGHT
THINGS
HE
HAS
LOST
IN
THE
PAST
WARS
HE
HAS
LOST
HIS
COMRADES
HIS
FAMILY
HIS
HOMELAND
HIS
PEACE
HIS
DREAMS
HIS
HOPE
HIS
FAITH
HIS
LIFE

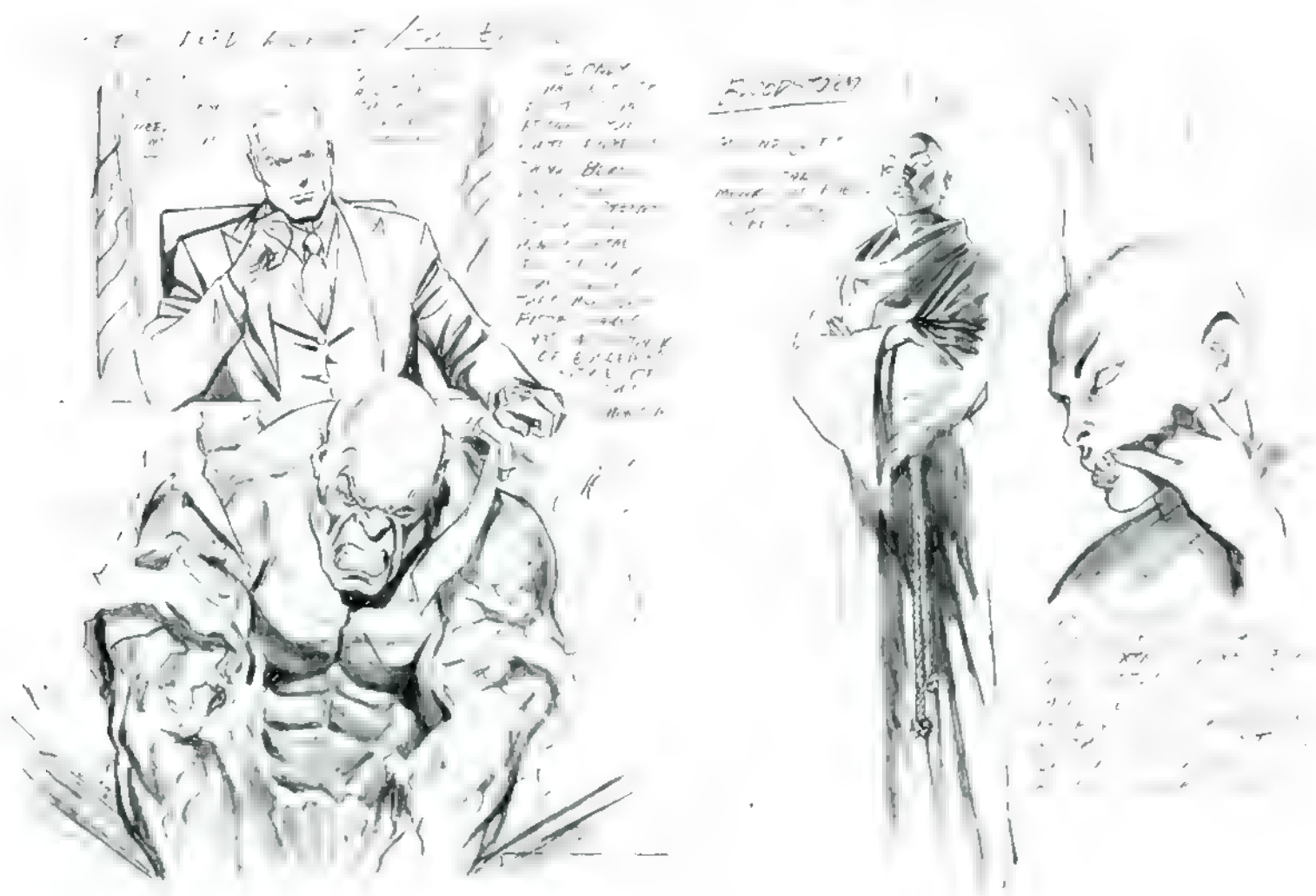


HYPERION
THE
EIGHT
THINGS
HE
HAS
LOST
IN
THE
PAST
WARS
HE
HAS
LOST
HIS
COMRADES
HIS
FAMILY
HIS
HOMELAND
HIS
PEACE
HIS
DREAMS
HIS
HOPE
HIS
FAITH
HIS
LIFE

WHEN HYPERION IS
SEEN IN THE DECOLATION
OF SMOKE AND SKEEL
HE WEARS HIS OLD
COSTUME IN TACKS,

THE COSTUME
MIGHT BE
RECOGNIZED
BY A
COUPLE OF
HIS
FRIENDS
WHO
WAS
STILL
LIVING
IN
THE
PAST
WARS
HE
HAS
LOST
HIS
COMRADES
HIS
FAMILY
HIS
HOMELAND
HIS
PEACE
HIS
DREAMS
HIS
HOPE
HIS
FAITH
HIS
LIFE





Top left: Design for Pope Immortus.

Top right: Design for Magneto subjugated by magnetic-power-wielding Toad.

Bottom left: Alternate Earth President Reed Richards, aka the Brute.

Bottom right: Mutant X's future version of the vampiric Bloodstorm.

EARLY DESIGNS

KARNAK

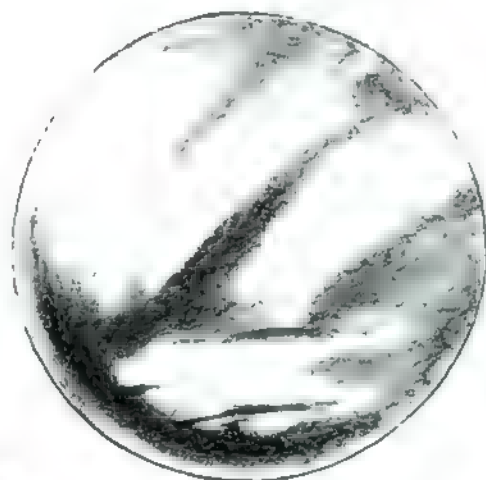


GORGON



JOHN JAMESON

TRITON



UATU

Top left:
Early designs for
the Inhumans,
featuring
Karnak, Gorgon,
and Triton.

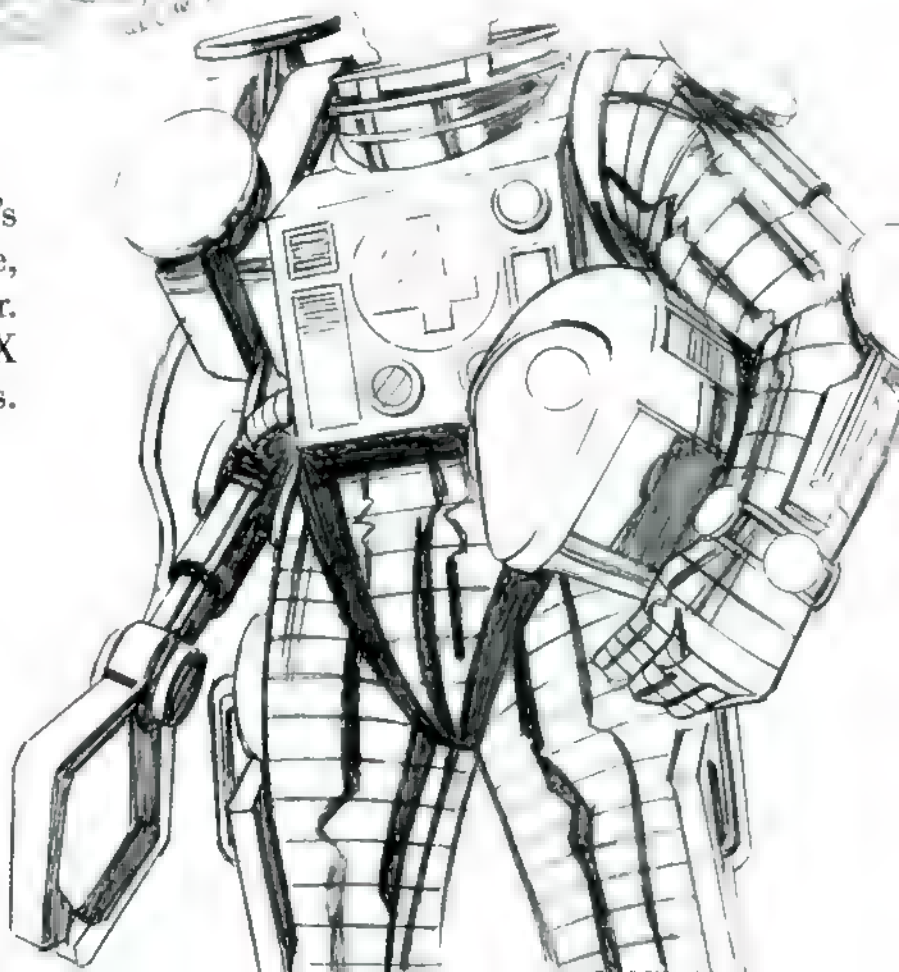
Top right:
Sketches of
John Jameson
and Uatu from
the Earth X
hardcover.

Bottom right:
Rough sketch of
the Adversary,
aka Mephisto.





Top images: Universe X's version of Reed and Sue, Officer Parker, and Dagger.
Bottom right: Paradise X spacesuit for Reed Richards.





Top images: Turnaround art for Dynamic Forces' Hulk and Banner bust.

Middle image:
Early rough of the Iron Avengers with Vision.

Bottom images:
Cover roughs for
Earth X Sketchbook
cover and Universe
X 4 one-shot,
Dynamic Forces
variant.



COLOR
← SPLASH GOING
ACROSS SKETCHES



MAVEL'S TAIL INTERACTS
WITH TALE BELOW

GALACTUS
SEE:
THROUGH
MARVEL
"FACE VOID"

BLACK JUMP
BORDER

CEV-EN-NG 202

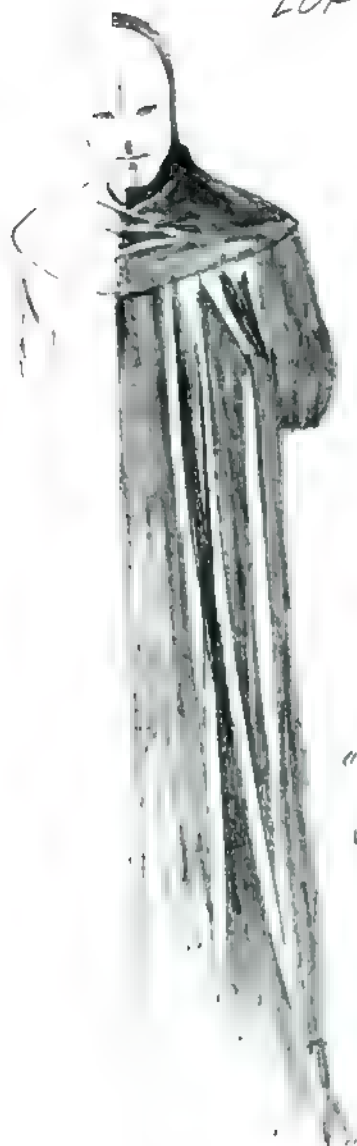


Top image: The very first cover rough for the Earth X Sketchbook.

Bottom image: The Earth X hardcover layout.



LOKI



Designs for
the Universe X
and Paradise
X redesigns of
Thor and Loki.

"MY FACE IS A
BLANK CANVAS ON
WHICH TO WRITE MYSELF,
NEITHER GOOD NOR
EVIL WILL DEFINE
ME UNTIL I DECIDE
WHICH IT IS THAT
I AM."

THOR'S HAND IS
MELTING INTO
THE FLESH
OF HIS ARM
TO
BECOME FLESH



LOKI
IN A B C
THE





FRONT



CHARACTER WORKER



FRONT

FRONT

FRONT



FRONT



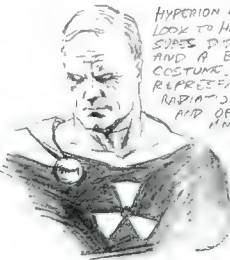
Early roughs for the Paradise X Sketchbook.



PARALLEL TIMELINE HEROES TO EARTH X

SPIDER-GIRL
WOLVERINE
KILLRAVEN
IRON MAN 2020
HYPERION
PHOENIX
DEATHLOK

HYPERION IS FROM A KC-STYLE FUTURE FOR THE SQUADRON WHERE EVERYONE DID BUT HIM (WITH THE EXCEPTION OF SPIDER-GIRL, MOST EVERYONE HERE IS FROM A FUTURE WHERE MOST ALL OTHER HEROES ARE DEAD AND THEIR WORLD IS IN TATTERS).



HYPERION HAS A BURST LOOK TO HIS EYES LIKE SPIDEY DID IN KC AND A BLACK & GOLD COSTUME. THE EMBLEM REPRESENTS HIS OWN RADIATION DANGERS AND ORIGIN OF HIMSELF. HE IS THE CUP OF AVENGERS FOREVER TO THE CROWDING OF A SMALLER BROKEN SPIRIT.



MARVEL'S DISCIPLES

KAZAR BSHANNA

CROSS COLORS CHANGE ON A MEN TO INDIVIDUALIZED COLORS
TOWER - WHITE
MERMAID - BLUE
POGACE - ORANGE
CHARM - GREEN
DOUBLETREAT - RED

BUZZ & CHUCK AT 13



RETHINKING SCOTT SUMMERS ADD OR NO?

IRON AVIGEN



VENOM (MAY PARKETZ)



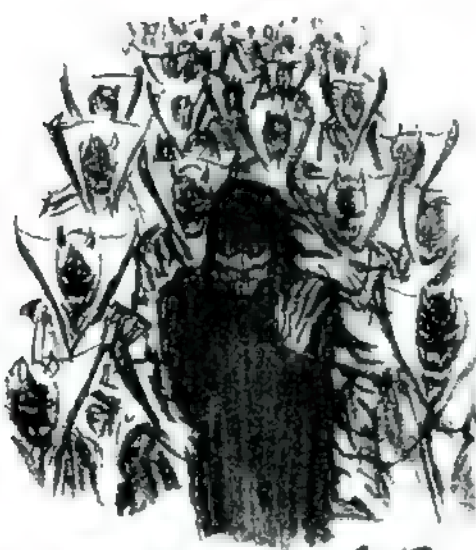
BLACK KNIGHT



Early roughs for the Paradise X Sketchbook.



X-REUNION





VOL 1

VOL 2

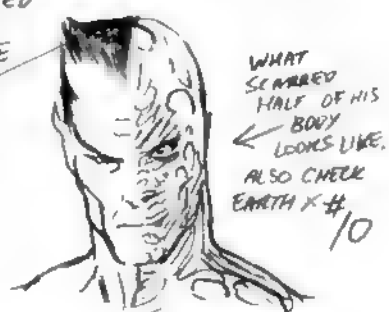


Top left: Universe X special X-Men cover sketch. **Top right:** Wizard #108 Universe X cover sketch. **Bottom:** Connecting Universe X covers for volumes 1 and 2 of the TPB.

Universe X designs
for Moon Knight.



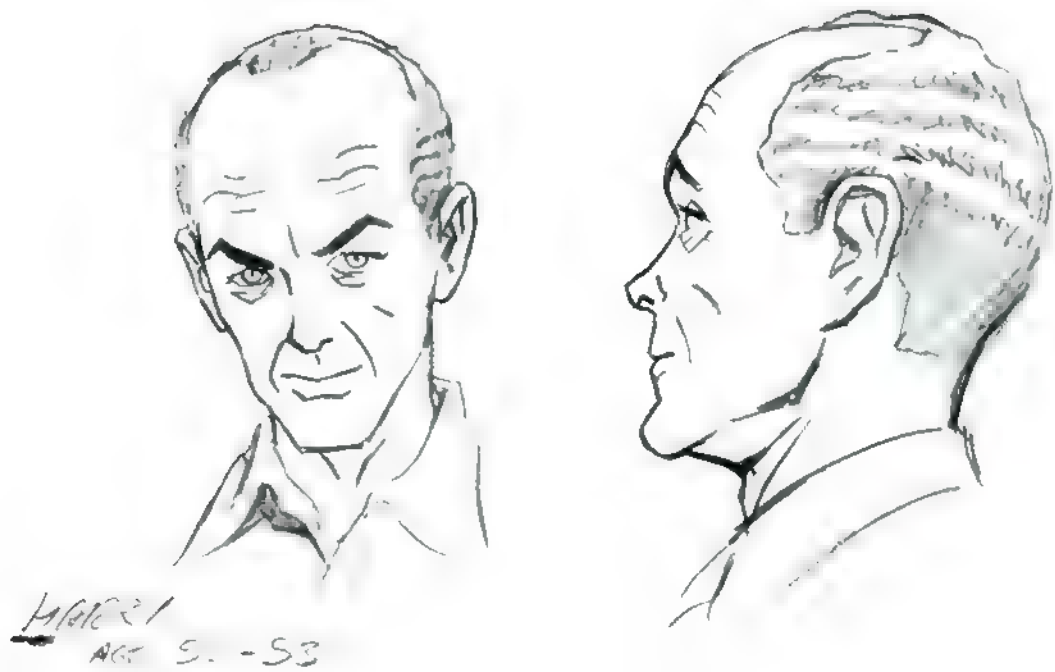
NAMOR UNDER WATER



Top left: Namor as seen underwater in Universe X 4 one-shot.

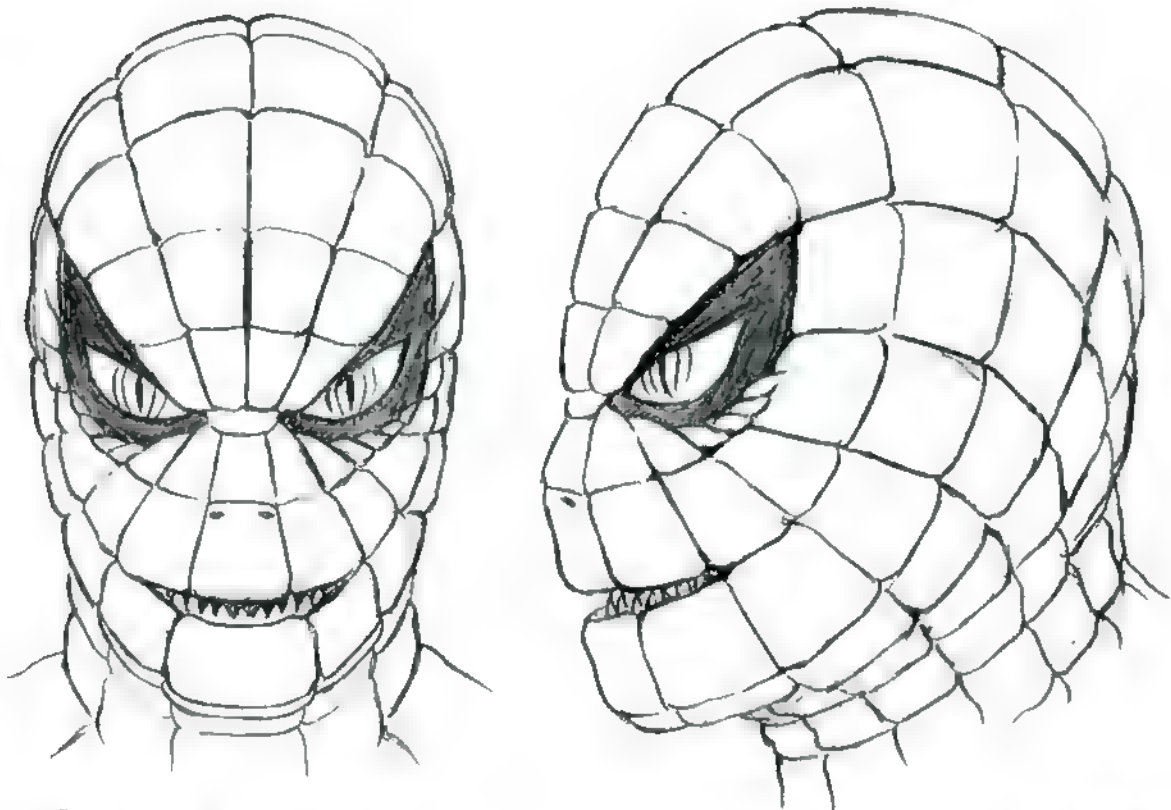
Bottom: What If? alternate Earth versions of Namor and Sue.





Top: Universe X
Spidey one-shot
design of an older
Harry Osborn.
Middle: Earth X
design of Norman
Osborn. **Bottom:**
Head design of
Spiders Man.

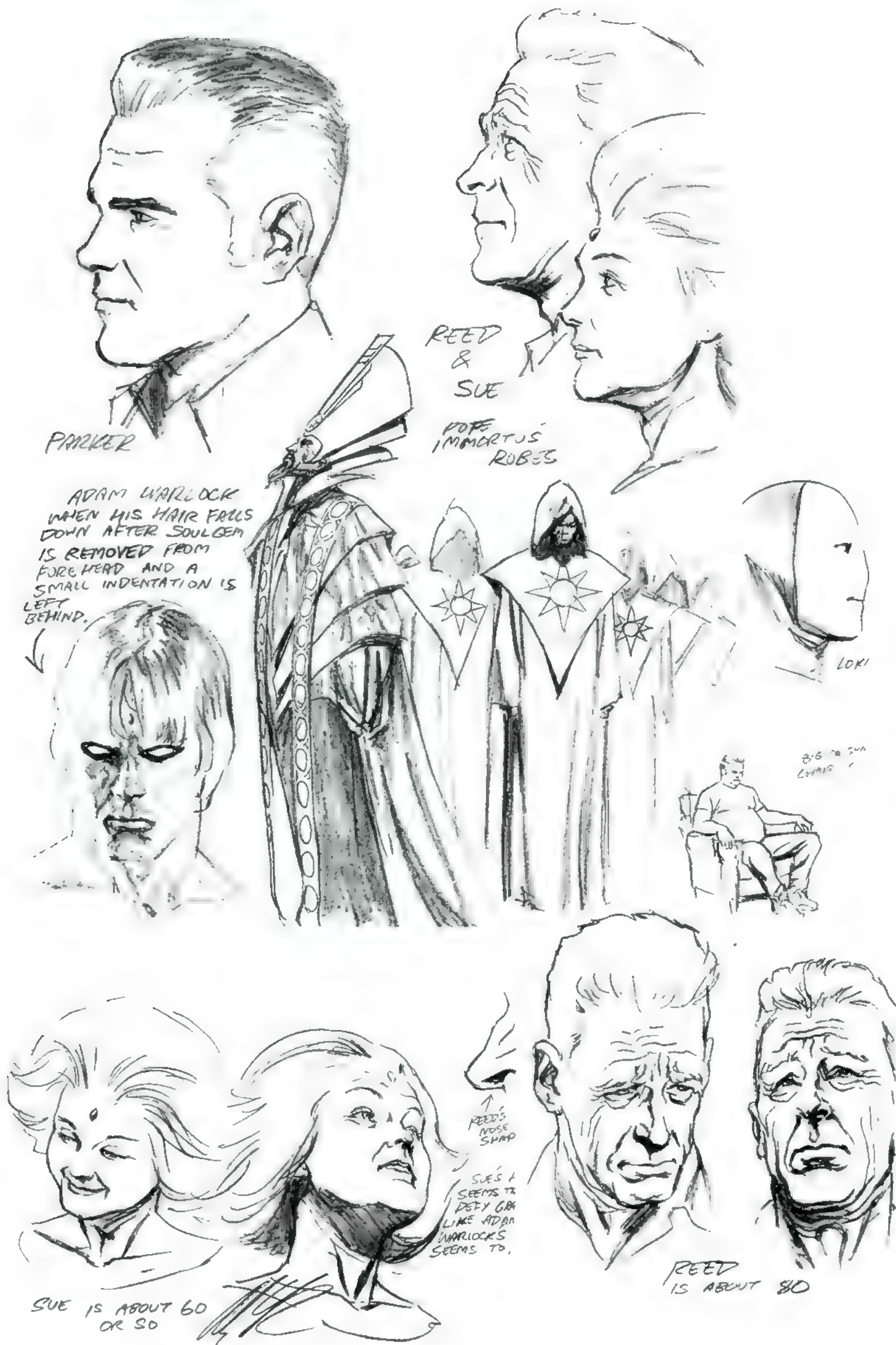
NORMAN OSBORN



SPIDERS MAN

EXACT FACE REPTILIAN DETAIL. ALL LINES NOT

M/M



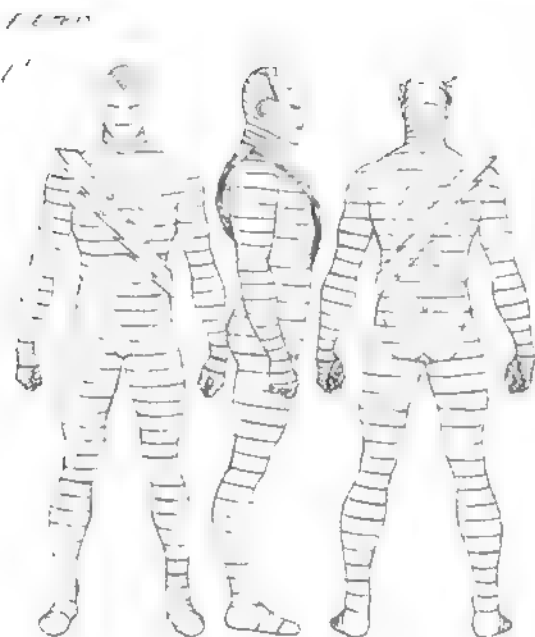
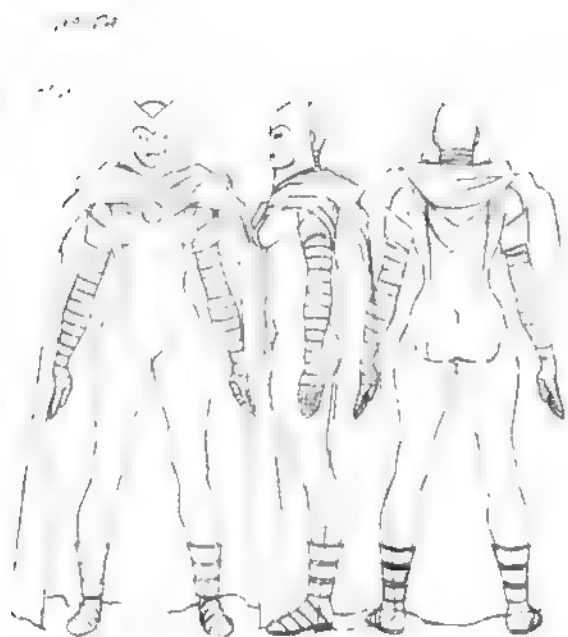
Universe X drawing guides for Officer Parker, Reed and Sue, Adam Warlock, Pope Immortus and followers, and Loki.



↗ FULL BLEED STYLE IMAGE
 ARMOR LITTERED ABOUT IN FOREGROUND

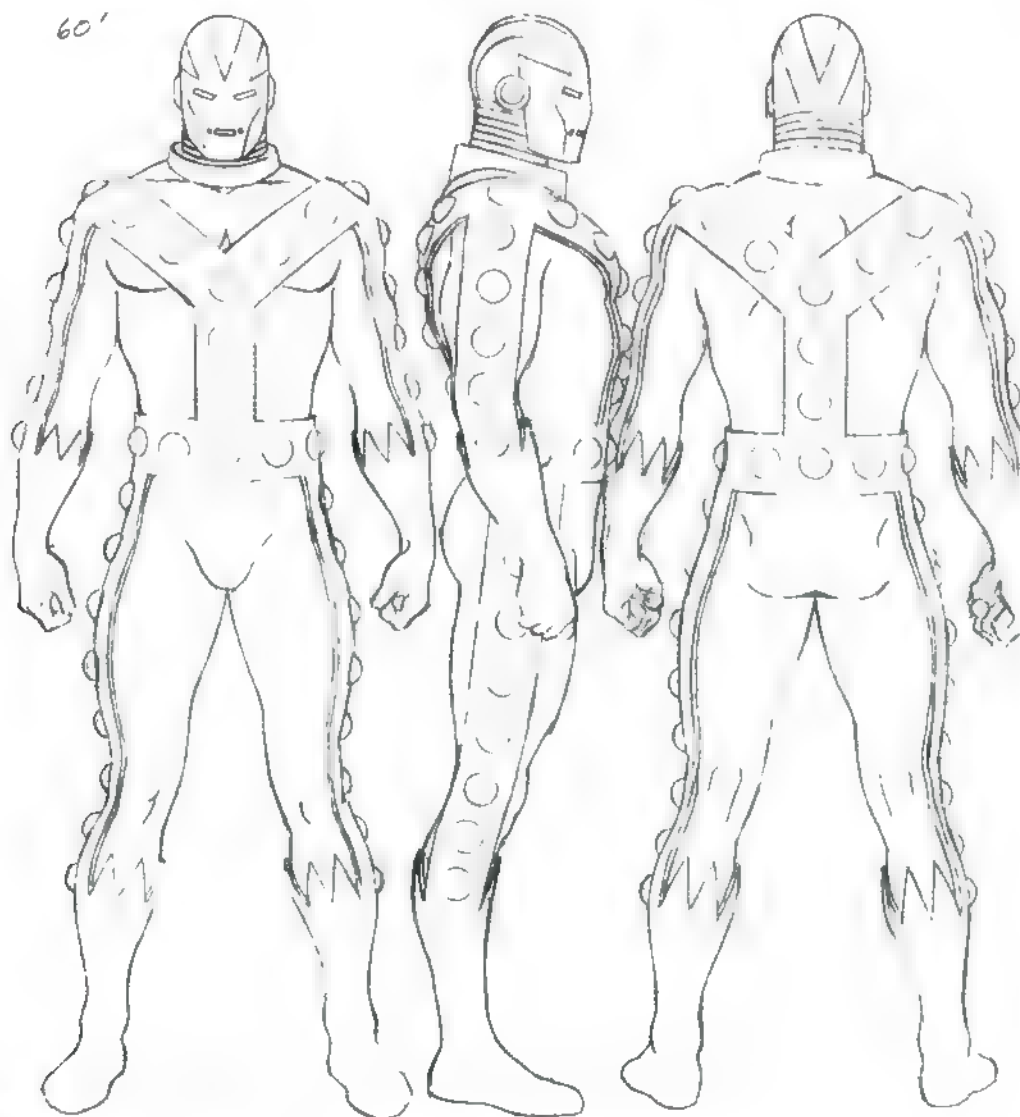


Universe X 4 one-shot story guides for
 the rebirth of Sue Storm, as well as the
 afterlife appearance of Dr. Doom.

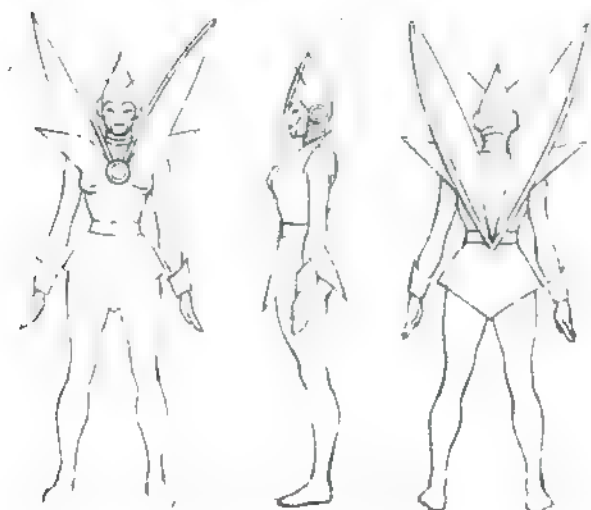


HAYK

60'



JAV



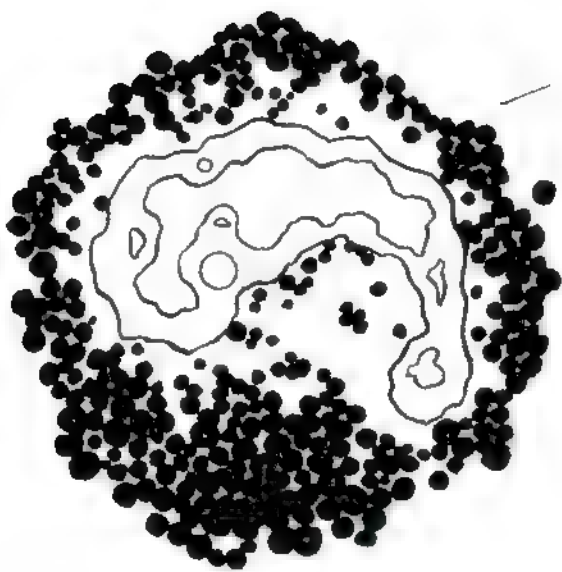
Turnarounds for
the Iron Avengers.



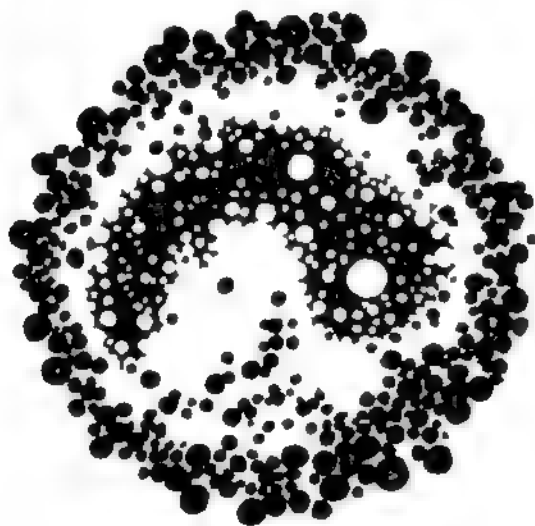
Universe X designs
for the Ant-Men.

Universe X
designs for
Spidra of the
Ant-Men.





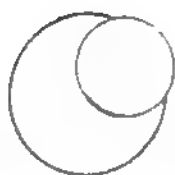
TO EMBODY
CELESTIAL



TO EMBODY
CELESTIAL

Top images: Earth X Kirby dot designs of an embryonic Celestial.

Bottom: Designs for John Jameson and his wife wearing their spacesuits.



MOON OVER
EARTH SYMBOL

JOHN
JAMESON

"THE MOON KNIGHT"





Paradise X cover designs.





RED SKIN
PINK
CLOTH



PYM

RED & BLUE!
BLUE WINGS



RED
SKIN
PINK
CLOTH

EARTH

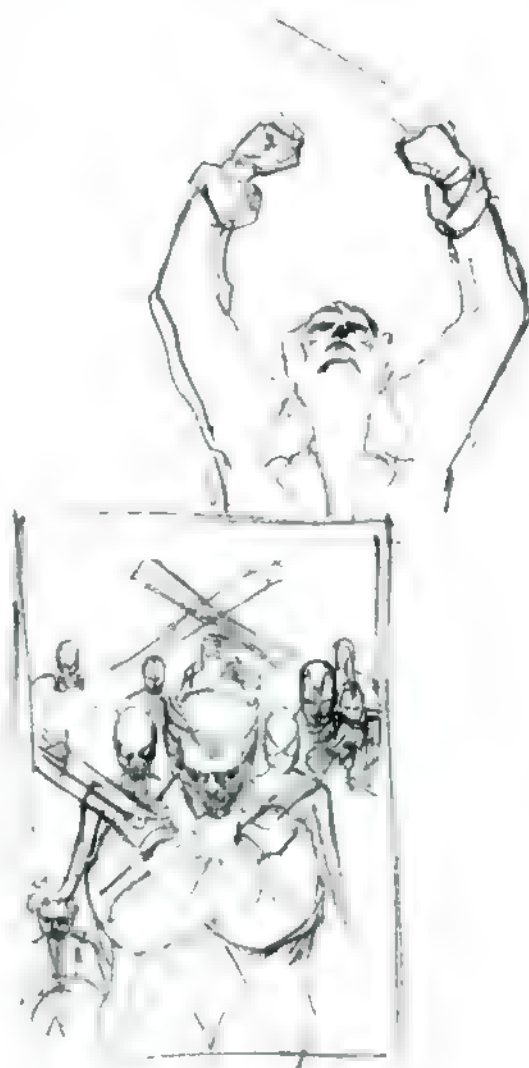
PART 1 BODY
NIGHTMARE H
EARTH 100%
FACE 100%
S.E. 100%
C.O. 100% E. 100%



Paradise X designs for the Avenging Host, redesigning Jean Grey, Clint Barton, Tony Stark, and Hank Pym.

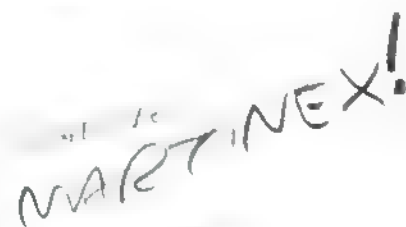


The Avenging Host.



Paradise X Sketchbook
and TPB cover designs.

1. $\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} = \frac{1}{4}$
 2. $\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} = \frac{1}{4}$
 3. $\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} = \frac{1}{4}$
 4. $\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} = \frac{1}{4}$
 5. $\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} = \frac{1}{4}$
 6. $\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} = \frac{1}{4}$
 7. $\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} = \frac{1}{4}$
 8. $\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} = \frac{1}{4}$
 9. $\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} = \frac{1}{4}$
 10. $\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} = \frac{1}{4}$



ANIMILUS
F-15-29K

TRIP WITH JEL
REAVE

1 GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY

2 MAR-VELL
ON EARTH

2} THE AVENGING HOST
1 "A"

HERALDS

7 THOR & LOKI

8 DAREDEVILS - JUDE

9 THE THIRD-DIMENSIONAL MAN

10 SPIDER-GIRL w/ VENOM + PETER

17 KING, BRITAIN & MEDUSA

W/ BLACK KNIGHT & IRON MEN
+ JACK OF HEARTS

13} REED ...
14} & ...
15} THE X-MEN REUNION
16} W/WOLVERINE & WOLVERINE
17} ~~REUNION~~

THE MARVEL ARMADA: MURDER
 (ALL DEPT GUY + REAL MARVEL AS
 AN ARMY)
 SASQUATCH & MORE

Paradise X Sketchbook
and TPB cover designs.



UNIVERSE X SKETCHBOOK



UNIVERSE X 0 (DYNAMIC FORCES VARIANT)



UNIVERSE X I (DYNAMIC FORCES VARIANT)



WIZARD 108 COVER



UNIVERSE X 4 (DYNAMIC FORCES VARIANT)



UNIVERSE X CAP (DYNAMIC FORCES VARIANT)



UNIVERSE X SPIDEY (DYNAMIC FORCES VARIANT)



UNIVERSE X VOLUME 1 & 2 TPB COVERS





PARADISE X VERTICAL INTERLOCKING COVERS